Gender and empowerment

in Bawku West District, Ghana

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Based on an intersubjective understanding between the researcher and the participants from Bawku West District, Ghana, this thesis examines how a local NGO that aims to empower women in terms of knowledge and access to land, has influenced the everyday life of women and men in a rural patriarchal community. The intersubjective understanding is a result of a feminist research approach focusing on subjective experiences emerging out of focus group discussions and participatory observation. The thesis assesses how empowerment and gender are understood and argues that diversity in interpretation of those concepts affects the impact of empowerment.

Through the usage of a gender lens in the field and in the analytical process, the author acknowledges that men need to be included in the process of empowering women in order to avoid a feminization of obligations and responsibilities. In order for women empowerment to strengthen the level of cooperation within families, men should be given training in reproductive skills. Empowerment needs to be looked at in relation to the existing power and emotional relations between husband and wife. Together with subjectivity, symbolic representations and institutions, gender relations are subject to both change and continuity. When it comes to bargaining patriarchy; ethnical customs and religious norms have to be looked at more carefully because they can both impede and support women empowerment.

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1. Introduction

Since Ester Boserup's study of *Women's role in Economic Development* was published in 1970 the role of the women in development has become more and more emphasised. Boserup found that women were marginalized due to the fact that they gained less than men as wage labourers, farmers and traders, as the commercialization of agriculture had contributed to undermine the role of the women and their social status. Since then, to address these findings many development projects have made use of participation and empowerment as their strategy and it has been mainstreamed into the development discourse. These concepts are central in gender-sensitive planning approaches such as the SEGA-model (Thomas-Slayter et al. 1995). One other important contribution to the inclusion of women and the emphasis on gender is the feminisation of poverty thesis. In 1995, the fourth UN Conference on Women stated that 70 % of the poorest in the world are women (Visvanathan 2011).

I believe developing projects that support women to claim power in order to take control of their life is a good solution when trying to achieve better living conditions for people living on the margin. There are many examples where development projects have failed and resulted in deeper marginalization. But the growing number of projects focusing on women gives the impression that many CBO's, NGO´s and International Institutions now put faith in the contribution of women empowerment to achieve development. It has become a buzzword in the alternative development discourse. The emphasis on women in order to support the enlargement of people´s choices and enhancement of their capabilities is important for achieving human development. When comparing their role with the role of men, women living on the margin of survival have expressed thoughts like this: "A poor woman is concerned not only with herself but she thinks of her children and family" (Visvanathan 2011, 180). Many development actors have a belief that the contribution of women empowerment will have a larger effect on the development of society. Naila Kabeer is among those when she argues that: "resources in women's hands have a range of positive outcomes for human capital and capabilities within the household" (Kabeer 2012, 4).

It is therefore interesting to take a closer look at what the result of such a focus is. Women empowerment is about supporting women to take control of their lives. This can stir up the existing power balance within families, because it encourages women to negotiate for power. Without consciousness about the realities within the family, women empowerment can result in

deeper and more complex conflicts between men and women, adding more difficulties to the life of the women.

1.1 Objectives

The objective of the research is about trying to get an understanding of empowerment and to examine the effect which the emphasis on women empowerment has. The local Ghanaian NGO, Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC) works towards gender equality in a number of communities in Bawku West District in northern Ghana by empowering women to claim rights to access land. Does this effort remove barriers that Ghanaian women living in a patriarchal society face? And how does it affect the existing power relation between men and women within the family?

From these reflections I have formulated a research problem:

How is the emphasis on empowerment of women influencing their ability to improve their room for manoeuvring within the family?

- How is empowerment understood among men and women?
- How does women empowerment lead to changing gender relations in Bawku West District and what are the consequences of this?
- What type of structural barriers to empowerment of women exists within the local community?

1.2 Limitations

This section acknowledges that there are a number of limitations that need to be taken into consideration when reading this thesis. Firstly, the language barrier made it challenging to include many strong individual representations of the participants in the process of knowledge production. Since I did not know the local language and few of the participants spoke English; interaction with the participants during participatory observation was limited. The key-informants helped me translate, therefore I were able to interact with them and observe manifestations of gender relations within the family, but the dialog was limited and I were not able to get very close to the participants. The language barrier also meant that I could not understand what were said during the Focus Group Discussions, and although the recorded discussions were translated by the moderator after each session, I could not know if the translation was accurate or not.

During the analysing of the data I realized that my material did not include many deep individual stories from the everyday life, and this limited the analytical discussion. This limitation can be explained by the restricted time the research team spent with the participants. The moderator was very busy with other responsibilities at the time of the fieldwork and I was unfamiliar with working in rural Ghanaian conditions.

This thesis also presents a limited number of participants and the sampling method resulted in a selective representation of the population of communities under study. The impact of the work of the local NGO to empower women was only assessed through experiences stemming from one community in Bawku West District, therefore other important results of women empowerment could be ignored. But by using qualitative methods and a feminist research approach, the emphasis is on acknowledging and understanding subjective realities (Harding 1998; 2008); therefore the voices of 25 participants from to communities in Bawku West District are the only ones.

1.3 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised in seven chapters including this introductory chapter. **Chapter 2** presents the Ghanaian context for gender and empowerment, while **chapter 3** explains these concepts theoretically. When theorizing gender and empowerment emphasis is put on explaining and creating an understanding of empowerment that will be used throughout the thesis. This understanding is used to find an appropriate analytical approach, which also determines how gender and empowerment are studied. **Chapter 4** looks closer to these methodological aspects of the thesis and elaborate on the feminist approach taken to obtain knowledge. It also examines how the gender lens has been applied in the field by using qualitative research methods such as FGD and participatory observation. The result of these interactions is presented in **chapter 5** where the understanding and impact of women empowerment in a Ghanaian rural community is considered by drawing on discussions among the participants and observed realities. **Chapter 6** assesses how gender relations are subject to change and goes more deeply into the analytical discussion by making use of the four dimensions of the gender lens; subjectivity, gender relations, symbolic representations and institutions. **Chapter 7** presents the concluding discussions and recommendations for the local NGO involved in this study on their future work with women empowerment.

2. Contextualizing gender and empowerment

This chapter aims to give insight into the role of gender in Ghanaian societies in order to better understand why empowering women can encourage more female participation in the development of the Ghanaian society and allow individuals' abilities to contribute to human development, regardless of their gender. Its aim is to explain how gender relations influence the everyday life of people living in Ghana, by looking at gender specific policy and its influence in the society. The main focus will be on presenting the framework for the everyday life of rural women in northern Ghana, since they are the main category of study. This includes how the culture of patriarchy is reflected in traditional customs when it comes to marriage laws, the right to own land and inheritance. I´m arguing that patriarchy is a negotiable practice (Kandiyoti 1988) and there exist support mechanisms that can help individuals to manoeuver in their everyday life. It also aims to give an understanding of how families are structured when it comes to gender specific responsibilities. Finally, the physical, social, economic and political characteristics of the study area will be presented.

2.1 Who are a rural woman and a rural man in Ghana?

The research uses women and men as constructed categories of study. In development literature women are often portrayed with two different images. Either the woman is a powerless, passive victim or she is portrayed as a self-reliant heroine (Cornwall 2005). People live their life differently; therefore these images are not enough to explain the life of women, regardless of where they live in the world. Some aspects of these two discourses about women in the development paradigm may reflect how Ghanaian women feel when handling different situations in their life, but it is important to underline that they cannot be used as fixed categories, because there is great variation among women. As Ogundie-Leslie states "All African women have multitude identities, evolving and accreting over time, enmeshed in one individual" (Ogundie-Leslie 1994, 251).

The man is often seen as the breadwinner. When development economists introduced theories about the household, this view was an important part of it. Embedded in those theories are specific views of the role of the man and what the role of the woman is. Becker looks at members of the household as part of a unit of labour and they are only differentiated when it comes to productivity (Becker 1974). Roles of labour come naturally where the aim is to maximize the joint welfare within the family. The man is seen as the natural head of family and should specialize in productive and breadwinning activities, while women's biological nature

gives them the responsibility for reproduction and childcare (Kabeer 1994). This view established a practice of giving economic support to the men, reinforcing a gender gap also found in traditional social organization and cultural practices. Feminists have managed to bring forward the importance of women in development thinking (Kandiyoti 1988; Folbre 1994; Kabeer 1994; Moore 1994; Agarwal 1997). Family members are individuals with agency that make use of bargaining to choose survival and development strategies (Agarwal 1997).

In Ghana there is a difference between men and women when it comes to access to land, property, education and economic resources. But there is also a difference among men and among women, therefore labels, behaviour and attitude should not uncritically be attached to categories of people. "Women as a category of analysis are constructed by the context and the particular situation" (Alexander and Mohanty 1997). This also applies for the male participants in the study. I have made use of rural Ghanaian women and men and the family as categories of study in order to facilitate the analysis of the data.

2.2 Gender inequalities in Ghana

The UNDP, in its 20th anniversary edition of the Human Development Report in 2010, introduced the Gender Inequality Index. It makes use of five indicators grouped under three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and labour market. The aim of the index is to show that gender inequality constrains human development. The Gender Inequality Index from 2011 shows that Ghana is ranked number 122 out of 146 countries. On a scale from 0 to 1, where 1 refers to a very high level of inequality, Ghana scored 0,598 (UNDP 2011).

A difference between policy and practice

According to the 1992 Constitution of Ghana there shall be equality between men and women. Chapter 5, article 17 (2) states that "A person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social/economic status" (Constitution of Ghana 1992). But the reality on the ground is that the Ghanaian traditional system favours men. The Ghana Gender Profile from 2008 states that "the marginalization of women remains a very real problem in Ghana" (ADF 2008, 1). In the northern part of Ghana, the customary laws that organize the society follow a patrilineal structure. This is especially visible when it comes to the right to land and property. The men own most of the land. Customary laws that favour men, manage 80 % of landownership in Ghana (ibid, 15).

One of the indicators in the Gender Inequality Index is the level of education. The index measures the educational attainment among the people that are 25 years and older. It shows a

gap between female and males; 33.9 % of the female Ghanaian population has completed an education equivalent to the secondary level or above, while the figure for the males is 83.1 % (UNDP 2011, 140). When it comes to adult literacy you see a 20 % gap difference between men and women. In the northern regions the gap is 30 % (ADF 2008,viii).

Included in the five indicators is women's parliamentary representation. After the 2012-election, 27 of the 275 members of the Ghanaian parliament are women (Gouvernment of Ghana 2013a). Women were highly visible in the media during the Ghanaian 2012 election campaign and there were three female vice-president candidates. But although there was a 30 % increase in female parliament candidates compared to 2008 (Ghana Web 2012), the final result showed a decline in female membership from 10.8 % towards the end of the fifth parliament to 9.8 % early in the sixth. This type of measurement of women's access to decision-making is criticised, because although the women are underrepresented in the national parliament, it does not give any picture of their role at the domestic and local level. Some women feel they lack time to formally engage in national politics, but it does not mean their status is lowered (Cornwall 2005, 3) or that they are invisible when it comes to influencing local decision-making (Kabeer 1994).

There are political bodies assigned to put emphasis on gender inequalities. On the national level you find the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWAC). MOWAC works with "mainstreaming gender concerns into existing public policies and programs" (ADF 2008, 5). On the regional level there are ten directorates to support the work of the ministry, but the link to the district level is weak. It is required that each District Assembly appoint gender desk officers to facilitate the implementation at the community level, but many districts have failed to do so, or have appointed persons without knowledge about working with gender (ibid, 6).

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWAC) has prepared an Affirmative Action Bill that aims to give legislative backing to gender issues and support more women to be represented in decision-making and governance (The Presidency 2012). Women's movements do a lot of lobbying to accelerate the process of passing such bills into laws. LAWA Ghana is a group of Ghanaian female lawyers taking part in the Leadership and Advocacy for Women in Africa (LAWA) programme. They have been active in the process of passing The Intestate Succession Bill and The Property Rights of Spouses Bill into laws (Modern Ghana 2012). An intestate succession law, a law of decent and distribution, aims to facilitate the determination of who is entitled to the property of a deceased according to the rules of inheritance (LAWA

2011). Together with the Property Rights for Spouses, both laws aim to give more protection to the surviving spouse than the existing laws provides (WiLDAF 2008). The current intestate succession law of 1985 states that self-acquired property of a deceased person is the exclusive right of the surviving spouse (Mikell 1997:89). In Ghanaian customary law, none of the spouses have a right to the property of the other. The traditional practice does not see the wife as part of the husband's economic unit. Therefore it is difficult for the wife to give claims to the property of the husband.

The bills were presented in 2007 and it will still take time until they are passed as laws. To be passed as a law, a bill has to be presented by a reviewing committee and read twice in the parliament before it can be considered by the parliament. The Intestate Succession Bill had been read twice and was ready to be considered in February 2012, but is still not passed as a law. The Property Rights for Spouses was at that time not ready for the second reading in parliament. This is a good example where you see that such laws get little attention and the willingness among politicians to pass the laws is low (Modern Ghana 2007).

Gender inequality and development

Gender inequality is not only putting limitations on people on the basis of their gender, but it also undermines the development of the society in Ghana. When resources are allocated unequally, individuals will have difficulties expanding their capacity, which will also put limitations on the society as a whole. The World Bank has presented studies that show that poverty is greatest and quality of life lowest in societies where gender discrimination is greatest. They therefore suggest that when developing strategies to combat poverty, it is important to promote gender equality and empowerment of women, because it is smart economics (World Bank 2012).

According to the 2010 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) of Ghana, the government is obliged to set down a three-year plan to ensure growth. The Development Agenda for 2010-2013 is called Better Ghana Agenda. Among their goals are gender specific issues like; to ensure gender equity in access to land, labour and technology, capital/finance and information; to change "old mistakes" when it comes to discrimination of women; and to reduce gender and geographical disparities in the distribution of natural resources (IMF 2010).

There are also studies showing that women are deeper into poverty compared to men. In 1995, a UN Conference on women established a feminization of poverty thesis based on the claim that 70 % of the poor population were women. This view led to the assumption that female-

headed households are the poorest of the poor (Visvanathan 2011). However the connection between poverty and gender inequalities is not as direct and straightforward as it seems. A poverty analysis from 2006 shows that Ghana households led by women are less poor compared to male-headed households. It also showed that female members could experience poverty in households classified as non-poor (ADF 2008, 4). This underlines that women and men are not homogenous fixed groups; both men and women experience poverty differently. But women face some disadvantages that men don`t, affecting their standard of living in a negative sense. The feminization of poverty thesis tends to see women as victims using only economic measurements, but Sylvia Chant argues that to achieve development it is more productive to talk about "feminisation of responsibilities and obligations" (Chant 2011, 180).

2.3 Women in Ghana

Within the borders of Ghana there exist many different forms of social organization. This is a result of influence from other cultures through globalization, and the fact that Ghanaian traditional systems are diverse. The two main systems are patrilineal or matrilineal. In a patrilineal kinship and lineage system the paternal side of the family controls and passes on cultural practices and inheritance, while matrilineal decent and inheritance is attached to the female figure (ADF 2008, 2). These systems coincide with the north-south geo-political divide of Ghana; patrilineal in the north and matrilineal in the south.

Despite the divide in traditional customs of decent and inheritance, there are similarities when it comes to appointed gender roles. The Ghanaian women stands for 80 % of Ghana's food production (Amu 2005, 27). Domestic work and childcare are the responsibility of the woman, while the man is trusted to generate family income. In a Ghanaian traditional society, the customary law obliges the men to take care of wives and children. In return it is expected of wives and children to be dedicated in supporting the husband. But the woman has no ownership of the resources obtained within the family (Tsikata 2001). Although this type of social organisation clearly defines responsibilities within the family, it disfavours women and creates gender inequality.

Culture of patriarchy and ethnicity

Women are disfavoured when it comes to access to resources such as land and property, giving them a subordinated position in society. The culture of patriarchy leads to the fact that many Ghanaian women face huge difficulties taking part in decision-making, entering the labour market, and getting post-secondary education (Cole, Manuh et al. 2007; Darkwah 2010;

Hampel-Milagrosa 2011) All those constraints are a result of hidden institutional ideologies, rules, norms and practices that operates within the family sphere and the wider society (Mohanty 1991). Patriarchy is a practice that can create such constraints and influence four key institutions of society: the family, the state, the civil society and the market.

Connell defines patriarchy as "historically produced situations in gender relations where men's domination is institutionalized. Men's overall social supremacy is embedded in face-to-face settings such as the family and economy" (Connell 1990, 514). In Ghana, the culture of patriarchy relates to ethnicity. An ethnic group is a social group emerging out of social interaction. A membership in an ethnic group enhances social identity, social organisation and a sense of belonging.

Among the Kusaal, the ethnic group under study, patriarchy is most visible when it comes to the process of marriage and property rights. More than 80% of Ghanaian marriages are contracted under customary law (Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi 2006, 136). When married, the woman leaves her family behind to live with her husband and his family. By accepting marriage she also accepts the rules and norms that are authorised by the male family-head. In northern traditional societies, allocation of land is done through the patrilineal lineage system, and women's access to land depends on the goodwill of male members of their in-law family (Tsikata 2001).

Polygamy is present in Ghanaian societies. Polygamy is the practice of having more than one spouse at the same time. Ghana has three laws that regulate polygamy. According to the civil law and the Marriage Ordinance, polygamy is illegal. Secondly, The Mohammedans' Ordinance reflects the Islamic practice of a limit of four wives. Thirdly, a married man under the customary law has no limitations on how many wives he can have (CEDAW 2005). According to Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2008, 18% lived in polygamous marriages (Ghana Statistical Service 2008). Polygamy is challenging for the women involved because they have to share the resources in the family and compete with others for the attention of their husband (BBC 2006).

A negotiable practice

Although patriarchy has deep roots in many Ghanaian societies and results in gender-specific constraints (Kabeer 2008a), it is not a fixed and homogenous practice. Women can negotiate their position within the family in order to improve it. That is the idea behind Kandiyoti's term "patriarchy bargains". She argues that male dominance is upheld by rules and norms, but these

are contested, redefined and renegotiated by both men and women (Kandiyoti 1988, 275). Although many women seem to accept the culture of patriarchy, they find strategies on how to manoeuver within these realities. The resistance can be both active and passive and take different forms according to the context in which it takes place. Bina Agarwal argues that each person's fall-back position, the situation if they exit a relationship, will regulate the process of negotiating (Agarwal 1997, 4). On the other hand, both men and women can maintain patriarchy. One example from northern Ghana is that according to some traditional norms, men should not be cooking.

2.4 Family structure in Ghana

In this paper I have used family as a term. In Ghana family can refer to all persons related by blood, marriage, fostering and adaption (Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi 2006, 135). A Ghanaian family consists of both the nuclear family and the extended family. In addition to husband, wife and children it involves kinship and filial relations (ibid, 132). The average size of a Ghanaian family is 4.4 members, but in Upper East Region it is made up of 5.8 members (Ghana Statistical Service 2012, 22). Those numbers may include two, three or four generations, including children, husband, wife/wives, siblings, parents, parents-in-law, grandparents etc. Within a Ghanaian family there can be more than one wife, since polygamy is accepted. Wife can have two definitions in Ghana: *a female married to a given man* and *a female married into a given compound or lineage* (Sudarkasa 1986, 27). In this study a wife can be both, but the focus is looking closer at the gender relations within the nuclear family, particularly between husband and wife.

A traditional home in Ghana is a compound made up of separate rooms consisting of small units of the family. The rooms surround a central courtyard and share the same outer walls. Inside a compound each family unit contributes to the organization of their daily activities. For instance they have shared meals. In rural areas the family is the heart of the society. It creates social security, because the family members exchange social services with each other. The grandmother takes care of her grandchildren and in return she knows that she will be given elderly care from the family. The family upholds cultural heritage and secures the existence of their lineage through childbearing (Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi 2006). In rural areas the family is the central unit of production and consumption. Extended family members living elsewhere can be asked to come and help in the agricultural production. Support can also be given to family members that struggle with their everyday life. Child fostering is a customary practice in Ghana

where children are sent to members of the external family to be raised, trained and prepared for adulthood (Tsikata 2009).

2.5 Rural life in Ghana

Under the colonial period it was the southern part of Ghana that got much attention. Gaining control and building up infrastructure were more important in the south compared to the north, because resources were shipped out from the coast. This divide between the north and the south has implications on people's lives today. The political centre is geographically located in the south, disfavouring the north when it comes to allocation of state resources, developing infrastructure and social services. The effect of state policy on rural communities is also limited.

Ghana has had a stable economic growth since the 1992 election. It is likely to achieve the first Millennium Development Goal, which means halving poverty by 2015. Poverty in Ghana is considered a rural phenomenon. The Ghanaian definition of rural is localities with less than 5,000 persons (Ghana Statistical Service 2012). The Ghana Gender Profile from 2008 states that 85 % of the people below the poverty line live in rural areas (ADF 2008, v).[1] Poverty is more concentrated in the northern savannah regions, (Northern, Upper East and Upper West Region) where 69 – 88 % of the poor population dwell (Awumbila 2006, 150). Out from these numbers you can see that there are limited economic resources in the north, but in order to fully understand the everyday life of the people living on the margin, vulnerability is a better word to use. The UN defines vulnerability as "a state of high exposure to risks and uncertainties, in combination with a reduced ability to protect or defend oneself against those risks and uncertainties, and cope with the negative consequences" (UNDESA 2003: 4). Risks can both be economic (the economic impact of environmental and natural risks) and social (gender inequality, social discrimination, unequal distribution of resources and power, etc.) (Holmes and Jones 2010, 3). Gender influences the experience of risk because it creates hierarchal structures within a society. Vulnerability is therefore gendered and gender vulnerability can be defined as "the inability to prepare, adjust or adapt due to constraints inherent in a particular form of gender relationship" (Schroeder 1987:33).

Rural women's life and their room to manoeuvre

This study looks closer at rural women's life in Ghana and their room to manoeuver; how they deal with opportunities and challenges in their everyday life. Farming is the main occupation of

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[1] The poverty line in Ghana is measured differently by different actors, but here it refers to 1.25 US $

the rural population in Ghana (Gyasi 2009, 7), and with that follows tasks for both men and women that shape their everyday life. A woman's day includes cleaning the compound, preparing and serving food, fetching water, working on the land, fetching firewood, taking care of the children, washing clothes, and other types of domestic work. The gender specific sharing of responsibilities within the family also influences what type of work she can do on the farm.

In the traditional system, the male family head controls land, and the female in-laws work as labour cultivating the land. There has been a change giving women responsibility for their own plot of land, but that opportunity depends on their male counterpart. But access does not mean that they can do whatever they want. According to customary law access to land depends on membership in the village community. Membership is obtained by birth or marriage (Agbosu 2007).

Marriage in Bawku West District is regulated under customary laws attached to the Kusaasi ethnic group. When a man has found a girl he wants to marry, he will have to present himself to the girl's family and tell them he is interested. After that he informs his family and asks for their support. Together with representatives of his family he goes to the girl's house with a certain amount of gifts (pito, kola nut and other material items) according to the custom. If it is accepted, the groom has to present the bride price, which for the Kusasis consists of four cows; two female and two male to the bride's family. The father, brother or the family-head of the bride's family controls the bride price. 2-4 cows may also be added when the woman gives birth. Although the couple may be Christian, the traditional rites have to be completed before they can go to the church (Sundong 2005, 62).

According to the traditional custom there are some preferences that influence the choice of a wife. One of them is the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). The World Health Organization defines FGM as "procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons" (WHO 2013). FGM is practiced in many Ghanaian traditional societies, and in some communities it is viewed as a prerequisite for marriage (Adongo et al. 1998). According to traditional custom it is part of the ritual process girls go through preparing to get married. Girls get training in domestic work and are given advice about nutrition. Emphasis is put on teaching the daughter how to be a good wife and prepare Ghanaian dishes. When married, women face challenges when it comes to control of their own body. According to the traditional custom the marital contract obliges women to give the husband unlimited access to her body (Akumatey and Darkwah 2009, 36).

In Northern Ghana, ownership and control of productive resources are determined by men-headed kinship systems. The ownership is held by the community as a whole, but controlled and exercised by various traditional actors. Traditionally the *tendanas*, land-priests, held the right to distribute land to smaller user-groups of the community. The tendanas authorize the customary laws of landownership and perform rituals when giving out land. But in recent time the ritual ownership has been modified. There are practices where the Paramount chief delegates land control to sub-chiefs without consulting the local tendana (Agbosu et al. 2007). This is explained by the growing economic value of land and population pressure (ibid, 34). But in the Upper East Region the tendanas still play an important role when it comes to allocation of land. Membership in local communities gives individual user-rights, but women cannot do what they want on the land. Their ability to exercise those rights will be influenced by cultural and contextual understandings of need (Moore 1994, 91). This has consequences for the agricultural production. Women that are farmers have difficulties getting hold of good and fertile land and are not prioritized when it comes to access to irrigation sites. The customary practice also includes norms about what males and females can do on the farm. One example is that millet, which is an important food crop in northern Ghana, is viewed as a male crop, preventing the women to plant it on their land (Agbosu et al. 2007, 39). Some norms also say that married women are not allowed to own livestock, because the in-law family are afraid she will give it to her original family.

Inheritance of property is organized following the patriarchal system. It is the eldest son that inherits the dead father's land. If the children are too young or there is no son, a brother of the deceased would administer the property until the children are older. It is the children's responsibility to take care of their widowed mother, but according to customary laws she has no rights to claim part of the heritage (Tsikata 2001).

Opportunities and support mechanisms

Although the traditional customs is strong and puts limitations on rural women's room to manoeuver, there exist opportunities. **Education** is seen as a tool to improve people's life, particularly in Northern Ghana because there exist few economic options for women and men compared to other parts of the country (Darkwah 2010). Although women in northern Ghana still face disadvantages regarding access to education, Darkwah's study shows that when comparing the three last generations, there are an increasing number of women with education (ibid).

The natural occurrence of the shea tree in the northern part of Ghana is a **business opportunity** for rural women. As long as the tree grows on their community land, women have access to pick the fruits. The shea nut has a global, commercial value because it is used in cosmetic products, but it is also used locally in cooking (Carett et al. 2009).

Further in this section I will look at different support mechanisms available in order to negotiate patriarchy. **Informal relationships** within the community provide support in rural women's everyday activities. Between neighbours or along kin, women lean on each other when it comes to childcare, domestic work and farming activities. Low access to means of transportation or traditional norms limits the mobility of women, but social networks can make it easier to move outside the walls of your own compound.

Religious institutions give people a chance to expand such networks beyond the neighbourhood. 94.7 % of the inhabitants in Ghana practice a religion and a significant Christian community in Upper East Region is the Pentecostal church community (Ghana Statistical Service 2012, 4). It is a very important part of rural people's everyday life, because it gives support and advice and shape norms, rules and values that exist in societies.

The traditional authority also has well-established institutions that are of help when seeking access to land or organizing religious and social ceremonies. Within patrilineal descent groups like the kusasis, women generally do not hold formal leadership positions. But Sudarkasa argues that women take part in discussions of lineal affairs, and in such discussions age comes before gender. The older you are the more influence you have (Sudarkasa 1986).

The international development policy demanding the roll-back of the state that began in the 1980's, has led to many **developing agencies** rooted in the Ghanaian society. The last 20 years have witnessed a rapid expansion of the number of Community-based organizations (CBO's) and Non-governmental organizations (NGO) working to bridge the gap between the needs of the people and the services the state can offer. They especially target the service sector; like health and education. The global fight against poverty is also a factor of motivation for the establishment and work of NGO's in Ghana. Many NGO's are targeting women, which is an outcome of the international promotion of gender equality (IMF 2011). One such organisation is the gatekeeper for this study; Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC). With the Women's Rights and Domestic Violence Campaign, they work towards gender equality by empowering women to claim rights to access land.

2.6 The Study Area
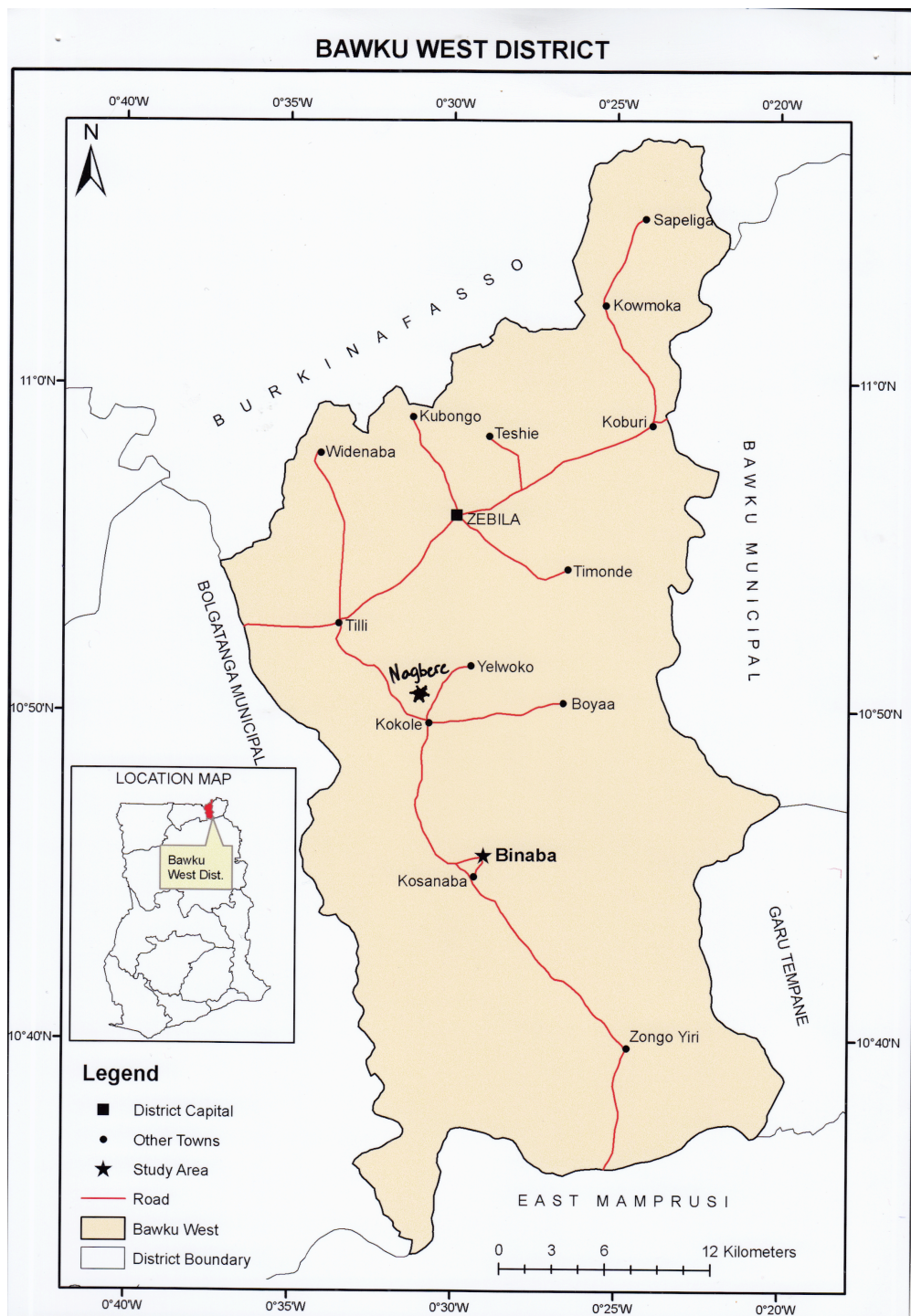
Map 1. Bawku West District

Participants from two communities in Bawku West District have contributed to the accomplishment of this study. Nagbere was the main community of study, while a control interview was conducted in Binaba. Bawku West District is one of 9 districts in Upper East Region in the northeast corner of Ghana (Map 1). Bawku West District has a population of 94

034 inhabitants (Ghana Statistical Service 2012) spread on an area of 1070 square km (MOFA 2011). The geographical boundaries of the district are Bawku Municipality and Garu-Tempane to the east and Bolgatanga Municipality to the west. The northern border of Bawku West District is also the national border of Ghana, shared with Burkina Faso. To the south is East Mamprusi Municipality. Zebilla is the district capital and is found in the northern part of the district. The two communities in the study, Nagbere and Binaba are located in the centre and further south (Map 1). The population in both Binaba and Nagbere (approximately 600 people) are classified as rural in a Ghanaian context (Ghana Statistical Service 2012).

Climatic conditions

Since most of the people in Bawku West District are farmers, their agricultural activity is determined by the climatic conditions. There is only one rainy season, where most of the precipitation occurs between May/June and September/October with an average annual rainfall between 800 mm and 1.100 mm. In the period between November and February, the Harmattan winds bring with it dry, dusty and cold conditions (Gouvernment of Ghana 2013b). Compared to the rest of the country, the average temperatures are significantly higher. The North East Trade Wind and the southwest monsoon influence the climatic conditions and create the difference between wet- and dry-season. The vegetation is savannah woodland and semi-arid grassland (Sundong 2005). The trees occur with low density and what grows of other plants is influenced by the precipitation. In the rainy-season the vegetation is quite dense, but during the dry season the ground is nearly naked.

Its people

The people in Upper East Region belong to a number of different ethnic groups: the most important of them are Mole Dagbon (74.5%), Grusi (8.5%), Mande-Busanga (6.2%) and Gurma (3.2%). Those form the basis of seven major languages. The Participants in this study are Kusasis, a sub-group of the Mole Dagbon. 75 % of the population of Bawku West District belong to the kusasis and their ethnic language is Kusaal (Gouvernment of Ghana 2013b). The district is also influenced by migration from the surrounding municipalities, Burkina Faso and through the nomadic Fulani ethnic group. In recent years the influx of people from Bawku Muncipality has been high, caused by a conflict between the Kusasis and the Mamprusi concerning the paramount chiefdom (Sundong 2005).

The majority of the participants were Christians and belonged to the Pentecostal church, but traditional religion and Islam also have an influence in the everyday life of the inhabitants of

Bawku West District. Looking at the region as a whole, 41.7 % are Christians, 27.9 % practice traditional religion and 27.1 % belong to Islam (Ghana Statistical Service 2012). The reality among many is a combination between traditional practice and one of the world religions.

People's occupation

The climatic conditions influence the occupation of the people: 80 % are engaged in agricultural production (MOFA 2011). During the rainy-season, the farmers are busy working on their land: preparing the land, sawing, maintaining the crops and harvesting. Most of the activity relates to cultivating of food-crops like millet, maize, sorghum, groundnuts, beans (Bambara, soya and black-eyed beans) and rice. Poultry and livestock rearing are also important occupations, with guinea fowl, cattle, goat and sheep being the most important animals. Most of the agricultural production is for domestic consumption and during the farming season they also produce crops for storage and a food resource during the dry season. Families rely on access to firewood to be able to cook their food, so time is also spent collecting firewood. And because of scarce access to timber, dried steams of sorghum (a type of millet) are also used for cooking.

In Nagbere, there are bodies of water running through the community with its own fishing pond, where there are some working fishermen. During the dry-season when most of the water had dried up, only onions could grow. Because of the challenging conditions there is pressure on the land to produce enough food during the rainy-season. Nagbere did not have electricity or piped water, but there was a borehole located close to the community church.

In addition to their farming activities, some people are involved in petty-trading. It includes small-scale trade like producing food for sale, sale of tomatoes, onions etc. Important markets for the participants were Zebilla and Binaba and market day fell on each third day. The informal economic activities also include selling of cash crops like cotton, production of sheabutter from the sheanuts, oil processing of groundnuts and processing of the seeds from the dawadawa three.

Social characteristics

The social construction of the communities under study is organized around compounds made out of different family members. The families in Nagbere were mostly extended following a patrilineal kinship system. The families had from two to six children; therefore child caring was a big part of their everyday activity. A growing number of children go to school during the day. Nagbere did not have its own school so the children had to travel a long distance to attend

school. Means of transportation was limited so some travelled the distance by foot. When the children reach a certain age, most of them are sent to boarding schools. There were children attending both secondary high in different municipalities, either in Bawku East or Bolgatanga Municipality.

When it comes to the social organization of the communities, inhabitants took on different responsibilities and tasks according to what was required within the community. The tasks could be in relation to either the community church or mosque. Nagbere had its own Pentecostal church and it worked as a unifying element in the community. It was a meeting place for the inhabitants and the location for social arrangements.

Political structure

The District Assembly in Bawku West District is made up of 45 members (currently, five of them are women) and represents the communities in the district. 32 of them are elected and 13 are appointed (Zebilla District Assembly 2012). Their tasks are to implement national sectorial policies, manage local level planning, budgeting and implementation (ADF 2008). The District Assembly send representatives to the Regional Coordinating Council. The Regional Coordinating Council of Upper East Region is located in Bolgatanga, the regional capital. Their job is to coordinate and monitor national and local policy and other development interventions. The Regional House of Chiefs is also represented here. Zebilla is one of 12 political parliamentary constituencies of the Regional House of Chiefs. In addition there are District management teams and Executive Committees of the D.A level who are involved in high-level decisions.

Looking at local governance, the traditional authorities have an authority over people's lives. Following the ethnic groups, they are organized with clan leaders and chiefs. Each chiefdom works as a microstate within the state institutions. Nagbere has its own chief, but the highest chiefdom of the Kusasi people is the Bawku Naba, the paramount chief of the Bawku traditional area. He is located in Bawku Municipality.

To conclude this chapter, the participants of the study live in a society where there exist many barriers for women. Patriarchy denies women access to productive resources such as land, limits their mobility and defines male and female responsibility in relation to the social organisation and ethnic customs. Current Ghanaian state laws are not strong enough to ensure gender equality; on the contrary, the laws inhibit women from contributing in the society on

equal terms, hence they are not empowered. The next chapter will explore what women empowerment means and outline the theoretical framework for the research.

3. Theorizing gender and empowerment

Empowerment can be described in many different ways; therefore the chapter will look at the definition used in this research and how it is positioned within the field of development. The feminist movement has managed to establish gender as an important aspect when discussing development of the world. The creation of the UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, in July 2010 underlines this focus. The theorizing of gender and empowerment provides a framework for the research that will be used to structure the analysis of the stories told by the participants from Bawku West District outlined in chapter 5 and 6 of the thesis. A suggested analytical approach will be presented based on the different dimensions of the gender lens, a methodological tool that will improve the understanding of the stories of change and continuity when it comes to subjectivities and gender relations.

3.1 The gender lens

The theorizing of gender and empowerment is using the gender lens as its fundament because it has a central place in the theoretical framework for this research. As I will elaborate on later in this chapter, empowerment has become a buzzword in the process of planning development policies. The inclusion of empowerment in development planning started with the critique of women as only an "add on" to traditional planning approaches (Panda and Lund 1998). Caroline Moser engaged in this critique by advocating for new methods of development planning that were more gender sensitive. In the book *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice, and Training* she argues that acknowledgement and inclusion of the gender division of labour and gendered power relations within families and in the labour market, would better target gender inequalities and reduce constraints to development (Moser 1993). Among the engagement that attempts to follow up Moser's critique, the Socio Economic and Gender Analysis (SEGA)-model developed by Barbara Thomas-Slayter (1995) is the most holistic approach to a gender sensitive planning framework. The SEGA-model (Figure 1) is holistic because it includes both structures (the light bands) and processes and interventions that can alter structure (the dark bands). It provides tools that allow a gender specific analysis of local realities, but at the same time that relate gender to broader socio-economic processes (Panda and Lund 1998). In addition it includes a methodological approach that aims to engage the beneficiaries of development policies in order to achieve gender sensitivity in practice (Thomas-Slayter et al. 1995, 32). Empowerment is a central concept in the model, which is

based on experiences showing that investing in empowering people promotes gender equity and contributes to sustainable development (ibid, 35).
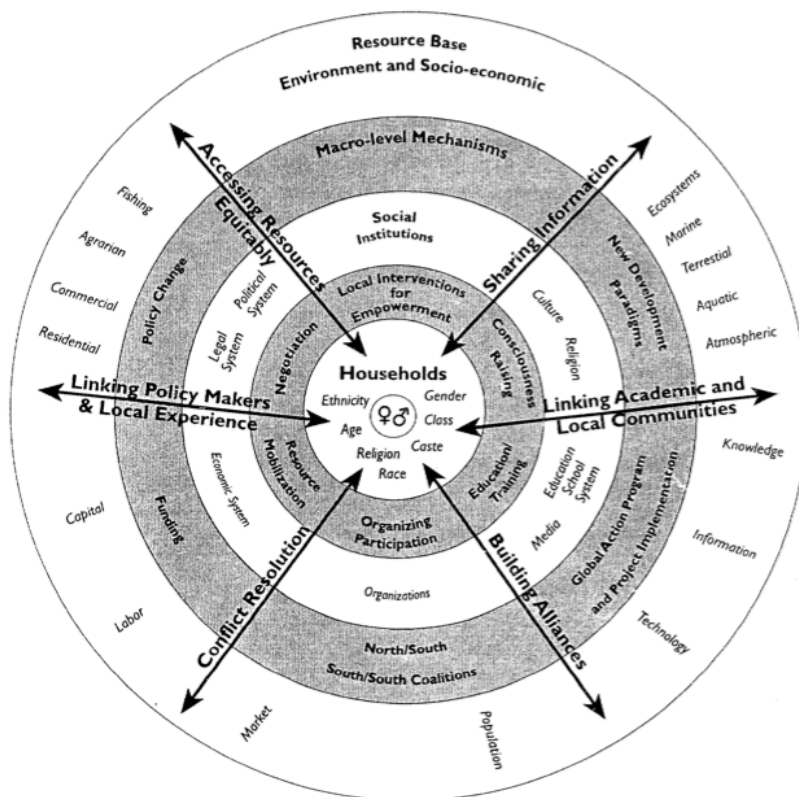
Figure 1. The SEGA-model (Thomas-Slayter et al. 1995).

The gender lens follows the argumentation of the SEGA-model, recognizing gender as a multi-dimensional and intersectional concept (David and Driel 2005). The gender lens makes use of three dimensions to explain and analyse observed realties and these dimensions are the fundament for my suggestion for an analytical approach for this research. The first dimension in the gender lens deals with *production of stereotypes*. The social contexts in the communities the people live in create images of how individuals should behave and what they should represent. Men as the physically strong and authoritative member in the family and women as emotional, dependent caretakers are examples of such symbolic portraits, referred to as *symbolic representations* in the analytical approach. The second dimension includes *institutional practices and structures* in order to understand women and men's room to manoeuver in their everyday life. It acknowledges that there is a difference between and among categories of men and women and tries to grasp how these differences are manifested in the observed realities. This can be visible in the traditional custom of marriage and the division of labour when it comes to agricultural practices. But within categories there is a diversity of

individuals. The *subjectivity dimension* of the gender lens takes this into account and tries to see how individuals deal with and negotiate the institutionalized realities. (Davids and van Driel 2005, 8).

These three dimensions are included in my research questions, reflecting my position within theories of development and how the realities of the participants in Bawku West District should be understood. Women are seen as active subjects that can bring about change, but they are affected by their ability to negotiate within the family structures and to deal with institutional practices. But this dynamic process of change is also affected by symbolic portraits and how empowerment is understood and made use of.

3.2 Empowerment

There were participants in this study saying; "I feel empowered!" But what does it mean to be empowered? Throughout the research empowerment denotes people's ability to make decisions in order to take control and improve their own life. Development agencies acknowledge that there exist barriers and marginalization in people's lives and empowerment has been presented as a strategy to break out of marginalization and dismantle and transform these barriers. Included in the definition of empowerment presented above is empowerment as a dynamic process of change. In this process individuals are encouraged to negotiate for power. Although empowerment puts emphasis on individuals as agents for change it also acknowledges that collective resistance, protest and mobilization are important to challenge basic power relations (VeneKlasen 2004, 8). The ability to improve and take control of our own life is affected by structures in the society that determine people's social position. The social position of individuals in Bawku West District can constrain their access to power and their influence when it comes to how power is exercised. To refer to the fieldwork, participants in Binaba said that they were not expected to move outside the compound because of their role as a wife.

In the process of enabling marginalized people to make life-improving decisions, it is important to open people's eyes to see alternative ways of living their life and the possibility to make decisions that can change it. In order to achieve this, people's sense of self-worth and social identity need to be addressed (Kabeer 2008b, 27).

3.3 Empowerment and development

It was Ester Boserup who was one of the first to focus on women's role in development. Her book "Women's role in Economic Development" from 1970 explains how economic

development strategies failed to support women. Some years later, in "Education for Critical Consciousness" from 1973, Pablo Freire argued that the marginalized and the subordinated should be in the centre of creating social equality. He worked with poor Brazilian farmers and saw them as active subjects. Through education based on the use of dialogue, respect and mutual learning they had better chances of influencing authoritative decisions that affected their lives (Freire and Nordland 1999, 19). Education became a tool to empower the poor and marginalized.

The feminist movements' engagement with the development discourse put attention on women and how they had been neglected, and activism in the 1980's helped to link empowerment with gender inequalities. The existing theory at that time, the Women in Development Approach (WID) became criticised for highlighting access and ignoring how people act (Visvanathan 2011). The answer to this was the Gender and Development approach (GAD). Its focus lies in addressing socio-economic inequalities and looking at the role of culture when dealing with women's subordination (Parpart, Rai et al. 2002). Women empowerment therefore became established as a good strategy to lift women out of marginalization and subordination.

The position of empowerment in the development discourse can also be explained by the shift in the development agenda in 1990. With the publication of the Human Development Report, development was defined as a complex process that focused on encouraging the development of people's capacity to demand change. "People are the real wealth of the nation" (UNDP 1990, 9). This established an alternative development discourse where the goal was to put people back at the centre of the development process. Since empowerment includes the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions, empowerment is seen as a micro-narrative that fits into the alternative development paradigm.

3.4 How is empowerment used today?

Today, empowerment has figured in the development discourse for over 20 years, and it has become a concept that many different development agencies makes use of. It figures in local grassroots organizations such as Community Self-Reliance Centre in Northern Ghana, in Ghanaian state policy and in international institutions such as the World Bank (World Bank 2012, 94). As I have tried to outline above, the alternative development discourse was established as a reaction to the failure of top down approaches to development, but the paradox is that when looking at how empowerment is operationalized today, international development institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank use empowerment

as a top down strategy. In Ghana, empowerment is mostly understood the same way. The Pathways to Empowerment is an international research and communication program that tries to link the knowledge of academics and activists in order to highlight what works when it comes to women empowerment. It gets funding from UKAid under the British Department of International Development (Pathways of Women's Empowerment 2012). They did a research showing that in a Ghanaian context it exist a more instrumental approach to empowerment, focusing on growth and social harmony. Both among the state, multi- and bilateral agencies and NGO's the emphasis is put on economic empowerment (Anyidoho and Manuh 2010). It is argued that the narrow approach to empowerment mainly works as "basic survival and antipoverty discourses that masquerades as empowerment discourses" (Ibid, 273). Jane L. Parpart presents one of the strongest critiques about this, arguing that empowerment is used as if it is unquestionable (Parpart, Rai et al. 2002).

Originally, UNDP referred to empowerment as a strategy to support the enlargement of people's choices and to enhance their capabilities in order to achieve human development. This understanding highlights subjective experiences, especially women´s and other grassroots initiatives as the starting point of developing strategies that can support women and men to take control of their lives. The IMF and the World Bank have adopted a different approach to empowerment. Empowerment is seen as a tool to improve productivity within established structures, and women empowerment is viewed as a strategy for women to earn more money. "Acknowledging the prospects, energies and contribution of women, counting half the world's population is smart economics and will help achieving the world's growth potential". This statement came from the former World Bank President Robert B. Zoellick during the 2011 Annual meeting of the IMF and the WB where gender equality and women empowerment were one of the main topics (IMF 2011).

The wide range of definitions of women empowerment shows that the realities of women's everyday life have been brought to the surface, and developing agents have developed strategies to deal with gender inequality. Because of the fact that many countries lean on the World Bank and the IMF for support, empowerment has become mainstreamed as a simple lineal set of actions that leads to a final outcome. Here economic empowerment is the goal, but the process leading the way there does not get the attention it deserves (Cornwall and Edwards 2010). This is problematic, because access to economic resources is influenced by other aspects than the individual ability to make choices that improve the economy. In order to increase their economic resources, some of the female participants from Bawku West District explained how

they had to challenge their social position, both within the family, the relationship with the husband and the wider community. There are barriers in the form of traditional norms, values and customs that are shaped by male authority. In order to overcome these barriers and create a transformation that can endure in time, the process of self-realization, self-actualization and mobilization that can create change needs to be addressed (Cornwall, Harrison et al. 2007).

How can these aspects be included in today's mainstreaming of empowerment? In the book *Rethinking Empowerment* Jane L. Parpart looks at four issues that can support fulfilling the potential of women empowerment as a strategy. Firstly, power structures exist at all levels, therefore it has to be analysed locally, nationally, as well as globally. Secondly, empowerment is more than power over resources, people and institutions. The ability to exercise power needs to be taken into account. The third issue highlights how political and economic structures, cultural assumptions and discourses affect the process of empowerment. Lastly, empowerment is both a process and an outcome (Parpart, Rai et al. 2002).

3.5 Different dimension of empowerment

The conflicting images of empowerment, from empowerment as a building to empowerment as a pathway (Cornwall et al. 2008), show that the concept is complex and includes dimensions that can be interpreted differently. Empowerment includes: expanding a person's *power to* bring about change, enabling people to take *power over* (take control over situations to make things happen), supporting *power within* (individual awareness) and encouraging *power with* (to work collectively) (Rowlands 1997). Foucault has inspired the definition of power used in this thesis. Power is a changing, dynamic process that can be negotiated for. It is not something fixed, held by some individuals or groups (Foucault and Gordon 1980). Being empowered means that you are mobilized to access and exercise power, but it can be exercised both constructively and repressively.

Another important aspect of empowerment is that it includes both agency and structures. The agency-oriented perspective is present in the emphasis on individual capacity building (Rigg 2007). Agency is the ability to define our own goals in life and act upon them (Kabeer 1999). It is an important component of capacity-building, because it touches upon people's motivation in living their life and their subjectivity. Subjectivity is a process of building your own identity, where thoughts, desires, fears, emotions and perceptions experienced by each individual meet with existing social, cultural, political and economic discourses where people live their lives and shape modes of thought, ambitions, desire and so on (Moore 2010, 38). Kabeer argues that

women's sense of self-worth and social identity is the starting point of the empowerment-process (Kabeer 2008b). This can be linked to the subjective dimension of the gender lens because the process of building identity, affects how individuals deal with the institutionalised.

But those discourses can create structural barriers in the society and need to be identified and dealt with in order to be able to take control of your own life. In Bawku West District the process of women empowerment is structured by existing social norms and accepted practice. Although some women have managed to get acceptance from their husbands to own land, it is up to the traditional chief to give the authority to do so. This proves that power operates at different levels and empowerment has to be put in relation to structures. Gender as a power relationship comes to play in different levels of society, because hidden institutional ideologies, rules, norms and practices produce "structures of constraints" (Folbre 1994) that are gender specific. In Bawku West District women are expected to stay in their compound, and do specific types of work. But individuals can find ways to manoeuver in order to deal with these constraints. "The room to manoeuvre" is a concept that refers to the room where strategies to negotiate, resist or sustain social practices are developed (Long and Long 1992).

Empowerment does not only have different interpretations among international developing agents, but my findings show that it is also understood differently among both beneficiaries and NGO-workers in the field (Chapter 5). Some people point out economic empowerment as the most important focus, while other put emphasis on individual self-awareness and capacity-building. Male participants from Bawku West District supported the idea of improving the income opportunities of their wives, but it was still difficult for women to have full control of the money. Women had the chance to start their capacity building, but their opportunities are limited. The position of each actor involved in the empowerment-process needs to be examined. My position in dealing with women empowerment is that it should not be reduced to only be about economic empowerment. To be empowered economically is a good outcome, but the most important issue is the process that leads marginalized people to become ready to make decisions that will improve their life.

Empowerment is a process in time; a journey that involves constant negotiating (Cornwall and Edwards 2010). An important experience I got in the field is that although empowerment leads to change in some areas of the society there will be other areas that will resist the change and continue to exist as before. Empowerment therefore needs to be seen in relation to change and continuities across time (ibid). Stølen and Vaa (1991) look at continuity and change in

connection with gender relations by arguing that the pillars of traditional authority are not easily altered. Young women adopting traditional male responsibility as the main income earner of the family is a result of negotiation and redefinition of gender relations. However, primarily a fashion to adjust to social change than a transformation of underlying gender hierarchical structures (Stølen and Vaa 1991). The intervention of CSRC in the everyday life of people in Bawku West District, engenders change in the sense that the meaning of gender is brought to the beneficiaries' attention, and it becomes defined, negotiated and redefined. But the definition and value put to it depends on how this relates to traditional values: whether or not they conform to the established practice. In the process of transforming their everyday life, elements of continuity - behaviour that preserve "old" values were present among the participants. This shows that in the process of social transformation there is a tension between continuity and change and the level of behaviour and ideas. There is no direct link between changes in the role of men and women and the conceptualization of *maleness* and *femaleness* (ibid). Although the gendered division of labour when it comes to agricultural production became more flexible in Nagbere it does not mean it transfers to other spheres of family life, domestic work or ideas and behaviour towards body and sexual relationships. Sexuality is social constructed; affected by social norms, political and economic structures (Cornwall and Jolly 2010). R.W. Connell (2002) argues that sexuality evolves around reproduction and emotions, as the major arena of emotional attachment and the realm of intimate contact and particularly strong emotional bonds. These bonds can be both positive and negative (Connell 2002, 63).

In this understanding, where development includes both continuity and changes, it is interesting to look more into how gender is shaped by place (Laurie et al. 1999). The process of globalization makes the world become compressed in time and place. The expansion in social relations and peoples increased mobility facilitate knowledge transfer throughout the world. Globalization is also a cultural phenomenon, and in this section I will look at how processes of cultural globalization are negotiated. When supporting women to negotiate for land rights, CSRC is trying to create cultural change. Culture is defined as lived experience, the way of living your life, structured by representation and by power (Schech and Haggis 2000). African Initiatives, the British NGO, is able to transfer western knowledge to the local Ghanaian organization CSRC. This intersection of the local and the global influences the approach the CSRC take in their work with women and men in Bawku West District, when it comes to terminology and what to focus on in their projects. Cultural gendered identities can be

reworked as a result of globalization, but it can also be used in a negative sense. Globalization makes it possible for the Norwegian company BioFuel Africa Ltd to produce alternative energy resources in Alipe in Northern Ghana, but by cutting down shea-threes poor women are adversely affected and more marginalized (Dagbladet 2009).

The creation of a common understanding of culture, in the meeting between the local, national and the global level, is used to challenge gender relations, but this process is negotiated by the people in the field; CSRC's beneficiaries. It can result in both *spaces of opportunity and spaces of oppression* (Laurie et al. 1999, 35). Space is defined as a scene for human subjectivity, experience, action and interaction (Holloway and Hubbard 2001). In this research spaces include the compound, the community, the church, the realm of property ownership and traditional practice. Women and men in Nagbere have new economic, political and social opportunities because women have managed to expand their room to manoeuver. But although, some traditional customs, norms and values are reworked there still exist spaces of oppression in religious institutions and attitudes towards sex.

3.6 Gender relations and empowerment

Empowerment is a dynamic socio-political process that is affected by a range of activities and variables and gender relations is one of them (Batliwala 2007). Gender is a process of cultural interpretations of biological differences between men and women (Stølen 1991, 14). It is a social construction of both an individual identity and a social relation that varies over time and space. Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC) provides tools, for example improving the women's ability to speak their mind in order to challenge men's authority and encourage them to define their own values and behaviour. These women are encouraged to negotiate for power, but this can stir up the existing power balance in a way that can end in conflict. Interventions can reinforce male hierarchy and by encouraging women to negotiate for power, men can also feel threatened and make women more vulnerable (Chhacchi 2009, 14). Since both gender and power have a relational dimension, women's position as agents are relational (Cornwall 2007, 28). Relational webs are a big part of the everyday life of the participants; therefore empowerment can't be understood fully when it is abstracted from social and intimate relations. The value of social relations has been proved to matter a lot when it comes to empowering women (Madland 2008; Kabeer 2010; Quisumbing 2010). The main focus of these works is on the social relations outside the husband-wife relation. I argue that in order to

bring empowerment to the next level, where it can improve the cooperation between women and men, intimate gender relations, like the husband-wife relation need to be included.

Both cooperation and conflict is a natural part of the family arrangements, and the room where members manoeuver in order to meet with challenges and opportunities that they face in their daily life are bargained and negotiated. I therefore found it interesting to question how women empowerment affects the process of negotiating within the family. Amartya Sen's *Bargaining Models* (1990)*,* despite being a theory of household economics, brought attention to the challenge of conflict and cooperation in family arrangements. It resulted in the use of a cooperative conflict model when approaching households. Families are not fixed units but have permeable boundaries, changes according to time and take different forms in different societies. To expand Sen's Bargaining Model from only being about economics I have found inspiration in Bina Agarwal's article *Bargaining and gender relations, with and beyond the household*, where she adds the dimension of social norms and cultural constructions of gender to the negotiating process (Agarwal 1997). The outcome of the negotiating process depends on the actor's ability to access and exercise power. Different aspects, like gender, the outcome of previous negotiating processes and each person's fall-back position, the situation if they exit a relationship, will regulate the process of negotiating (Ibid, 4).

By challenging women's perceptions of self-interest it should aim to strengthen women's power to negotiate. But both men and women in the family sphere need to be included in order to keep the level of cooperation higher than the level of conflict. Out of Agarwal's eight factors that influence a rural person's strength of negotiating, the research among women and men in Bawku West District touches upon four of them:

- Personal resources and attributes.
- The state and the local community (social norm; who deserves what)
- Support from the local NGO (CSRC)
- Social perception (deservedness; are there social dimensions that that restrict what women can do?)

3.7 Why gender?

A large number of developing actors now take into account the existence of gender inequalities between men and women, and make use of the SEGA-model or other gender sensitive planning tools to develop projects. The feminist movement within the geography of development has

contributed to bringing local everyday experience into theories of development. The realities of women have become visible; especially as important contributors to improve the unequal and unbalanced distribution of resources that exist in the world (World Bank 2012). Naila Kabeer (2012) argues that: "resources in women's hands have a range of positive outcomes for human capital and capabilities within the household" (Kabeer 2012, 4).

1975 was named the International Women's Year and the first conference on women was held in Mexico City. The realities and the role of women in achieving development was even more underlined with the presentation of the feminisation of poverty thesis at the fourth UN Conference on Women in 1995 (Visvanathan 2011). The feminisation of poverty thesis sees women as both deeper and longer into poverty. It acknowledges that poverty changes over time, but it claims that female-headed households are poor. Poverty puts heavier burdens on women compared to men and numerous barriers prevent women from moving out of poverty (Chant 2011).

This approach to poverty is criticised for being too instrumental and superficial. It pictures the men as breadwinners and women as victims, without acknowledging the diversity in how people live their everyday life. Syliva Chant argues that there is too much emphasis on income, and it fails to question the impoverishment of women. Aiming to broaden this view, Chant instead wants to use "feminisation of responsibilities and obligations." (ibid, 180). In the article *The scramble in Africa: reorienting rural livelihoods* Deborah F. Bryceson argues along the same lines, explaining that farmers tend to engage more and more in non-agricultural activities, because of the need for money. Women are also requested to earn money and this increases their workload, because they are still key-producers of food for the household (Bryceson 2002). Specifically for Ghana, Lynne Brydon (2010) has observed an increasing feminisation of family responsibility from the middle of the 20th century. She argues that traditional male responsibilities like providing cloth, shoes and paying school fees rest more and more on women. This underlines that many women have to deal with poverty, but in order to develop support mechanisms it is more productive to look closer at how people, both women and men, deal with this burden. Other authors like Tine Davids and Francien van Driel (2005) also argues that gender and development should not be reduced to poverty and women's issues. But how can you obtain in-depth knowledge about women's situations?

The feminist standpoint theory rejects the idea of a universal objective truth, because it does not fit with the realities of women's and men's lived experiences and relationships. Using

marginalized women's own experiences as starting points will broaden the way knowledge is produced (Harding 2008). But it has to be critically tested (Haraway 2001). Among feminists there is a diversity of practices and positions, both theoretical and political. Feminists, engaging with development in different parts of the world, have very different experiences (Cornwall, Harrison et al. 2007). African feminists can build their knowledge differently compared to feminists in Europe, and each feminist can find their inspiration from different sources. Oyeronke Oyewumi challenges the whole idea of using a feminist approach in an African context. She argues that feminists tend to be too Eurocentric, limiting the possibility of acknowledging African realities. She backs this by saying that in the Yoruba society of south-western Nigeria it is age that is the organizing principle of families, not gender (Oyewumi 2002). Gender is dependent on the social context and specific relations in the community it takes place.

The questioning of the western feminist view that all spheres of life are gendered has given support to an African understanding of women. Oyewumi (2000) argues that in an African context there is a distinction between wife and mother. Female subordination is embedded in the position of wife, but being a mother is a position of power in Africa. "Motherhood is the preferred and cherished self-identity of many African women" (Arnfred 2004, 24). In relation to this she argues that the wife-husband relation is only one aspect of family-relations. The women-child relation implies women as the authoritative figures.

Mary Kolawole argues that making use of the term *womanism* appeals more to the African reality because it underlines cultural relevance, the family, motherhood, and the intersection between various forms of oppression, social stratification and marginalisation based on race, ethnicity, age, class and gender (ibid, 262). Oyewumi builds on this argumentation by explaining subordination in patrilineal societies as something that has nothing to do with gender, but which is embedded in the fact that a woman is an outsider to the lineage (ibid, 24).

These contributions show that it is not enough to make use of a narrow feminist perspective, because gender is not the only aspect. Age plays a role in family organization in Ghana too, but in the relationship between men and women age is not the most important factor; ignoring the gender dimension will therefore not be productive. I have used a feminist approach to better understand the reality of the female beneficiaries in CSRC's Women's Rights and Domestic Violence campaign. But I have stressed the fact that men's support in the process of empowering women is important (Chant 2000). I have looked at the relationship between men

and women within families in Bawku West District, and how structures, agency and symbolical representation affect subjectivity and gender relations. In order to achieve this I have made use of a gender lens. The three different dimensions of the gender lens are useful as a methodological tool when trying to see the realities in the field from different angles. I have tried to include these aspects in the illustration of my analytical approach.

3.8 A suggested analytical approach
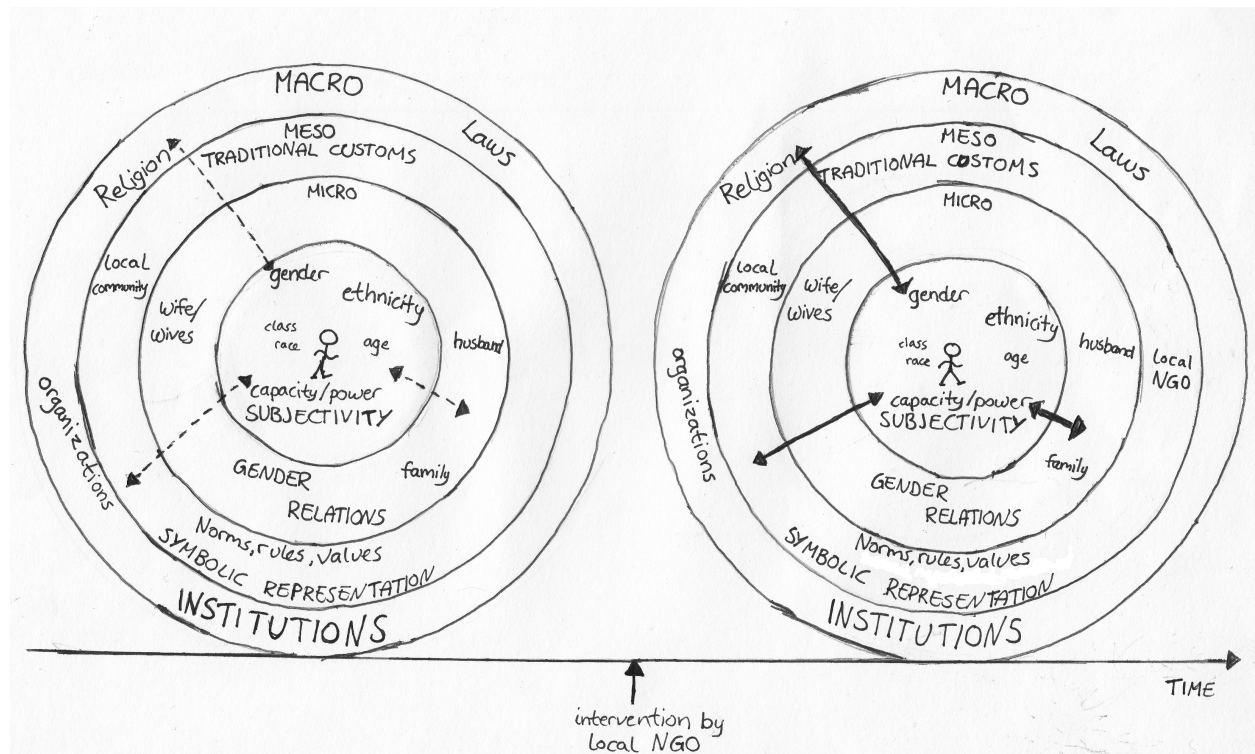
Figure 2 Analytical approach to gender and empowerment in Bawku West District. Derived from the gender lens (Davids and Driel 2005) and the SEGA-model (Thomas-Slayter et al.1995).

The analytical approach is inspired by the gender lens (Davids and Driel 2005) and the SEGA-model developed by Barbara Thomas-Slayter (1995). To include the local experience of the participants has been an important aspect in the methodological approach in this research and the model help to link the three dimensions of the gender lens together. Embedded in the illustration are also the theory of continuity and change (Stølen 1991) and Urie Bronfenbrenner and his Ecological Model of Human Development. The Ecological Model of Human Development is a holistic approach to the study of human development. Originally, it was used to study child growth where an active growing human being is influenced by the changing settings in which it lives. There is an interconnection between those settings and they are

embedded in a larger context that affects the process of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 21).

The figure above tries to illustrate a holistic approach to development where the negotiation and maintenance of subjectivity, gender relations, symbolic representation and institutions shape the everyday life of people. Development is a dynamic process where empowerment and gender evolve over time. Intervention in such a process is subject to both change and continuity (Stølen 1991). Incorporated in the figure are the different structural dimensions that together shape the society in which the participants live; however, change, continuity and individual's room to manoeuvre are difficult to visualise without simplifying the dynamics embedded in these concepts. The arrows try to show the process of negotiation that exists between and across those dimensions. In the left circle they are marked as a broken line, but bold in the right circle. This visualises how the local NGO has strengthened women's power to negotiate.

Individuals are at the centre of this figure and in this research the emphasis is put on female individuals from Bawku West District. Their **subjectivity** affects the way those women live their life. They are active agents of change that have the potential to define their own goals, identify their motivation in life and deal with challenges and opportunities that occur along the pathway toward reaching their goals. Capacity-building, in terms of accessing and making use of *knowledge and resources*, is the key to achieving this potential and expanding their room to manoeuver. Resources refer to social networks, financial capital, or natural resources such as land.

This dimension also includes individual's ability to access and exercise power. Subjectivity is not innate; rather, it is created through social processes where relations of authority and power come to play (Harding 2008, 105). Subjectivity needs to be seen in relation to others, because relationships influence how individuals will realise who they are, what they may become and what they will achieve (Moore 2010, 37). The illustration acknowledges the interplay between different systems of power in relation to age, race, class, ethnicity and gender, which operate at all levels of society (Thomas-Slayter et al. 1995). The most important dimensions for this research are ethnicity and gender. This research focuses on **gender relations**, the intra-family relationship between husband and wife. Together with subjectivity, gender relations make up the *micro level*, where the focus is on trying to explain relationships and interactions that individuals have in their immediate surroundings.

The *meso level*, described as "interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 25), represents the local community of the participants, where the individuals meet with the traditional customs of the Kusasi ethnic group. The traditional customs are based on norms, rules and values that again create **symbolic representations,** symbolic portraits of how individuals should behave and what they should represent.

These norms, rules and values are defined, negotiated and redefined over time and because of an intervention that strengthen the ability to negotiate. The local NGO moves into this level as a result of their engagement with the every day life of the inhabitants in the community.

At the *macro level* you find laws, religion and other **institutions**, which structure the society at a higher level. But at the same time they influence how people live their everyday life. Embedded in those institutions are rules, norms and values that constrain or enable human behaviour (ibid, 21).

Religious institutions are an example of such an institution. A significant Christian community in Upper East Region is the Pentecostal church community. Its influence in Ghanaian communities can be explained by the practice of speaking in tongues, which links it to the spiritual practices of the traditional religion. Speaking in tongues is seen as a strong language of prayer when contacting God, underlining that faith is dynamic and includes powerful experiences (Pinsebevegelsen 2007; BBC 2009).

The church allows members to take an active part in the performance of services and other events. The churches in Bawku West District organized their assemblies into groups of men, women and youth. All groups are responsible for organizing church services throughout the church calendar. In this way women are included in decision-making and get training in being a leader. There are also female "soldiers of prayer" within the church that have special responsibility in the church community. These structures support the establishment of religious-based women's associations, but along with religion also come practices that can constrain the process of change.

The traditional authority also has well-established institutions that are of high importance when it comes to settling disputes. Informal arbitration is carried out at the local level with the help of family or lineage elders, community leaders or special individuals (Huq 2010). The chief has the authority and knowledge to make use of the traditional institutions by applying local

customary law. In Nagbere, the knowledge and usage of customary laws are superior to the state laws.

The gatekeeper for this study; Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC) is one of the growing number of humanitarian organisations in Ghana. CSRC is a local Ghanaian NGO, established in 2004, which provides different projects that aim to support communities in the Upper East Region to "have greater control over their own development and livelihoods through increased understanding of participation in social, economic, and political decision-making that affect their life" (CSRC 2009). Their projects include work on sustainable agriculture production, reproductive health and women`s rights, and domestic violence. Their approach is based on community empowerment where the support goes through groups, scaling up from the community level to the regional governance. With the Women's Rights and Domestic Violence Campaign, they work towards gender equality by empowering women to claim rights to access land.

The room where individuals manoeuver in order to meet with challenges and opportunities they face in their everyday life are **negotiated**. In the process of women empowerment, women are encouraged to negotiate for power in order to define, adapt to, resist and change rules, norms and values that determine the distribution of resources such as land. There are challenges and opportunities embedded in all spheres of life: the subjectivity dimension, when it comes to gender relations, the symbolic dimension, and in institutional practices. Therefore, the negotiation of the culture of patriarchy among the Kusasi ethnic group takes place in all spheres and between and across different levels of society. The ability to access and exercise power to negotiate depends on each situation the participants finds themselves in, but the capacity of people, social norms, social perceptions and support from external organizations such as local NGO's influence the outcome of the negotiation (Agarwal 1997).

To conclude the theoretical discussion, the gender lens is used in this thesis to give an insight in the influence of subjectivity, gender relations, symbolic representations and institutions in rural communities in Bawku West District. The next chapter will examine the approach taken to obtain such knowledge.

4. Methodology

Gender and empowerment in Bawku West District, has been studied by taking a feminist research approach and making use of qualitative methods. The understanding of gender and empowerment, and the characteristics of the everyday life of the participants have been established with the use of dialog and discussions. The participants have taken part in focus group discussions (FGD's) and the researcher has made use of participatory observation and key-informant interviews in order to support, confirm or question the picture presented by the groups. The focus has been to understand women's ability to bring about change, prior to and after the intervention of a Women Rights Project, led by the local, Ghanaian, non-governmental organisation, Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC). Key-informant-interviews have therefore been conducted with one field-worker and the Women's Program Coordinator in order to be conscious about the nature and background of their intervention and how it benefits the people.

The research has aimed to highlight the realities of the participants living in Bawku West District. It is a result of the way the participants see and explain their own realities and how the researcher understands the same realities. The knowledge developed in this meeting has been analysed using a gender lens. The focus of the feminist methodology applied has been on collaboration, positionality, reflexivity and subjective ethics. I would argue that this gives a higher accountability of knowledge production (Haraway 1991).

The goal of this chapter is to present and explain the research design, the methodology and the methods used in the study. It will show how the researcher prepared for the fieldwork, and the methods will be evaluated looking at the process critically. Furthermore, the chapter will explain and justify how the information gathered was handled and analysed. It concludes with some reflections on ethics and reflexivity. Throughout the chapter references from the field diary have been used in order to offer better insight into the processes of data collection.

4.1 The research design

To ensure that the research problem was addressed properly, I made an outline of the different components in the research, including the requirements of the data collection and the fundament for the data analysis. A requirement of the study was to do fieldwork. The outcome of the fieldwork is affected by how well it is planned and the ability to adjust to the realities met in the field. The preparations towards the fieldwork started in September 2011. An idea for the research topic existed already, but it became narrowed down through discussions with

fellow students and professors. By reviewing literature, a more specific project proposal was made.

An important component of the research was to examine the consequences of an intervention using women empowerment as a development strategy. To get a clear view of this process, I decided to conduct the study in a setting where women`s processes of change are limited because of men claiming strong authority. Another requirement was to get access to participants that were willing to speak about their experience of benefitting from a development project that aims to empower women. In order to get that type of access, I decided to connect with a NGO. I knew through literature review (Awumbila 2006; ADF 2008; Gyasi 2009) and a previous visit to Ghana that the northern part of the country had a patrilineal social organization. In the end of 2011 the search for a local Ghanaian NGO started. It was a difficult and a time consuming search. The final connection with CSRC in northern Ghana was made in March 2012, with the help of the British partner African Initiatives. I talked to the Ghanaian NGO on the phone and the date for the fieldwork was set to August 2012. The data collection was therefore done through fieldwork in Bawku West District, Upper East Region, Ghana (See Map 1). CSRC runs different projects that aim to support the female farmers in multiple communities in Bawku West District. Nagbere was chosen as the main community of study, while Binaba was used to control the picture presented in Nagbere.

The research was based on an interest in examining how encouraging women to negotiate for power was reflected in women`s ability to manoeuvre within the family, and in the relationship between husband and wife. Focus group discussion (FGD), key-informant interviews and participatory observation were chosen as appropriate methods to reveal this. By looking at gender relations, men were included in the study and the participants became divided into two different groups, one male and one female. The framework for the discussions was set by asking the participants to outline their understanding of empowerment and gender.

The fieldwork preparations

To get good access to literature that could prepare the fieldwork for the Ghanaian realties, I became an affiliate with Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA). CEGENSA is a body of University of Ghana in Accra with a focus on institutionalizing gender equality and equity as a legitimate business of the university and promoting research, documentation and dissemination on gender (CEGENSA 2011). Through the research unit at CEGENSA, I established an academic network that together with secondary data about gender and

empowerment in a Ghanaian and African perspective contributed to create a good fundament for the creation of the questions that guided the FGD and the key-informant interviews (Appendices). The research questions were used to set the frame of each session of FGD, but through discussions with professors in Accra and the local NGO in Bolgatanga, the questions became contextualized and more open and easier to answer.

To make use of a gender lens

A gender lens analysis is the analytical framework applied for the research. A gender lens is a methodological tool that helps the researcher to observe the raw material from multiple perspectives (Davids and Driel 2005, 7). It facilitated the analytical process because it became easier to deconstruct discourses of both femininities and masculinities, but at the same time give each participant room for subjectivity and agency. The analytical framework includes four dimensions of how to explain and analyse the observed realities: 1) the influence of institutionalized practices or structures. 2) symbolic representations. 3) how individuals deal with and negotiate the institutionalized practices. 4) the influence of gender relations on the interaction between husband and wife within the family.

During the fieldwork both male and female participants discussed issues from their everyday life that fell under these dimensions. The FGD's focused on gender relations and women as agents for change, while the participatory observation mainly dealt with the manifestation of institutionalized practices or structures. These dimensions were also applied during the session with the control group in Binaba. The first analysis of the material was done through the discussion with the control group. The knowledge they shared helped to set the realities in Nagbere in perspective and resulted in a deeper understanding of these realities.

4.2 Feminist methodology

During the research I met many different individuals. Most of them were farmers and their everyday life was outlined quite similarly, but individually they presented and explained experiences that differed. The emphasis on these experiences and how they connect with realities and ideas have been the background for the methodological position. A feminist methodology gives space to the experiences of the participants and argues that knowledge of social life is closely connected to these experiences. It acknowledges the normative and the political embedded in any research, therefore it is not possible to produce valid knowledge by neutrally connecting ideas and reality (Ramazanoglu 2002, 43).

A feminist research approach questions the existence of a firm, universal, objective truth; rather, there exist many subjective realities. The research has been looking at how individuals, both male and female, perceive and experience their everyday life, and how the intervention of a non-governmental organisation (NGO), aiming to empower women, has changed this. In a feminist approach the researcher plays a crucial role in acknowledging and understanding these realities. The production of knowledge in the research is a result of an intersubjective understanding between the researcher and the participants. The participants in the research were encouraged to take on an active role in the knowledge production. Emphasis was put on building up an environment of rapport and trust to ensure collaboration between the main actors in the research, the participants, the researcher and the moderator of the FGD's. But in addition, the contribution of these actors was carefully examined, through the use of critical reflexivity (Dowling 2000). I believe taking a collaborative approach will enrich the research, because it will challenge the researcher's assumptions and support the participants to work together to develop their own understanding (Sprague 2005, 163).

This is the foundation of my positioning and use of feminist methodology. It is inspired by Sandra Harding's feminist standpoint theory (Harding 1998; Harding 2008). Honest testimonies of women's everyday life cannot be rejected when it does not fit in the western discourse of science, but on the other hand the knowledge that derives from such a viewpoint has to be tested and considered as incomplete (Haraway 2001, 126). The use of secondary data and a control group interview has put the data in a broader context and supported the construction of knowledge. But to ensure the validity of this type of knowledge production it is important to acknowledge that all the actors involved in the research are affected by their positioning. This will be examined in the following sub-chapter. Reflexivity and ethics is outlined towards the end of this methodology chapter.

Positioning

The subjective perceptions of the researcher, the moderator and the participants are included in this research. How they position themselves in the field varies and comes to play in the meeting between them. According to Stuart Aitken, positionality is driven by motivations and expectations (Aitken 2001). My motivation includes different aspects. Most importantly, I wanted to develop my understanding of women empowerment: how this theoretical concept works in real life, and how it affects the gendered relations in the family. Secondly, I wanted to learn about a different culture, and see how people, categorised as economically disadvantaged, deal with challenges in their everyday life. In addition I became motivated by the thought of

getting to know how a local NGO worked: in particular, how a women empowerment project is build up and how they behave towards beneficiaries and how the beneficiaries react to the support.

My expectations towards what to meet in the fieldwork were influenced by the literature read beforehand. I wanted to meet with the field open-minded, not letting biases control how I saw things. I tried to apply a dynamic attitude, emphasising the ability to adapt to different situations. But it turned out to be more challenging than expected. The creation of the guidelines for the FGD's (Appendices) were based on the theoretical background that was developed with the help of both African and western literature about women, gender and empowerment. During the subsequent preparations I discussed the guide with a university professor in Accra who was very critical of the approach. I was accused of "assuming and imposing western views on African realities. (…) How do you know that it is like this in the field?"

"The way the feedback was given hit me quiet hard, but it was very useful, because it underlined the importance of being conscious about my own perception and cultural background and how it could limit the study. It contributed to improve the discussion guide, because the questions were changed or formulated differently."

The position of the different actors in the research

The position of the researcher: I'm a female, Norwegian student. I'm young and unmarried, grown up on a small farm in a small coastal community. I'm familiar with the Ghanaian culture through an exchange semester in Accra, but the local customs and norms in Upper East Region were unknown. I'm brought up in a family with a holistic view of life where respect and tolerance towards others are key-values. Interest in other cultures has been encouraged and used as a source of inspiration.

The position of the participants: In the FGD a total of 25 people participated. The social status, sex, age, religious practice, and other aspects that define their social position, affect the positioning of the participants in the research. Of the 25, there were eight men and 17 women and they were engaged in subsistence agriculture. Their age ranged from young parents to grandparents. Most of them were Christians, but a few practiced Islam and some were traditionalists. Those that were Christians belonged to the Pentecostal Church, Assemblies of God, and many of them had important positions in their local church community. In their society many of the women defined themselves in relation to the occupation of their husband

and the rest of the family. All of them belonged to the Kusaasi-tribe, the major ethnic group of Bawku West District. They were farmers, where most of the agricultural production was for domestic consumption.

They warmly welcomed the researcher, and were curious about me and contributed willingly to the research. I believe it can be explained by the fact that they respect and believe in the work of CSRC, and that they were very eager to get to know the newcomer in their community. They expressed gratitude toward me for taking an interest in their situation and the knowledge transfer from CSRC made them confident about their ability to contribute to the discussion of theoretical concepts.

The position of the moderator: The moderator was a middle-aged, respected Ghanaian male. He was a teacher and closely connected to the chief palace in his community. He also represented his community in the District Assembly. He was non-religious, referring to himself as a freethinker. In the beginning he had some judgemental views about my position and the knowledge of the women, but throughout the research he changed his perception.

"I'm happy having the chance to work with you. I have learnt a lot by discussing the realities of your society and your understanding of things, but also by talking with the participants. I learnt about my own local surroundings and I'm impressed by the knowledge of the women in Nagbere."

He showed an open and respectful behaviour towards the participants, and the female participants seemed to speak openly despite the fact that a male was there. When discussing different aspects of empowerment in the control group, some of the participants reacted strongly towards the moderator; *"Why do you keep asking about this when you know we'll never be empowered like this."* This comment showed the closeness between the moderator and the participants, and the fact that it is not only positive. But the moderator managed to get an elaborative explanation about it, and because of the respect and understanding that existed between them they managed to re-establish the open and positive environment.

4.3 Qualitative methods

Through women empowerment, women in Bawku West District are supported to claim power in order to take control of their everyday life. This includes both changes on the individual and collective level and looking at the *process* of change as just as important as the output. I believe a feminist methodology has the right tools to understand these different mechanisms. But in

order to reveal those mechanisms, qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, were more appropriate to make use of in the field.

The qualitative interview

The qualitative interview has been used in this study to get an in-depth understanding about the concepts and perceptions when it comes to women empowerment in Bawku West District. An interview is a complex social interaction that brings forward people's experiences and thoughts about a specific topic (Kitchin and Tate 2000). In a qualitative interview the knowledge shared by the respondents is used to analyse their experience of everyday life (Kvale 1997, 42). The study looks at some personal issues like the level of conflict in the relationship between husband and wife in the family. Because of that, semi-structured interviews were used as a tool to give the participants enough influence and flexibility, but at the same time, help the researcher to get some control of the situation. The focus was on creating an environment as informal and relaxing as possible in order to get the participants to open up (Crang and Cook 2007).

Key-informant interview

The research was conducted in collaboration with the Ghanaian NGO, CSRC. It was therefore important to get an in-depth understanding of how the organisation works and how they understand and makes use of the concepts *women empowerment* and *gender*. Two key-informant interviews were conducted with the staff of CSRC; one with a fieldofficer responsible for Bawku West District and one with the Woman's Programme Coordinator that worked in the office of the organization. In addition, there were two key-informants among the participants in Nagbere. Key-informants are important individuals because they have great knowledge about the topic of interest. They differ from other informants because of their position in a culture or their relation with a specific community (Schensul, Schensul et al. 1999, 84). The key-informants in this research contributed, with their broad knowledge, to give the researcher a deeper understanding. Their communicating skills and ability to share knowledge helped the researcher to gain from their experience and position in the society. A key-informant is often closer to the researcher than other informants, and Cato Wadel argues that when personal relationships are established the level of trust is higher and the researcher will gain deeper insight (Wadel 1991).

Focus group discussion (FGD)

Focus group discussions (FGD's) have been the main method in this study, where discussions and dialogue between the participants has given the researcher insight and knowledge about the reality of everyday life in the community and their understanding of important concepts. It has also shed light on the influence of the work of the organisation. The FGD's were conducted with three different groups. One group of women and one group of men form the community of study, and one control group in a neighbouring community. The FGD's gave voice to a group of 8-10 participants that were mainly farmers and most of the participants from Nagbere had an important role in the local church community, where they were members of different organizational committees.

The groups had a dialogue about certain topics facilitated by a moderator, where participants are encouraged to engage in a conversation where meanings are constructed. The participants can't be seen as isolated individuals because understanding and knowledge comes as a result of interaction between the moderator and participants and between the participants (Silverman 2007). The use of dialogue supported the achievement of an intersubjective understanding where meanings and interpretations of the realities in the community are created, confirmed or disconfirmed (Dowling 2000, 30).

The participants in the FGD's knew each other, which made it easier to create a more comfortable environment that prompted the participants to talk about their perceptions, feelings and the spontaneous sharing of knowledge (Kvale, Brinkmann et al. 2009).

In order to succeed with an FGD a skilled moderator is needed in order to guide the participants through the discussions. A moderator should have the ability to establish consensus between participants by navigating around or avoiding conflicts (Krueger and Casey 2009). It was also important to establish a common understanding of the concepts *gender* and *empowerment*. The moderator was to take an active role in the study, therefore good knowledge about the research area and the theoretical concepts and good communication skills were required of the moderator. The search for the right person started when working with CEGENSA in Accra, but the search did not succeed until I came to the office of CSRC in Bolgatanga. The NGO suggested some candidates and I went to see the most qualified candidate and presented my plan for the research. He was originally a teacher, but at that moment he was doing some NGO-work. Through the NGO-work he had some experience in gender training, including the concepts *gender* and *empowerment*. He lived in Binaba, not far away from Nagbere and spoke

the local language kusal. Originally a woman was considered as the best choice of moderator since I believed it was easier for a female to adopt an understanding for the study, having the same sex as the researcher. And also because I wanted to prevent that the moderator limited the participation of the informants. But through the meeting with the candidate from Binaba, he gave the impression of having the right background and motivation for engaging in the research. He was also familiar with the work of the CSRC and well-known in the community of study.

The researcher was more in the background during the sessions, acting like an observer of the group members and the group dynamics. In this study, the role of the researcher was more limited during FGD's because of the language barrier.

Participatory observation

The third method used was to observe participants in order to get a better understanding of how men and women interact and relate to each other. One important dimension of the study was to look at women's status in Bawku West District, especially how it is manifested in the relationship between husband and wife. What people say and how they act can differ. Both groups in the FGD's agreed that in theory there is no difference in what a man and a woman can do when it comes to agricultural activities, but by observing the inhabitants it was clear that the work was organised in male and female activities.

There are three steps that are important to take in order to succeed with participatory observation (Crang and Cook 2007). The first is to get access to the participants and to get close enough to observe how the relationship between husband and wife is manifested. The second will be to actually do the observation, to live among the participants and to grasp how the topic of study is manifested in their way of life. The third step is when the researcher goes back home and tries to analyse what she/he saw.

The goal of using participatory observation in this study is to support the creation of an intersubjective understanding between the researcher and the participants in the research (ibid). The role of the researcher is therefore important. The meeting between the researcher and the participants in the field should not be overshadowed by the attitude and perspective of the researcher (Mikkelsen 2005). The researcher needs to apply different perspectives in trying to understand the realities observed. The fact that the behaviour of the participants during the observation is influenced by the presence of the researcher also needs to be included. The closer relationship you have with a person, the more the person acts naturally. But it is quite

difficult for an outsider to be looked upon as an insider when entering an unknown community. The researcher's identity, social position or belonging influence how the community members behave towards the person. But the line between insider and outsider is fluid and changeable (Mullings 1999).

4.4 Important mechanisms in the field

The local NGO as the gatekeeper

Since CSRC became a key-actor in making the fieldwork happen, it was important to get to know how they worked. Knowledge about the organisation was limited because it was very difficult to keep in touch with them from Norway. The first part of the fieldwork in Upper East Region in northern Ghana was spent in their office in Bolgatanga where the plan for the study and the requirements needed was presented. I got access to project rapports and participated in some workshops in the field in order to get to know how the local NGO work. The type of support the NGO provided helped to narrow down the study to focus on how women in Nagbere are supported to get access to agriculturally productive land. The framework of the questions became more focused and put in a local context. It also facilitated the choice of Nagbere as the community of study. Two of their field officers worked as the actual gatekeepers when they introduced me to the community. The NGO has a good reputation and are well-respected among the people in the community, because of their dedication to their work. The two local field officers were also well-known to the participants. Both were from the same district and had worked closely with Nagbere. Because of this, the community easily accepted the request of participating in the study. Prior to the community entry I had explained the details for the research to the field officers. The representatives of the community gave their consent and the date for the first session of the FGD was set. The visit was also the start of building rapport and trust between the researcher and the participants.

I wanted to make sure the influence of the gatekeeper was minimized, and it was underlined in conversations with the local NGO. CSRC was consulted in the difficult job of finding a good moderator for the FGD's, and it was agreed that using some of the staff was not a good choice, but I was still concerned about the influence of the NGO. This is taken from the field-diary 8. September 2012;

"The organisation has much influence when it comes to choosing the community I will work in and who will be the moderator for the FGD's. But at the same time I do not know anybody that can act as a moderator from this area, therefore the help from the NGO is very important."

After explaining the requirements, the organisation suggested some candidates, both for the community and the moderator. In the end the choice was mine to take. CSRC understood the importance of reducing their influence, especially since some of the topics of discussion aimed to look closer at their work. The field officers were therefore only present during the community entry and in the beginning of the introduction of the first FGD. They left when the actual session started.

Selection of participants for the FGD and Key-informants

When choosing qualitative methods, it is important to think about who should be asked to participate in the research. Three different groups of 8-10 participants for a total of five different sessions were asked to participate. The theoretical sampling was selective, because it was required that the participants in the sample had benefited from the support, given by CSRC, to women to access land. Consequences of women empowerment are highlighted from different perspectives by including participants that are experiencing it, because they will contribute with good knowledge and subjective realities (Crang and Cook 2007).

Since I had limited knowledge about the research area, I could not point out the participants. I applied a snowball sampling, giving the responsibility of selecting the participants to the contact persons that CSRC had in Nagbere. The same method was also used for the control group in Binaba. The moderator knew the area very well and picked out the required number of participants, aiming to represent the diversity in the community.

Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method where the researcher cannot control if the total population of interest is represented in the sample (Schutt 2006, 157). The contact persons were informed of the conditions for participating, therefore the sampling could not be done randomly. I made use of the social connections they had in order to get to know others in the community. There are both advantages and disadvantages with this. Participants that know each other well will find it easier to speak their mind, but on the other hand the sampling can become too selective where some are denied access. Because of that there is a chance that the diversity of the community will be invisible and the most vulnerable not given a voice. Although there is a chance the majority of the participants represent the most successful beneficiaries of the NGO-intervention, it was underlined the need for a diverse group of people and I feel this was respected in the sampling process.

The key-informants were also selectively sampled. The two representatives from the local NGO were chosen because of their closeness and experience with the field of study, and

because of the work they do in the organization. The two in Nagbere were chosen because of their position in the society, as head of the local church, and because of their ability to speak English.

Preparations for FGD

When the choice of moderator was done, he was given a detailed plan of the study, which helped him to develop an understanding of the research. The expectations and the role of a moderator were explained in detail in order for him to understand and perform his role well. The discussion guide was also presented to him (Appendices).

The moderator was asked to look through the discussion guide and a meeting was set for the research team to sit down and discuss the topics in order to create an understanding of the focus of the study, and if different aspects of it were understood in the local language. It was also made clear that the moderator's role was to facilitate the discussion and steer it through each topic. The researcher was to act as the assistant, recording the FGD's with a voice recorder and observe the participants in the discussions and take notes of their behaviour. Since the language was unknown to the assistant, no interruptions were to be made unless the moderator needed to clarify some issues.

Preparing for participatory observation

During the community entry a family in Nagbere was asked if they could accommodate me in order to facilitate the participatory observation. The family gave their consent, which helped me to fulfil the two first steps on the three-staged process of participatory observation; access to participants and to do the actual observing (Crang and Cook 2007). One important aspect of the observation was to try to see the realities from the perspective of the participants. When I arrived in Upper East Region I started to learn some basic phrases in the local language kusal. That made it possible to take initiatives to connect with the participants. Throughout the fieldwork I also stayed with two other host families, which gave me knowledge about the local context.

The process of building rapport and trust

Since learning the local language was an important step for the researcher to establish a relation to the participants, it was also a good tool to start the process of building rapport and trust (Chambers 1997). It was built gradually and became crucial for the sharing of reasonable knowledge in the FGD (Krueger and Casey 2009). My approach is inspired by Robert Chambers and underlines that behaviour and attitudes of development actors affect knowledge

production. When meeting people in the field, the researcher needs to be critical about its own appearance. A dominant and overriding appearance will limit the process of knowledge sharing (Chambers 1997; Chambers 2005; Chambers 2012).

In a research where methods are chosen to facilitate a creation of an intersubjective knowledge, the participants should be encouraged to feel free to speak their mind and share reasonable knowledge. Trust is built gradually; there is a need to take one step at a time in order to gain rapport (Chambers 2005, 163). While waiting for the community entry to start, the NGO-workers and I met with some of the community members. The fundament for an open environment was built through some informal small talk facilitated by the fieldworkers. By walking around with some of the community members without the CSRS-staff, I greeted more community members, established a relation with the participants and was introduced to some of their daily activities.

I tried to use humour as a tool to create an open environment. Through acting as open and relaxed as possible in the new situation I found myself in, I hoped that by smiling and expressing a positive attitude would reflect my interest in their everyday life and their explanations. And I felt I succeeded doing this, because the participants eagerly engaged in conversations with me and answered my behaviour by showing an interest in me and having a positive body language. I was carful about putting my own ideas forward in order for the participants to gain confidence and feel free to express their own realities (ibid).

4.5 The methods in practice

In this section I want to look closer at the methods applied. It will include the preparations that had to be done, and an outline of how they worked in the field, and the strengths and weaknesses of them. For all the methods applied the participant's right to confidentiality was underlined. The conditions for participation were presented and they were asked to give their consent. The need of using a voice recorder was explained and their permission asked for.

The Key-informant interview in practice

During the fieldwork I had two different approaches to the key-informant interview. With the two NGO-workers I had a structured, formal interview session, but with the two key-informants in Nagbere I chose to take an informal approach. This is due to the different setting I was in and the different nature of the inquiries I had.

The key-informants that represented CSRC, were asked to share in-depth knowledge about the work of the organisation. In order to obtain that information I outlined a semi- structured interview-guide (Appendix 4) with questions that sought to address the topic of interest, but at the same time give the informant some influence and flexibility (Crang and Cook 2007). Since it addressed very specific topics, the guide worked as a checklist for the topics I wanted to include.

I had to get to know the staff of the NGO in order to make sure that I chose the right persons. Although I had many informal discussions with the key-informants, the formal, recorded interviews were done towards the end of my time with the NGO when I knew who had the competence I was looking for. During the actual interview, I asked the participants to formally introduce themselves and their position in the NGO. I gave them space to come forward with their opinion, but at the same time was ready to follow up interesting aspects. Sometimes I found myself interrupting the answers, but I did not want to limit the participants, therefore I became more conscious about my behaviour. Although the interview focused on many formal questions about the structure of the NGO, there were also some questions where I wanted the participants to reflect on their own position.

The interviews with the key-informants in Nagbere were of a different kind. They were conducted when I did the participatory observation. To succeed with the observation I had put emphasis on creating a relaxed atmosphere. To ensure this I chose to take an informal approach to the key-informant interviews. I did not use the voice recorder, but rather wrote down what I remembered from the conversation straight afterwards or at the end of the day. The FGD's in Nagbere had highlighted some aspects that I wanted to take a closer look at, and these topics became the theme of the informal conversations of the key-informants. The conversations were repeated, also including important aspects that were reviled during the participatory observation.

Critical review of key-informant interview as a method

My experience with the key-informant interviews is that it gives the researcher deeper insight. The informants are chosen because they have the knowledge that can bring the understanding of the researcher to a higher level. I made use of two different approaches to the method, one formal and one informal and I felt both of them fulfilled their purpose.

The most challenging aspect of using key-informant interviews is when you speak with somebody because of who they represent. The key-informants from CSRC spoke on behalf of

the organization. The interview touched upon their individual understanding of different aspects, but it is important to remember that, they can ignore personal opinions, according to who they represent (Thagaard 2003, 46). The key-informants that represented CSRC, did not want to put the organization in a bad light. Nor was that the wish of the participants in Nagbere, since they benefited from their work.

The FGD's in practice

Before having the first FGD, the research team (researcher + moderator) agreed to arrive early to be there before the participants. The two fieldworkers from CSRC came along to facilitate a formal introduction. The location for the FGD's was close to the community church where chairs were provided for each participant. The chairs were put out creating a circle where each person could see the others and a table for the recorder was set up in the middle. One of the fieldworkers gave a brief explanation of the purpose of the session. Each participant was asked to introduce themselves buy their name and responsibility in the community. I presented myself and welcomed them using the kusal I had learned. The participants were very happy about this, and it eased the environment. The two field officers left and the facilitator took over and explained more in detail what was expected of the participants, what type of information was needed and how it would be used.

In the beginning, some of the participants were shy and did not participate much in the discussions. But when they got more familiar with the research team, they answered more freely. This observation made the research team put more emphasis on encouraging everyone to participate. They were told that every person's opinion was important and during the sessions some participants were pointed out to speak to answer. There were some participants in the group that dominated. Because of their position in the society or their knowledge about a certain topic, they spoke more freely. There was a better flow in the discussions during the next session. The facilitator was more familiar with the capabilities and knowledge of the group and also with the method.

"The method functions very well; it brings forward discussions. The participants are able to talk about challenging topics. They respect each other by raising their hand and everybody contributes." 22/9-2012

After each session, the research team sat down together to go through what was recorded. The voice recorder was used and the discussions translated. This was necessary because I did not understand what they were saying in the local language. By going through the data when it was

fresh in our minds, the research team had the possibility to follow up interesting aspects of the discussions in the next session. The discussion guide (Appendices) was moderated according to the information given. The research team also discussed their own role in order to improve the method and to make sure there were no misunderstandings between the researcher and the moderator. Emphasis was put on how the moderator could encourage more discussions by showing respect for all types of answers. On the other hand time was limited, so the discussions needed to concentrate on the topics that were important for the study.

Before the FGD's the research team was concerned that it would be difficult for the participants to discuss the theoretical concepts. But both of us were impressed by the knowledge they had.

"I'm impressed by their level of knowledge. They navigated through the concepts more easily than expected." (Field diary: 18/9-12)

It became clear that the participants were familiar with working in groups, because they handled the method very well and respected each other's opinions and signaled by raising their hand when they wanted to speak. It was a bit challenging being the observer, because I did not have the competence to understand what was said during the FGD's.

"I tried to show interest and respect for the people speaking by using a positive body language, smiling and nodding when they spoke. But it was challenging to keep the positive attitude and concentrating throughout the whole session, when I could not follow what they were saying." *(Field diary; 24/9)*

The research team agreed that if the participants were stuck on a question and the moderator was not able to get the discussions back on track; the observer could be asked if there was an easier way to ask the question, in order to get the participants going.

Critical review of FGD as a method

By using FGD's some of the theory behind it has been confirmed. It is a good tool to create an environment where people can talk about their perceptions and feelings, and where sharing of knowledge happens spontaneously. Some of the theoretical concepts that the participants were asked to discuss were challenging, but by building on the knowledge they had and the contribution of others, the participants managed to develop an understanding. Some were also able to reflect further by linking their everyday experiences to the understanding of the concepts. Through the dialogue in the group and with the moderator, understandings were created, confirmed and disconfirmed (Dowling 2000). The role of the moderator is very

important, because he is the one facilitating this dialogue. The result of the FGD is therefore influenced by the skills of the moderator. The closeness of the moderator with the participants both in Nagbere and Binaba, was an advantage because he had good knowledge about their everyday realities.

The moderator should act as neutral as possible and not affect the answers of the participants too much, but since the researcher could not understand what were said during the sessions, it was difficult to control this.

"It is a challenge to control the influence of the moderator. In our first meeting he said; "The participants will say that now they discuss with the husband, and that they have access to land. The last 20 years they have been empowered. Americans think Africans mistreat their women." He had very particular expectation of my research. I had a talk to him where I drew his attention to the study and explained very clearly my motivation and interest in order to make him understand my point of view and avoid him from enforcing his views during the fieldwork."

The language barrier also underlined the fact that this method gives the researcher less control (Kvale, Brinkmann et al. 2009). After transcribing and analysing the material I realised that individual participants could have been given more opportunity to elaborate on their different everyday realities, because some of the diversity could have been lost during translation.

By observing the groups it became clear that group dynamics is an important aspect of FGD that need to be taken into consideration. Because of their position, knowledge and responsibilities in the community some participants dominated in the discussions. The behaviour of group members is shaped by interpersonal dynamics (Sprague 2005). Diversity of abilities and skills also plays a role when it comes to group dynamics (Johnson and Johnson 2006). CSRC had given leadership training to a selected number of community members and I noticed there existed a diversity of knowledge in some of the FGD. I tried to make sure leadership and participation was distributed among all members, through the structure of the questions and underlining the importance of every contribution. But in the beginning it was difficult for some participants to set aside already established group structures.

Another challenge with the FGD's is that in the process of finding a common consensus on certain topics some opinions can be hidden. These observations underline that FGD has

limitations and it is therefore important to use other methods to support the study. Participatory observation was applied in order to reduce these limitations.

Participatory observation in practice

The access to do participatory observation was achieved through some of the participants in the FGD. An English-speaking family in Nagbere agreed to host me for a week. During this week I tried to take part in the family's daily activities. Since the goal of the participatory observation was to create an intersubjective understanding between the researcher and the participants some time was used to establish rapport and trust.

"The first day of participatory observation went well. I felt it was important for me to try to relax as much as possible in order for the family to also feel relaxed about me. They had a lot of questions about me and where I'm from. I felt it was a nice experience to explain my background to them, since it helped establish an environment where knowledge was shared and understandings developed."

The family took me around in the village to meet with the chief, other community members and see their farms. Through these meetings I became familiar with their life as farmers and the agricultural production in the community. I also visited most of the people that participated in the FGD's. With the knowledge of kusal that I had developed, I was able to have basic small talk with people, but the host family facilitated most of the communication with the other community members. The language barrier therefore limited the dialogue and desire to create an intersubjective understanding with the participants, because I could not interact deeply with the majority of them. When observing and interacting with the community members, I tried to be conscious about my perspective. In order to grasp how the situation of women and the relationship between husband and wife are manifested in their way of life, it was important to be open-minded and apply different perspectives. A good tool was to make use of different questions like why and how. If not I felt it was easy to make judgements and compare with what I'm used to from home. But by ignoring the local context the research will become limited.

Another limitation of participatory observation is that the presence of the researcher might result in the participants acting differently from what they usually do. But through the sharing of knowledge, parallels were drawn between the researcher and the participants. I come from a small farm in Norway, where we have a small agricultural production. I could therefore relate to the participants in some aspects, which reduced the difference in identity and social position.

"I do not feel like an insider, but my small knowledge of kusal and the fact that I have grown up on a small, Norwegian farm gives me a stronger connection with the participants".

Despite the limitations, I felt that doing participatory observation gave a good contribution to the FGD's. It confirmed aspects brought up in the FGD's, but questioned other. New dimensions also came to the surface.

4.6 Handling the information

When analysing data in qualitative research the researcher needs to work systematically, because it is a crucial part of the research process. It will determine the outcome of the research. By consequence the handling of the information needs to be "soundly based and thorough", handled carefully and with attention to details. If not it is not worth the effort (Silverman 2007, 61).

Transcribing and coding

The FGD's were transcribed straight after each session. The moderator translated, and the answers from the participants were written down. The moderator gave additional explanations where I did not understand the local context. In addition I used the knowledge of my host in Zebilla to get a deeper insight into the cultural practices. The information was then typed and stored on my personal computer, where especially important statements were marked in red.

The connection between the research questions and different dimensions of the discussion guide helped to organise the data. In the process of analysis, the data is chopped up, ordered, contextualized and assembled (Crang and Cook 2007, 133).

When the raw material was coded, the research questions acted as the frame of the process. I looked through the material searching for statements that fitted under the four different dimensions included in the analytical framework: institutional practices, symbolic representations, gender relations and women and men as agents for change. When coding, attention was also drawn to identifying the differences in answers given by men and women. The statements were marked with the letters A, B and C according to which of the three groups it came from. A refers to the women's group, B the men's group and C the control group in Binaba. 1 and 2 reflect the number of sessions. Another dimension in the coding process was to look at the change in time, before and after the intervention of CSRC. The local NGO had worked in Nagbere for six years, which is used to define before and after. The notes in the field diary were also used to support the material. After an open coding where an overview over

elements, categories and concepts were found, selective coding was applied where the information was connected to the research questions (Silverman 2006, 96). Highlighting the understanding of the participants was emphasised during the coding process, because of the focus on creating an intersubjective understanding.

Another challenge when analysing, is to avoid generalisation. Information found in Bawku West District in Ghana cannot be used to generalise for the realities in the rest of Ghana and West Africa (Thagaard 2003). Information that did not support the discussion of the research problem was left out. In this process there is a chance that some of the information that the participants included were not given the same attention.

When looking through the raw material the first time in the field, I realized that much of the information concerned the work of the local NGO on supporting women's access to agricultural productive land. It included strengths and limitations of the support, highlighted by the participants. I decided that this information would be useful for CSRC, so I gave a presentation of the preliminary findings to them. The presentation became the first analysis of the complete raw material, and became very useful because the researcher's ability to grasp the realities in the field were tested. It also strengthened the results by adding other dimensions and in-depth explanations of different phenomenon.

4.7 Ethics of the methods

During the research I tried to find the right balance between focusing on getting good information, and respecting the participants and their private sphere. Through the FGD's and participation observation I engaged and interfered in the life of others. By asking about the relationship between husband and wife inside the family, I was aware that I went into sensitive and private topics. I wanted to avoid exposing the participants to harm by respecting their rights to withdrawal, anonymity and confidentiality. The first step that was taken was to give the participants good information about what the research included, the required time, how the information will be used and expectations towards the participants. It is only then informed consent can be reached (Dowling 2000). When asking about a sensitive topic, like the level of conflict between husband and wife, no answer would be forced out of the participants. But answers were warmly welcomed. During the FGD's the participants did not seem to have reservations about speaking about such topics, but information given was handled with care.

Another ethical challenge with the research relates to the fact that it is done in a developing country, in a part of the country where the people are considered to have limited access to

economic resources. The research occupied people's time during the farming season. The participants were farmers that produced their own food and were dependent on doing a good job during the farming season in order to have enough food throughout the dry period. The research was done in September/October, in a period when the farmers were waiting for the crop to be ready for harvest. Consequently they were less busy, but there were still important tasks to be done. In order to show my gratitude for allowing me to make use of their time, I arranged a goodbye meal after the community stay in Nagbere. A goat, bought on the local marked, was roasted and was served together with rice and stew. The people participating in the control group were given a fixed amount of money each to buy a snack of their choice.

CSRC had a practice about not giving the participants gifts. They underlined that the motivation of the participants should be to learn from the support given, not because they got gifts. This was taken into consideration when deciding how to show my appreciation to the participants. But since my work was special and on the side of what CSRC does, I wanted do something extra.

There are three other challenges in doing research among economically disadvantaged people (Narayan-Parker 2000). Participants might expect that their life will improve straight away when engaging in the research. Through the work of CSRC, the participants from Nagbere were used to the fact that the outcome of the support depends on the engagement and work of the participants, because they have experienced themselves that their life has improved step by step. Because of this, I believe their expectations were not unrealistically high. The two other challenges are how to present the findings of a research and how to follow up the results (ibid). The research will result in a document in English that will be given to the local NGO. But most of the people in the rural communities in Bawku West District do not read English, but I hope that the presentation I gave to CSRC will benefit the participants. The presentation focused on making CSRC aware of what the participants saw as strengths and limitations of the support given.

This information could change the way CSRC worked with the community and I became conscious of the power I possess as a researcher. It was important to make sure that the participants benefited from this. I was therefore happy when I learnt that CSRC had, because of the control group interview, started to facilitate the community entry, so that also Binaba could be included as one of their beneficiaries.

4.8 Reflexivity

Intersubjective knowledge production has been highlighted as an important concept in this research. Through dialogue I have been interacting with the participants about women's situation when it comes to access to land, and the effect this has on gender relations. In this interaction, participants and the research team have contributed with their own subjectivity. In order to answer the research questions, the researcher has to interpret answers and behaviours given by the participants. In this process of interpreting, my subjective understanding will influence the knowledge production, but it is not enough to examine the different identities of the participants (Nagar 2002). To make use of critical reflexivity will be crucial in order to present a reliable picture of the realities of the participants. Critical reflexivity is "a process of constant, self-conscious scrutiny of the self as a researcher and the research process." (Dowling 2000, 28).

The field diary became a good tool in order to follow up the process of evaluating my own role and behaviours as a researcher.

"I think the key to being a good researcher is to find the right balance between being professionally dedicated in the preparation and fulfilment of the research methods, and being aware of your personal emotions and thoughts. By living in Nagbere and taking part in the daily activities of the community, I learned that Christianity is an important part of their life. I'm not religious, but I tried not to promote this view. By observing different church services I was able to develop my understanding of the role of the church and saw behaviours and practices that added new dimensions to the study. But the intensity of the prayers and the services was strange to me, even scary. This was because of my different cultural background, and I had to work with myself in order to relax and avoid being too frightened. Realizing this made me able to apply reflexivity when questioning the religious practice. I believe that personal experiences, together with theoretical knowledge will help bring my understanding to a higher level."

These aspects underline that although the methods promoted collaboration between the participants and the research team, it is the researcher who presents the final findings of the research. The result will be biased by how I interpret conversations and observations. It is difficult to guarantee that others, repeating the same research will give the same result. An answer varies in relation to who asks and who gives the answers, and I learnt that FGD and participatory observation do not necessarily give precise answers. But the result has to reflect

and be genuinely based in the realities I met in the field. The researcher needs to combine working systematically and building up trust and rapport with the participants in order to present a trustworthy research. I would argue that the researcher's experiences are a natural part of the research, since the research topic evolves from a personal subjective interest inspired by literature.

To conclude this chapter, the above discussions shows that the synthesis of my experiences in the field and the discussions of the participants is the basis for the knowledge production in this study and the result of this synthesis will be presented in the next chapters. Citing discussions among the participants, interpreting these discussions and linking them to my theoretical approach leads to the analytical discussion and ends in a concluding discussion of the findings of this research.

5. The impact of women empowerment in Bawku West District

This chapter will assess the impact of the intervention of CSRC and their support through the Women's Rights to Land Project. It will look at the way the local NGO empowers women to claim their rights to access and own land and how it affects other spheres of life. The chapter builds on the information from four Key-informants (the Women's Programme Coordinator, the field officer and Key-informant 3 and 4), the three focus group discussions (A, B and C), and participatory observation. The two first Key-informants mentioned above work in CSRC and 3 and 4 are inhabitants of Nagbere. Group A refers to the female FGD, group B the male FGD and group C is the group from Binaba. Throughout the chapter I examine similarities and differences between the answers given in the FGD's. The key-informant interviews gave deeper insight into the picture provided by the FGD's and the participatory observation shed light on the relation between changes on the level of idea and the level of behaviour. Women empowerment and its impact on the ability to improve women's room to manoeuvre are characterized by both change and continuity (Stølen and Vaa 1991).

5.1 How does CSRC give support?

The work on assuring women's access to land in Bawku West District started in 2006, and the same year CSRC introduced the project in Nagbere. It is a component of the Women's Rights and Domestic Violence Campaign that was established as a result of cooperation between CSRC and the UK-based rights organisation African Initiatives. African Initiatives supports CSRC with funding, skills and knowledge transfer, project development and assessment and they are able to channel funding from UKaid and the British Department for International Development (DFID) to projects in northern Ghana. CSRC does not transfer cash to communities, but they invite other organizations to engage with the same communities to give financial support. In 2011 a NGO called Norfing started to give economic support as cash-loans to Nagbere.

The Women's Rights to Land Project is based on sensitizing, knowledge transfer and capacity-building, and through other type of projects CSRC provides technical training in sustainable cultivation and workshops on reproductive health. When it comes to sustainable agricultural production the communities involved are given seed- and livestock-loans and support to create saving schemes and other financial advices. The reproductive health project gives education on health issues and sexuality. The strength of the organisation is according to the Women's Programme Coordinator, the human resources and the ability to move around and be present in the communities.
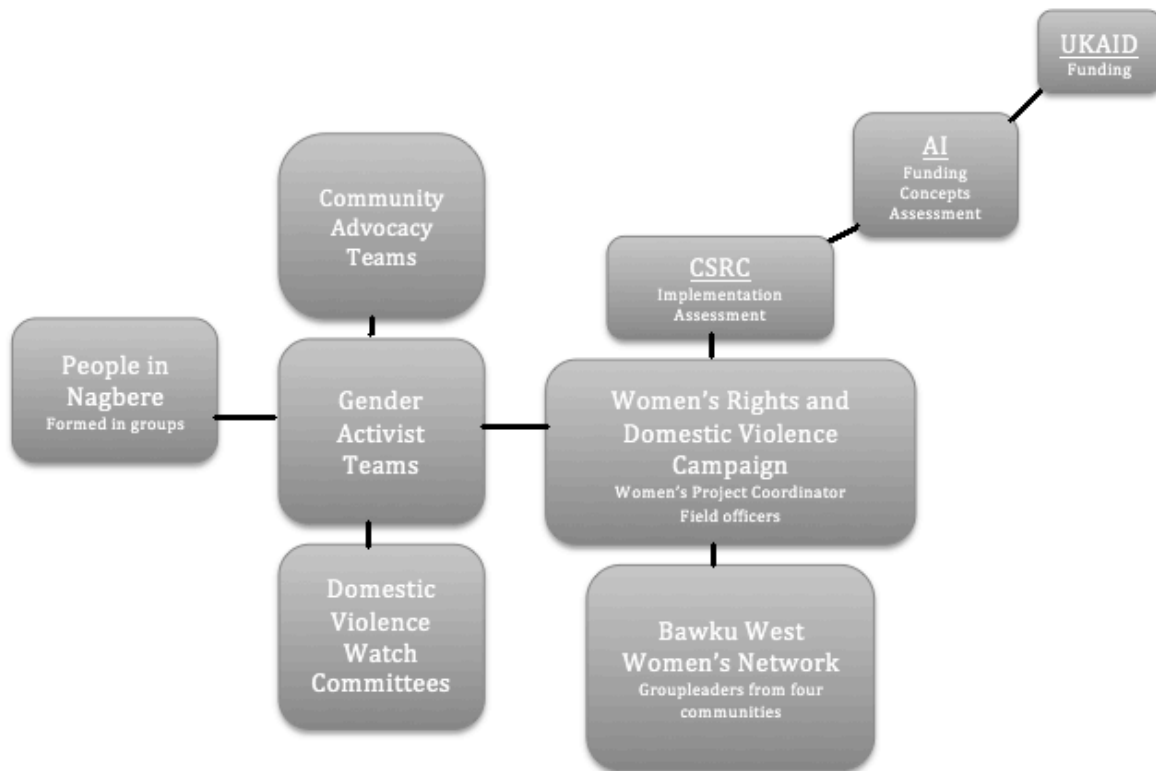
Figure 3 Illustration of the structure of CSRC (CSRC 2009).

When engaging with a community, CSRC involves traditional authorities (chiefs and tindanas), church-leaders, District Assembly members and other community opinion leaders. At the local level men and women are members of target groups, which have different types of responsibility. In each community there are smaller groups made up of the inhabitants of the community that receive training from the specific target groups. The Domestic Violence Watch Committees and the Community Advocacy Teams are examples of such groups. The first aims to reduce domestic violence and the second advocates for sustainable livelihoods and self-reliance within the local community and targets the District Assembly to create policy that will ensure this. In addition there are Gender Activist Teams that work on reducing the power imbalance between men and women. The Gender Activist Teams are composed of 4-6 persons from each community that are selected by the community itself. CSRC requires that women hold more than half of these positions. In each of these groups a leader is selected to represent the group and the community in the Bawku West Women's Network that consists of representatives from four communities in Bawku West District. The group leaders receive additional training, which she/he is obliged to transfer to the community. The group structure is used by different projects, and the Women's Programme Coordinator explained that it is a structure that is sustainable in the communities. The funding from African Initiatives for the Women's Right and Domestic

Violence Campaign stopped in 2010, but in Nagbere the groups are still active and the campaign is still going on. The field officer explained this as a result of the dedication and engagement of community volunteers and their ability to share knowledge with the rest of the community.

Another condition is that these groups are required to hold a number of meetings monthly, at least once a month in the farming season and twice a month in the dry season. Commitment to these meetings is a condition CSRC places on individuals and groups in order to benefit from the support provided. The beneficiaries in Nagbere explained that the women's right to access land campaign supports the capacity-building of women to be less dependent on men, and helps them to identify their own opportunities, challenges and rights. The participants identified education, as an important contribution of CSRC, in order to achieve peaceful co-existence with neighbours and family-members. "The education helps the women and men to work together and we have learnt that it is good to give the women land, and free will to operate (B1).

When entering Nagbere, the Women's Programme Coordinator explained that CSRC presented their project-plans and said; "this is what we have to offer, are you with us?" The female participants said they took the decision to participate on their own, based on the presentation that CSRC gave.

"The women did not ask their husband for permission, but we supported it because of the benefit that would come out of it." (B1),
"We already had some ideas on how to support each other and the presentation fitted with those". (A1)

5.2 How is empowerment understood?

CSRC has obtained knowledge about empowerment through African Initiatives. The Women's Programme Coordinator understands empowerment as a process of enabling people to do things on their own. The field officers make use of the Kusasis word *Nyare* when discussing empowerment with communities that belong to the Kusasi ethnic group. The word was well-known and used by the participants in Nagbere, but the control group in Binaba did not have the same knowledge because empowerment became introduced through the intervention of CSRC. During the presentation to CSRC of my preliminary findings of the research, some of the staff brought my attention to the fact that *Nyare* refers more to ownership than capacity, and it was suggested that *Youko* is a better word to describe what a person is capable of doing and therefore more in line with the understanding CSRC has of empowerment. But although they referred to Nyare many of the participants I interacted with did not have a technocratic approach to

empowerment; rather they included more than ownership. Empowerment denotes people's ability to influence and make decisions in order to take control and improve their life. This approach can be seen in Amartya Sen's work on entitlements and the emphasis on individual's capacity to command resources (Sen 1997), and also in Naila Kabeer's interpretation of empowerment as the capacity to exercise strategic control and renegotiate relationships with others. Kabeer looks at change in relation to women's sense of self-worth and social identity (Kabeer 2008b, 27). Subjectivity and individual's capacity to negotiate for power are central to the empowering process.

Empowerment as capacity-building and dynamic. The participants identified training in order to do things they previously could not do as an important dimension of empowerment. It relates to *power within* and individual awareness (Rowland 1997). The knowledge that the beneficiaries have gained in the interaction with CSRC has improved their capacity to communicate and to move freely; furthermore, it makes it possible for women to take part in decision-making within the family and in the wider society. Some of the participants explained that empowerment is about casting the vote where you want to and being able to speak in public.

"Empowerment is the ability to advise your husband about what type of crop to cultivate and when it is time to change it. Before, women were not supposed to take part in decision-making. Empowerment is there for building up the ability to make choices." (A1)
"My wife is empowered because the women are educated on certain things." (B1)
"We have been educated on the Human Rights, so we know that the husbands can be held responsible and punished for maltreatment." (A1).

The participants argued that with more knowledge their social outlook would change, because it made it easier to make choices that could bring about change. With expanded *power to* (ibid) improve their social status FGD A referred to a number of aspects; their contribution to increasing the family income, and how this lead to more well-being, their ability to speak and discuss, but also their ability to give more support to their children. With increased income they could seek medical advice and pay children's school fees. In Ghana social status is embedded in ownership of land, but women`s status is also related to the ability to have children (Akumatey amd Darkwah 2009, 39). Motherhood is a position of power in an African context and an important aspect of women's self-identity (Oyewumi 2000, 1094).

The participants agreed that empowerment is an on-going, dynamic process. "Empowerment has no end because it changes according to needs and because the society is dynamic" (A1).

Empowerment is a pathway where power has to constantly be negotiated in order to reach personal and collective goals (Cornwall and Edwards 2010).

But during further discussions some participants talked about a personal goal for empowerment, what empowerment can bring in the future. "The final outcome of empowerment for a woman is to achieve all the things a man can do." (A1). Several of the women discussed empowerment by comparing themselves with the man and the wish of becoming like a man. "Empowerment is to play the role of a landlord: to assure security of the family and provide food when he is not around." Empowerment is therefore both a process and an outcome, where the outcome affects the dynamic process (Parpart, Rai et al. 2002).

Empowerment as power to control. Empowerment was also discussed in terms of control over property and financial resources in order to support family members. Some participants highlighted this as the most important aspect of empowerment. "You become rich as a result of empowerment and then you can support your family and neighbours." (B1)

The female participants explained that with empowerment, women in the community could control their own property and that such a control gives women more room to manoeuver within the compound. Women actively deal with structures of constraint embedded in patriarchy (Kandiyoti 1988, Long 2001) and for some of the female participants ownership of land allowed them to negotiate the idea that women have to stay in the compound or cannot take part in a farming competition.

When ranking the different power dimensions embedded in empowerment the *power over* dimension was described as the most important aspect of empowerment in the FGD with the men. "It is because when you are able to take control, you will realize the rest." (B1).

The women in Nagbere found it difficult to rank the dimensions of power, because they said that all were important aspects, but during the discussions they put more emphasis on empowerment as the *power to* bring about change in social outlook and by expanding their knowledge. "The support given by CSRC has been helpful to raise our social status and improved our ability to make decisions on our own, and to support our children to go to school." (A1)

The male participants saw the ability to bring about change as a result of exercising the other power dimensions. "When you take control you are strengthened from inside, and you are able to better cooperate with community members when you are strengthened from inside. Then it now brings about change that will affect everybody in the community." (B1)

This can also reflect the understanding of the word *Nyare* as a narrow translation of empowerment compared to how it is actually used and expressed by Key-informant 2 and the majority of the participants.

The women in Binaba easily identified the most important dimension of empowerment; it was the power to bring about change in order to move freely outside the compound and take part in decision-making. They were not satisfied with the culture of patriarchy that existed in their community. "Cultural practices have to change. If I have power I would have wished to change them. Men and women should split the wealth, but the way it is now, everything is for the men." (C)

In relation to Nagbere the women in Binaba were not confident about openly negotiating patriarchy, but they explained that they made use of social networks to seek support. They found strategies to manoeuver within the realities of patriarchy, either with the support of friends and family members or an organization of women in the church called the Christian Mothers.

Yes, I feel empowered! Group A and B from Nagbere felt they were empowered, because the training they had been given had strengthened their ability to cooperate with their husband or wife/wives. The intervention of CSRC had therefore encouraged *power with* (Rowland 1997); "Men and women now work together." (B1)

The participants explained that they had learnt to take decisions together; "I can take part in decision-making, because my husband consults me and gives me the opportunity to give advice." (A1). "Before, decision-making was controlled by the man. Women had no authority. She was not supposed to take part in anything, and she was not allowed to speak in public. But with education the men consult the women in decision-making on what to plant and where to plant it." (B1)

They discussed mostly cooperation within the family, between husband and wife, but the women also explained that they have learnt how to organize themselves in support groups that improve the living conditions for others in the community. "We can use our own skills and organize so that we can help each other to weed. This is helpful because we do not expect our husbands to weed." (A1).

The ownership of livestock and land influences the social and economic status in Bawku West District and the ability to negotiate for change when it comes to gender specific practises. Key-informant 1 explained that now women are allowed to keep livestock, which previously was a

taboo. He explained that even though a woman had some livestock she could not come out openly and announce; "this is my livestock and I want to sell it to raise our income." This practice has now changed and it was part of the reason the women felt empowered. "We are now able to negotiate for power, because we are able to discuss what a man and a woman can own when it comes to livestock and land" (A1).

In both of the FGD's in Nagbere the participants highlighted that they are able to negotiate for political power, because they have had training on how to be a leader and to speak in public; "You need to show you are not lying, that you speak the truth and are able to see people's issues and support them. Then people will give faith in you as a leader." (B1)

To sum up this section, empowerment is understood as an on-going dynamic process. The participants explained it as capacity-building that improves their knowledge and abilities. Examples of this are the ability to speak freely and take part in discussions and decision-making when it comes to the agricultural activities. They focused on the individual capacity-building, but also acknowledged that coming together and working collectively improves their everyday life. There were some differences within the groups when defining empowerment in terms of the different dimensions of power. The men had a more narrow view of empowerment by underlining that it is the ability to take control that is the trigging factor of empowerment and which brings along the other power dimensions. Although they also touched upon different dimensions of empowerment, they talked more about control over economic resources as compared to the women's FGD. The women were highlighting the power to bring about change through the possibility to take part in decision-making. The FGD in Binaba identified many obstacles to empowerment in their society and were mostly concerned about bringing about change in cultural practices so that women could exercise their rights.

5.3 How is the emphasis on empowerment of women influencing their room to manoeuver within the family?

As I have presented in chapter two, there exists a gendered division of labour in Bawku West District. An important part of creating change is to remove gender-specific constraints that limit people's ability to deal with challenges and opportunities. I will therefore start this section by looking at the understanding of gender among the participants. In the FGD's the participants described gender as a group of people where women and men are put together. Group A and group B argued that there was no difference between what a man and a woman can do. "The only difference is that men has beard." (A1). When looking specifically at gender roles in the

agricultural production group A and B explained that a woman could do what the men could do. "If a woman wants to, she can buy zinc and build or repair the roof. The women have broken the yoke." (B1)

The women in Binaba said that in theory women could do what men can do, but they described that in practice their community was divided in gender specific roles and activities. They identified sawing, planting and weeding as the responsibility of the women at the farm and in addition, domestic work and food-preparation were their domains.

During participatory observation in Nagbere I observed that the division of labour has been challenged. Some participants explained that according to traditional norms, domestic work is the domain of women, and men were not allowed to cook. I saw boys and men setting the fire and helping out with the preparation of food. But despite additional observations where I saw men cooking and doing laundry, the participants explained in the FGD that this is not entirely accepted in their society. "There was a man that used to help his wife in domestic work, but he was exceptional. Yes, he was a woman-man…. (laughter)." (A2)

This shows that some gender-specific roles change, but some continue to halter the opportunities of both women and men. When identifying obstacles to empowerment in Nagbere, the Women's Programme Coordinator explained that customary discriminatory practices are embedded in the everyday life in a way that takes time to transform. There is a tension between continuity and change, where gendered *behaviour* does not influence the level of *ideas* about maleness and femaleness and vice versa (Stølen 1991).

In Binaba, a range of cultural norms and taboos limits women's abilty to deal with opportunities and challenges. Women are not supposed to take part in decision-making or go to social gatherings. They should stay inside the compound. The women expressed frustration about the situation they found themselves in. They felt they had too many responsibilities and obligations, and it was difficult to find a way to deal with their challenges, because their capacity to speak up and to ask for support from their husband was limited. They did not feel entitled to question the behaviour of men. "As a woman, I can't stand in front of the man and address him and ask for my rights. I can't. We are only part and parcel of the household; we are just here." (C). This underlines that personal attributes and women's sense of self-worth and social identity can have limitations on women's agency (Kabeer 2008b) and ability to negotiate (Agarwal 1997) and relates to the subjective dimension of the gender lens (Davids and Driel 2005).

In Nagbere, women's capacity-building has influenced their ability to deal with challenges and opportunities they face in their everyday life. Women are able to manoeuver in terms of taking individual decisions. By challenging constraints when it comes to access and ownership of land, women can control some of the money that comes from their agricultural production. The group A saw this as a very positive sign because they were able to give more support to their children, which is important for their status (Arnfred 2004, 24). If the children were sick, the women now had some money to send them to the hospital. They could also contribute to paying the school fees. By being able to own land and control the output from it, the women felt that their social status had changed. "Now I feel entitled. I can leave the compound and come back at any time. That is the reason why I could be here today" (A1).

The women in the community have managed to negotiate and challenge male authority, by standing up for their own rights and questioning the authority exercised over them. One example is gaining access to enter the harvest band. The food-crop they produce to consume during the dry season is stored in harvest-bands. There existed a taboo among the Kusasi ethnic group saying that if you let women enter the harvest band the man in the family would die because of a bad spirit. It meant that the women relied on their husband to take out what they needed to prepare food. Both the women and men in the FGD A and B said that today the taboo is broken down and women as well as men can enter. This is a new space of opportunity for the women (Laurie et al. 1999) that facilitate parts of their everyday activity.

Because of the climatic conditions that the participants live under, the rainy season is a time when the farmers are under high pressure for producing enough food to last throughout the dry season. The participants in the study said that their many obligations and responsibilities were an extra burden in terms of lack of time. Because of technical training and fewer limitations on what a woman could contribute with in agricultural production, women and men were able to lean more on each other for support, but it also signified that women could be given more responsibilities. During the participatory observation I went to see land that was owned by the women. When discussing the work that was done at the farm, Key-informant 3 made a clear distinction between what was her property and her husband's property and she was comparing the quality of them as if it was a competition between them to have the best products. Instead of cooperating, it seemed that having a plot of land of her own also entailed a lot more work and responsibilities. Lynne Brydon (2010) has framed this as *the feminization of family responsibility*, arguing that traditional male tasks are transferred to the women. Participants in

the FGD in Binaba demonstrated that a feminization of responsibilities exists in Bawku West District; "The women's responsibilities are more than the men." "My husband does not love me and he overburdens me." (C)

Other constraints to the room to manoeuver are that there are spheres of decision-making where it is challenging for the women to take part in. Along with challenging discriminatory practices when it comes to access to land, ownership and control of livestock is also a gender-specific constraint that is targeted by CSRC. "We have access to animals, but if there is a goat in the house a woman can't sell it. A man has to do that (A1). When confronted with this type of practice, the men explained that it relates to a cultural taboo; it was viewed that if a woman's livestock mixes with the man's, the women's livestock will multiply and the animals of the man will die. This type of control over what a woman could own is rooted in the fear that a woman could take property back to her own family. "In the beginning I did not want to give my wife control over land, because she could give it to her family." (B1). A Kusasi-wife in terms of a *female married into a given compound or lineage* (Sudarkasa 1986, 27), does not have access to resources unless male members of their in-law family allow them to. When accepting marriage she leaves her original linage and is obliged to manoeuvre within the rules and norms authorised by the new patrilineal family-head (Tsikata 2001).

The bride price in a Kusasi-marriage arrangement is four cows (two male and two female), which is paid by the in-law family to the family-head of the bride's family. Participants in group A of the FGD argued: "This should be changed because the mother gives birth to the child, therefore she deserves a share." (A1). The female participants discussed that it was not always common decision-making and they wanted more influence in decisions concerning their daughters' marriage. Their husband having more than one wife also limited the women's room to manoeuvre. Polygamy is a well-established practice both in Nagbere and Binaba. Through discussions with key informant 4, I learnt that the Pentecostal church in Nagbere favoured monogamous marriages. "We accept members of the church with two wives, but if some try to get a third they would be thrown out of the assembly".

Many of the female participants said polygamy was a challenge. "When my husband has more than one wife it is challenging, because I have to share the welfare with more people." (A2). Each wife and their children represent separate units of the compound, but income and food-crop provided by the husband are shared among them.

The women in Binaba who had not had training from CSRC saw polygamy as the major obstacle to bottleneck for women empowerment in their community. "Men have more than one wife and they will not discuss issues with any of them." (C). Akumatey and Darkwah (2009) argue that women in polygamous relationships are expected to be primarily concerned about the welfare and upbringing of their children, and she claims that emotional ties between spouses are weak.

Some participants also complained about their husband making bad decisions: for instance when he takes all the money and goes and drinks at the local market. One of the participants did not blame her husband for such behaviour; rather she saw it as her fault. "No. If my husband do that it is because, me, as his wife cannot satisfy his sexual needs. It is important that we as wives satisfy their sexual needs because then we can avoid such behaviour." (A2).

This statement was difficult for me to understand at first, but when I learnt more about the cultural practices of the Kusasi-ethnic group, I was able to link it with the ritual of marriage. Because of the bride price, sex is seen as the property of the husband. "Sex is a seed that is controlled by the man." The seed is placed inside the woman, but owned by the husband. Therefore he can make claims for it whenever he wanted. According to Akumatey and Darkwah (2009) the economic rewards gained through the bride price leads extended family members to encourage women to stay in their marriage and lack of bodily control evolves out of fear of physical harm or marital breakdown. The power to negotiate and say no to sex was limited among the female participants, because of these traditional practices. Some of the participants found it difficult to turn down the request for sex, because they were afraid they would be send back to their father's house. The uncertainty women face if they choose to break out of marriage and cooperative arrangements affects the bargaining position when it comes to sex, because the exit-option has negative consequences on the level of utility and well-being (Perrons 2004, 120).

To sum up this chapter, six years of support to access land have made women more capable of dealing with challenges and utilizing opportunities that exist. During the second FGD with both group A and group B, the participants argued that because of women having access to land they could contribute and control some of the family income, and as result many families had experienced change for the better. "The women are given enough room to manoeuver in the compound to bring satisfaction. My wife can buy sugar, more soup ingredients and farm input." (B2). "We used to be dependent on the man. We had to ask them for money to buy fabric, and ask for money to send the child to the hospital. Now we can do these things ourselves." (A2).

A good example of this is a story told by one of the female participants in FGD A; "I wanted to construct my own piece of land, but my husband said it was not possible. I did it anyway, because I realized that it was my husband that was losing. When I had prepared the land, I contacted the agricultural officers to have them to evaluate my work, but they did not want to come. I called them again and persuaded them to come and in the end I managed to bring them here. They assessed my farm and I won the best female farmer award in the district." (A1). This statement shows that change has to be continuously negotiated. Her husband had undergone training from CSRC about gender and empowerment, but he held back when confronted by his own wife.

To conclude, this chapter shows that traditional practices that have been part of the Kusasi ethnic group for generations are not easily turned around. Transformation takes time and the emphasis on women empowerment in Nagbere is subject to both change and continuity. Women´s position as agents is relational and they regularly meet situations that have to be negotiated in their everyday life. It shows that negotiating for change is influenced by four dimensions of gender; gender as subjectivity, gender as relations, gender as symbolic representations and gender embedded in institutions. The gender lens consists of these dimensions and in the next chapter it will be used as an analytical tool to go deeper into the findings of the research.

6. The gender lens as subject to continuity and change

In this chapter, I will use the gender lens to look closer at the discussions between the participants in order to identify the consequences of CSRC's intervention in Bawku West District. It aims to show that traditional discriminating practices are defined, negotiated and redefined and manifested in subjectivity, gender relations, symbolic representations and institutions. There is an interconnection between these dimensions and in a larger context they affect human development, and they are subject to both continuity and change.

First in this chapter I will focus on how gender relations are affected by women empowerment and subject to change and continuity. In chapter 5 I looked at the impact of women empowerment on women's individual ability to deal with challenges and opportunities, but here I will look at the implications of women empowerment on gender relations within the family. The focus is on the level of cooperation and conflict, because families are built around a co-operative organisation, which influences the interaction between family members (Sen 1990). This has to do with how power comes about in relationships between husband and wives, but also the fact that gender relationships are built on emotional commitments, such as affection and care (Connell 2002).

6.1 The impact of women empowerment on gender relations

One of the objectives of the research is to look at gender relations within the family as the husband-wife relation and how it is affected by women empowerment. Gender is the process where biological categories of male and female become social categories of men and women. Gender relations are the meeting between men and women and the interacting processes that define their gender. It is in this meeting that a woman can see how she is different from the man; there is therefore a link between subjectivity and gender relations. Key informant 2 argued that the power imbalance that existed in the communities they worked with was rooted in gender. The relationship between men and women has grown over time and has acquired fixed patterns within communities and ethnic groups. In chapter 5 I looked at the differences and similarities between categories of men and women in Bawku West District, but in this section I look at gender as an emotional relation and as personal and intimate interactions between men and women.

Cooperation

Through the conversations I had with the beneficiaries in Nagbere it became clear that the interventions of CSRC had led to more cooperation between husband and wife. The women had challenged the authority of the men, but they explained that the goal of this challenge is peaceful coexistence between husband and wife and within the family. "Before it were so many quarrels at home, but now me and my husband lives in peace. My husband is backing me and gives me opportunities." (A2)

The participants, both male and female, explained that their understanding of each other's needs has improved and that they can lean on each other for support. A male participant expressed that now he feels confident that his wife could take care of the farm if he has to travel. Vice versa, a woman explained that when she goes to weed in the farm, her husband could collect clothes or food crop that is in the compound drying.

The participants are farmers and their everyday activities are linked to agricultural production. Many of the participants appreciated the improved ability to cooperate when it comes to farming. The men were happy the women had obtained technical knowledge, enabling them to do more work on the farm and give advice when it comes to decisions over farming activities. One of the female participants explained how she now could influence decisions about selling farm outputs: "My husband wanted to sell the beans we had cultivated on the farm. The market was not good, so I advised him to wait. He respected my view and the beans were sold during the lean season and we earned more." (A2).

One other female participant explained that if she needed help to complete her responsibilities within the family she would ask her husband for help. "If my workload is too much, my husband comes automatically." (A2). One other female participant explained that you had to have well-backed and good reasons for the husband to listen to what she was saying and take her opinion into account when making decisions.

Some of the female participants specified that there were certain ways to challenge the authority of the man that would be best to follow, because their involvement in decision-making depends on the ability to communicate. By challenging the male authority in the community the female participants had obtained knowledge, strength and courage to confront traditional discriminatory practices, but they had also experienced that their newly won authority had to be handled carefully in order to maintain and achieve cooperation. One

participant explained that: "You can't exercise authority directly on the man, but you can give advices". (A2)

Each individual participant in Nagbere has the potential to access and exercise authority, but it is related to the ability to take *power over* and take control (Rowlands 1997). In the process where one person exercises authority over another, there are dynamics in the meeting between each person's authority. In Nagbere, male authority is maintained by both the fact that men control women's potential authority and that women give their authority to the men (Kandiyoty 1988). When solving intra-family conflict women manoeuvre within the male dominance by identifying their authority, but avoiding upfront confrontation with it.

This shows that the authority exercised by the men cannot be changed easily; it takes time. Through long-established customs, norms and social structures, patriarchy has become institutionalized in gender relations and embedded in face-to-face settings in the family (Connell 1990). The male participants were conscious about their continuing role as the authority in the family and in the relationship with their wife. To access and exercise authority was their responsibility and privilege, being a man. "As men we can counteract the opinion of the women." "I use my veto-power in good faith, because my wife trust my judgements." (B2) These stories from Nagbere show that the dimensions of the gender lens are interlinked (Davids and Driel 2005) and subject to both continuity and change (Stølen 1991). Subjective definitions of their role as an agent of change affect and come to play a part in gender relations.

The women in Binaba acknowledged the man as the supreme authority in their everyday life. They explained that men and women do not cooperate. "My husband overburdens me instead of supporting me, and I cannot influence decision-making. The fowl was limping and I suggested to my husband that we should slaughter it for soup. But for that my husband accused me for being a thief." (C)

Education had helped some women to start questioning the male's authority and improved the ability to handle family problems and support their male counterpart. But the challenge is that the men resist these changes and some of the participants argued that women's subordinated position is for the best; "Relationships were better before, because women used to fear the husband and took all instructions. Like that it was less quarrels." (C)

Conflict

When discussing the level of conflict within the family, the FGD in Binaba said that quarrels and conflict were very present in their community. In Nagbere the level of conflict had been reduced as a result of the intervention of CSRC, because family members' ability to communicate and negotiate had been strengthened. The female participants explained that husband and wife/wives are able to discuss issues and challenges with each other. But quarrels and conflict between husband and wife still occur because both cooperation and conflict are a natural part of family organization (Sen 1990). The participants said that poverty has been one of the main reasons for conflict. When people are not satisfied when it comes to basic needs like nutrition, shelter and clothing, quarrels occur more often.

Through participatory observation I learnt that Christianity is an important part of people's everyday life in Nagbere. There are activities in the church each day and it plays a major role in the social organisation of Nagbere. The participants' dedication to religion also became manifested when the occurrence of conflicts and quarrels within the family was explained as the work of Satan and the solution was to pray more. Religious institutions, as a dimension of the gender lens, affect subjective understandings of conflict and how people deal with it. This indicates an interrelation between subjectivity, gender relations and institutions. Other reasons for quarrels are: dishonesty; gossip; the inability to keep secrets; lack of understanding and the inability of the husband/wife to live up to expectations.

"Quarrels occur when, as a husband, I am not living up to expectations of being a landlord. Finding food, roofing and taking care of the maintenance of the compound is my responsibility. It is the same when my wife refuses to prepare food for me." (B2)

As wives, the women in Nagbere are expected to prepare and serve food, fetch water, collect firewood, sweep the compound, see the children off to school, do laundry, farm and dry the harvest. "As a woman you have numerous roles inside the yard and when you are assigned by the husband to do something for him and at the same time are occupied with these roles, he can see it as you cannot meet his expectations and it creates confusion." (A2)

One of the most discussed reasons for conflict between husband and wife had to do with sexuality and the sexual relationship between husband and wife. Polygamy is practiced among the Kusasi ethnic group, and both the male participants and the female participants saw the issues of having another wife or girlfriend as a source of conflict. "When I want to take a girlfriend or an additional wife it creates conflict." (B2)

Fulfilling their partner's sexual needs was an important strategy when it comes to hinder quarrels and conflict. The female participants in Nagbere identified the man's sexual needs and his inability to control it as one of the main reason for quarrels. As outlined in chapter 5; some of the participants in Nagbere saw it as their responsibility to avoid this type of conflict by giving him sex when he wanted to. Vice versa, in the FGD's with the men they explained that women refusing sex creates tension and quarrels in the husband-wife relationship.

Acting contrary to expectations and responsibility is therefore a source of conflict, especially if the new behaviour challenges the male authority. Some of the male participants said it seemed CSRC's project aimed to give women more power than the men. "There are some women that thinks the power is given to them is supposed to challenge the authority of the man." Another replied: "But they cannot, because there are certain things they can't do; like bury the dead. According to the cultural practices the women can't do that." (B2) This clashed with some of the views the women had; "I want to be able to bury." (A1)

Although other male participants underlined that women empowerment is about "seeking power to complement the common effort of husband and wife", they all agreed that they saw it as a threat to their authority when the women used power to challenge the men. This aspect will be looked at more carefully later in this chapter.

To conclude this subsection; the intervention by community CSRC and their strategy to achieve women empowerment has led to more cooperation between husband and wife in terms of sharing the workload when it comes to cultivation of the land, other farming activities, common decision-making and taking care of the children in terms of their school fees. Discussions, quarrels and conflict are part of their everyday life activities. But although the beneficiaries are given support when it comes to handling and solving conflict, sexual relationship is a source of conflict that the participants find difficult to handle and some of the women put the responsibility for that on their own shoulders. The clash between the male's and the women's idea about how much change empowerment can bring about can create future conflicts.

6.2 The gender lens as subject to continuity and change

There were many examples of how the intervention by CSRC has influenced subjectivity and the process of building capacity. The inhabitants of Nagbere have managed to negotiate and change existing social, cultural and economic discourses that have influenced their modes of thought, ambitions and desires (Moore 2010). One of the female participants manifested such a

change through her ambition to become an undertaker, a person whose job is to deal with the bodies of people who have died and to arrange funerals.

This section looks closer at such manifestations and acknowledges that they include both changed and continued behaviour. It is clear that the women are able to develop their ability to define goals and find ways to achieve them. A good example of this is the story told by Key-informant 3. She managed to challenge her husband's negative perceptions about her establishing a farm, taking the responsibility for the land and getting the outcome evaluated by the District Officers of agriculture. In doing that, she drew on personal resources and attributes to negotiate for power in her relationship with her husband. She exercised the power to overcome symbolic representations embedded in social norms and expressed by both her husband and the district officer. By referring to the analytical approach of this research (chapter 3), this story is a good manifestation of the interconnections between the dimensions of the gender lens. When trying to achieve her goals, the key-informant manoeuvres within gender relations that are affected by her husband's mode of thought and ability to make use of symbolic representations. In addition the district officer represents an institution that acts as a barrier to the woman's wish of being evaluated as a farmer, because the officer brings in his own subjective perceptions. The gender lens is therefore subject to both change and continuity, where the process of empowerment is defined, negotiated and redefined (Sølen and Vaa 1991).

The gender lens as subject to change

The practice of ownership of land embedded in the Kusasi customs was based on a definition of land as an unattainable resource for the women in Nagbere. The intervention of CSRC draws attention to gender and the traditional value added to this practice. Because of capacity-building women are able to challenge this traditional value and redefine ownership of land, meaning that women could also hold land. But this change is under constant negotiation (Cornwall and Edwards 2010), because elements of continuity are present in the society where the process of social transformation takes place. In the story outlined above, Key-informant 3 met behaviour that represented the old traditional values within the family. Her husband was not that happy about the change that she advocated for and questioned her actions. Key-informant 3 did not let these challenges stop her from reaching her goal of establishing her own farm. She had made use of the knowledge obtained in the interaction with CSRC. She knew her husband did not have a right to stop her and she acknowledged that she had an opportunity to own land. She used this capacity to access and exercise power to navigate around the scepticism of her husband and the district officer. The subjectivity of Key-Informant 3 has

developed in a way in which the modes of thought have changed because she is able to see opportunities that earlier were blocked. The idea of owning land has become familiar to her and it has affected her behaviour and ability to define, act upon and attain goals.

Key-informant 4 explained that in the beginning of CSRC's intervention, men were not eager to share their land with their wives. The idea of changing the traditional practices was not in their interest and did not concern them. According to the field officer some of the reactions they got from men in Nagbere were that men thought women did not need fertile land to cultivate crops, because what they had was also for the women. But when they saw examples where sharing land had a positive outcome, more and more men got convinced that it would benefit them as well. As a result their modes of thought towards ownership of land changed both on the level of idea and at the level of behaviour (Stølen and Vaa 1991).

To conclude, this development in subjectivity amongst both women and men in Nagbere has resulted in the fact that traditional taboos have been challenged. Women can now own livestock and enter the harvest barn without the husband around. Other opportunities that the female participants from Nagbere are able to take are accessing and control economic resources through increased farm output. The women explained how they were happy about being able to buy fabric, sandals, better soup-ingredients and contribute to pay the children's school fees.

The gender lens as subject to continuity
The female participants explained that they wanted to have all the opportunities that the men had, therefore ideas and behaviours when it comes to what is *femaleness* had to be challenged in order to open up more opportunities for women (Stølen and Vaa 1991). For instance they are able to own land and there exist less restrictions on what type of livestock the women can possess.

On the other hand, when they touched upon the role of the man they reflected ideas and behaviour towards *maleness* that contained elements of continuity (ibid). This is reflected in the story told by one of the female participants about a man that used to help out when it comes to domestic work. She referred to this man as a woman-man and explained that this type of man will be rightfully teased. Through the observed behaviour of the other participants, laughter and small comments, I understood that the participants had reservations against men that did domestic work and it suggests that being a man does not necessarily mean that all opportunities are open. Both men and women have ideas about how the other should behave, which is

interlinked with symbolic representations in a society. These ideas are reflected in behaviour that can limit individuals' ability to deal with opportunities and challenges.

The idea among the women of becoming like a man can end in some challenges that could hamper social transformation, because it can lead to an atmosphere of competition between husband and wife rather than cooperation. Key-informant 3 compared the quality of her piece of land to that of the husband, aiming to do better than him. Another issue has to do with what I have discussed above. Although women are supported to engage in additional spheres of the agricultural production, there is less attention on including men in reproductive work. Through the participatory observation I took part in a Christian baptizing ritual, and during the ceremony the pastor told the mother and father to share the responsibility of the upbringing of the child. The father was told to take care of the child when the mother was occupied with other responsibilities. To symbolize this, the pastor asked the father to hold the child during the ceremony and carry it down the aisle when the rituals were performed. This shows that institutions such as the church have the potential to act as agents of change and influence subjectivity, gender relations and symbolic representations in a way that can strengthen cooperation between husband and wife and encourage men to contribute more in the upbringing of children.

But despite the initiative from the local community church in Nagbere to encourage fathers to take responsibility in childcare, neither the participants nor the key-informants from CSRC focused on fatherhood. Some of the female participants teased men that did domestic work and portrayed them as "women-men". This shows that there exists a barrier between men and domestic work. A focus only on what the women have to do to enter the productive sector and less attention on men and reproductive work reflects Sylvia Chant's analysis of a feminisation of obligations and responsibilities (Chant 2011). Brydon has observed that from the mid twentieth century, there has been an increasing burden of responsibility on women in Ghana. She calls this "feminisation of family responsibility" and it can lead to women having limited room to manoeuver if there are no support mechanisms in place to handle their original obligations and responsibilities in addition to the new workload (Brydon 2010).

Their growing knowledge about human rights and their rights as women have made some of the participants aware of the fact that there exist state laws that can protect them. Many of the female participants from Nagbere were concerned about the uncertain situation widows faced in their community. Key-informant 3 explained that already prior to the introduction of the

Women's Rights and Domestic Violence Campaign some women in the community had formed groups in order to discuss this issue and find ways to support widows. A group of women in Nagbere had therefore organized themselves to build up a fund for widows in their community, because the traditional customs of marriage and inheritance is subject to continuity. The Kusasi customary law does not see the wife as part of the husband's economic unit. A widow can't claim the property of her deceased husband and there are few options when it comes to social security; she has to lean on her children or male representatives of the extended family to take care of her (Tsikata 2001).

Key-informant 3 explained that when her mother dies the customary laws gives her no rights of property. She explained that her brother's children are granted the right in the Kumasi customs to take property before her. She did not approve of this traditional custom and stated that she wanted to have training on the intestate succession law and women's rights when it comes to inheritance of property. Both the women in Nagbere and female lawyers in Accra are using groups to advocate for laws on succession of property that can have a stronger impact and address women's insecurity. This shows that room to manoeuvre is being advocated for on the level of institutions as well as the individual level (Long 2001). As mentioned in chapter 2 the official intestate succession law in Ghana has weak links with local realities and traditional customs. The female participants were not able to use this law as a reference point, because it is not easily accessed in their society and the advanced language makes it difficult to understand. During my time in the main office of CSRC some of the staff argued that the existing law was imported from a Western country, had weak links to Ghanaian realities and its language so complicated that even the NGO- workers had problems understanding it. The difficult language of a law, how it is practiced throughout Ghana and the unwillingness of state representatives to secure women more rights, does not support change but it rather promotes continuity. In this case the Ghanaian state becomes a bearer of gender inequalities, because it manifests values that limit women's room to manoeuver, individually and collectively.

During discussions with the staff of the local NGO, I met attitudes that favoured the continuation of traditional patriarchal customs when it comes to intestate succession. They explained that the social security provided by the Kusasi practice is strong; "I find security in the traditional customs." This was expressed by a male-staff member and he argued that there is a high uncertainty embedded in state laws because you are obliged to designate your beneficiaries, which requires money to pay a lawyer. I confronted them with the uncertainty the women in Nagbere had expressed towards widowhood, and asked what his wife thinks about

the traditional practice. He answered that if he dies his children would make sure the wife would be given a fair share of his property. The social perception and favouring of traditional practice of intestate succession can therefore limit the significance of state laws in local settings.

This shows that there is a tension between opinions among individuals. One of the female participants announced that she wanted to challenge the traditional norms during the ritual of burial where only males can be the undertaker. Other women did not want to change this, and in the male FGD the topic generated strong reactions. When discussing empowerment the male participants talked about empowerment as improving the traditional rules and changing them. But their fear of losing authority creates barriers to the process of bringing about change. When facing this fear, men in Nagbere lean to symbolic representation to define what can be changed and what cannot (Davids and Driel 2005). The men make use of traditional customs in order to claim authority. The institutionally enforced authority of males over females and children is an established practise and the process of negotiating can be scary both for men and women. There is a number of studies that shows that in the process of transforming patriarchies, men feel loss in self-esteem (Perrons 2004, 199). It is also argued that existing unequal gender relations have a durability that can withstand changes. To relate it to the discussion of this study, subjectivity, gender relations, traditional customs and macro institutions could all be a place where unequal gender practices could be reborn, subject to both change and continuity. I want to underline this by looking more closely at perceptions of sexuality in the following section.

6.3 Sexuality – a barrier to women empowerment

Participant's perception of sex stands out as a barrier to women empowerment in Nagbere. The sensitizing from CSRC about the equality of men and women has not affected the sphere of gender and sexuality. There was a shared understanding among the female participants that sex was something a wife was obliged to give to her husband. The possibility of changing this practice was not as clear to the participants as their improved ability to see new opportunities when it comes to productive work and the idea of making use of state laws to protect themselves and their interests.

Sexuality is sexual relationships that are socially constructed, because body is embedded in social practices. Bodies are not only material appearances, but also agents for bodily experience (Connell 2002). Cornwall and Jolly argue that sexuality has to be seen as something more than

problems about sex because it also has to do with pleasure and love (Cornwall and Jolly 2010). When it comes to sexuality and development they argue that there is a connection between sexuality and social marginalization and poverty because sexuality is formed by social norms, political and economic structures that have implications for people's mobility and ability to deal with challenges and opportunities. Sexuality is a sensitive and private topic that is challenging to deal with, but it is part of people's everyday realities. There are both positive and negative emotions and energy embedded in sexuality. Fear, judgements, pleasure and love affect people's self-esteem and subjectivity. Sex and reproduction are important aspects of sexuality, and although Kusasi women are high-skilled caretakers, the inability to control pregnancy affects the way the women prioritize their time and effort. Sexuality as a barrier to women empowerment in Nagbere, is embedded in traditional marital customs. According to Akumatey and Darkwah (2009) the marital contract in the Kusasi tradition and other polygamous societies obliges a woman to grant her husband unlimited access to her body. Also Manuh and Cusack explain that because Ghanaian culture approves polygamy, men grow up with a sense of entitlement to women's bodies (Manuh and Cusack 2009, 132). Following this logic body becomes interpreted as a material appearance and a property rather than an agent for bodily experience, and result in an expectation that it is the women's responsibility to satisfy men's sexual needs. However, this symbolic representation of the female body as a male property is subject to change, but in Nagbere women maintain this symbolic representation. This has to be seen in relation to sexuality as a social taboo.

Akumatey and Darkwah (2009) claim that in Ghana there is a culture of silence when it comes to sex. Although the FGD A in Nagbere reflected that the participants have expanded their capacity to speak their mind and that the women spoke quite freely about sex in the FGD, there exists a more solid barrier in dealing with sexuality compared to challenging the disfavouring of women when it comes to access to land. I learned through participatory observation that the barrier also is supported through Christianity, because attitudes towards sexuality in Nagbere are embedded in religious practices. Stølen and Vaa support this observation by arguing that religion is a source of powerful gender doctrines and is a major factor when understanding why some practices survive and are maintained (Stølen 1991, 16). I took part in a number of church services during the fieldwork in Bawku West District and I observed behaviour within the Pentecostal church where references to the Bible were made in such a way that generated and strengthened hierarchies in gender relations. During a Sunday service a woman held a speech for the assembly about the social role of the women, and she referred to the 1. Corinthians 11

where it is stated that the woman came from the man and was created for man. The same passage of the Bible also explains the hierarchy in the society where God comes first followed by Jesus, the Man and lastly the Woman. Manuh and Cusack (2009) refer to the Ephesians 5.22-24 to underline this aspect. "Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church" (Manuh and Cusack 2009, 138).

Sexuality is a taboo in the Christian religion, just as it is in the Ghanaian culture, and especially the perception of women's bodies is treated with fear and supressed. Women's virginity is associated with purity while sexual desires are illusionary, earthly temptations where women often are seen as catalysts for male desire (ibid, 144).

To conclude, this findings underline that men not only maintain their authority through traditional Kusasi customs, but also through the Pentecostal church as an institution of continued male domination. Institutions, symbolic representations, gender relations and subjectivity all play a role in the process of negotiating women empowerment.

7. Concluding Discussions

7.1 Rethinking gender and empowerment

Women empowerment in Nagbere leads to both change, where spaces of opportunities occur, and continuity, where spaces of oppression are maintained. The stories of change in Nagbere manifest that women's ability to improve their room to manoeuvre is strengthened. This is explained by the capacity-building among the women, but also the understanding among men that sharing of resources, power and authority with women will improve their life and create more harmony in the family. The involvement of traditional and religious authorities in Bawku West District supports this development; but on the other hand traditional customs and religion are still reference points for subjective ideas and behaviour that support continuity and maintain gender inequalities. Traditional customs and religion are therefore structural barriers that limit women's room to manoeuvre and the level cooperation within the family.

By linking the discussions among the participants to the research questions and to the theory supporting the research, there are some connections that need to be looked at more carefully. The participants understood empowerment as a dynamic on-going process, a pathway rather than a building (Cornwall and Edwards 2010) and in order to enable women and men to manoeuvre along this road, capacity-building should be emphasised. With access to knowledge about how to communicate, the ability to question institutionalized practices and their own position within them, the women felt empowered to deal with challenges and opportunities in their everyday life. The discussions among the participants support some of Jane Parpart's suggestions when it comes to improving empowerment as a strategy. Empowerment is more than power over resources, people and institutions, because the ability to exercise power in different ways together contributes to the development of Nagbere. Individual awareness of their own identity supported women's agency in a way that made it possible to define women as landowners. This change also comes as a result of the improved ability to negotiate for power and exercise it in a way that bring about change in traditional norms and taboos. In addition, when women are able to take control over land and the economic output of agricultural production they can contribute to create satisfaction within the family by serving better food and giving financial support to send children to school. The security and strength that was embedded in women's groups made it possible for women to make use of social networks to build up support to widowed women in their community. The groups organized by

CSRC also became an opportunity for demanding knowledge about state laws and negotiating the role and influence of the mother in the rite of marriage.

Negotiating for power within the interacting dimensions of the gender lens is a constant process because empowerment is embedded in agency as well as structures. Empowerment is interpreted and used differently among people and it affects women's room to manoeuvre when the husbands' understanding of empowerment conflicts with the wife's understanding. The male participants argued that empowerment is about improving traditional customs. On the other hand the traditions represent a safety net for their authority and therefore the men uphold some customs. This tension needs to be acknowledged and dealt with in order to realize the full potential of women empowerment.

In Nagbere women empowerment has improved women's room to manoeuvre because of capacity building when it comes to the ability to discuss issues with their husband and to define their role in the family and the local community. By identifying challenges and opportunities they face in their everyday life and finding ways to deal with them, women are able to negotiate and redefine traditional customs and male authority in specific spheres of life. It has become easier to access natural resources, reduce the worries about poverty and make use of laws and rights as a reference point in the process of negotiating for change. But their additional responsibilities and obligations in relation to their wish of copying traditional male work have to be given more attention by actors working with women empowerment, both providers and beneficiaries. Kolawole (2004) argues that women should build on their own power and qualities in the process of empowerment instead of trying to be like men. Women's qualities and potential should be the starting point for the capacity building, because women should be able to do what they want, but without being overburdened. There should exist equally accessible spaces of opportunities for women as for men, but the opportunities should reflect personal attributes and encourage self-realization rather than copying male ideals. Women are already active in the agricultural production in Nagbere and adding more productive work without reducing the reproductive work will be a challenge in relation to the time and energy needed to fulfil the responsibilities.

Since both this research and other (Perrons 2004; Kabeer 2008b), show that women entering the productive sphere of life improves women's ability to negotiate for power and to bargain patriarchy, I would argue that empowerment in the development discourse also needs to encourage men to take on reproductive work. Reproductive training should therefore be given

to men so they can take on care work and in order to create more awareness of gender-biased inequalities. Sylvia Chant argues that gender-training needs to include verbal recognition being followed up with practical changes in order to transform inequalities. Change on the level of ideas needs to develop into change on the level of behaviour and "bringing men in could mean that gender transformations will be more sustainable" (Chant 2000, 27). In Nagbere women empowerment leads to more cooperation between men and women in agricultural production. I argue that putting more emphasis on including men in the process of women empowerment could enlarge the capacity to cooperate in more spheres of everyday life.

The gendered division of labour in Nagbere organises the everyday life of families. Through the intervention of CSRC, the participants have been able to define gender and challenge and change gender specific responsibilities in the agricultural production, but participatory observation revealed that the sensitizing by CSRC had affected only some activities and change was more present on the level of ideas than manifested in behaviour. For instance men weeding and doing domestic work was characterized as abnormal behaviour and not socially accepted. And although some women allowed their men to cook, I did not observe men fetching water or collecting firewood.

The discussions about gender relations showed that women and men have specific expectations towards their spouse, and when they fail to fulfil the expected responsibility it leads to quarrels. These expectations were gendered and embedded in symbolic representations. Through the discussions about sexuality men were symbolized as the "owner of sex" and the holder of authority when it comes to decisions about sex; the female body was reduced to a material appearance and a tool to avoid quarrels.

CSRC's emphasis on sensitizing and including men in the Women's Rights and Domestic Violence-campaign has led to more cooperation between husband and wife in Nagbere. Conflict plays a natural part in the family as a co-operative unit, and the participants have learnt how to deal with it. For instance they explained that their temper had to drop before they discussed issues. But the strategies individuals used in order to reduce the level of quarrelling are embedded in the awareness among both men and women about the husband's position as the authority in the husband-wife relation. Especially when it comes to decisions about sex and productive activities. The male participants were conscious about the fact that they had a veto-power in decision-making, which they could use to counteract women's opinions. On the other hand, female participants explained that it was wise for women to adopt a low profile and not

challenge the temper of the man if you wanted to solve quarrels. Thus the participants drew on gendered roles when dealing with quarrels, and expectations towards daily responsibility and sexuality were the strongest manifestation of the gender lens as subject to continuity. The process of negotiating male authority has to be handled with care, because the men explained that they feel threatened when women go too far in challenging their authority. Traditional customs are used as a safety net and a justification for men to continue to exercise authority in certain spheres of life. The need of safety obliges to both men and women and patriarchy is a source of security that has been part of the everyday life in Bawku West District through generations.

Despite the intervention by CSRC there exist barriers to empowerment in Nagbere, because norms, rules and values are redefined in a way that limits women's room to manoeuver. The barriers that exist in Nagbere are embedded in subjectivity and gender relations. Men's subjective understanding about their authority, which is protected by customary practices, is a constraint on women's desire for more autonomy. Social perception in Nagbere about what a woman and a man can and cannot do influences the process of change (Agarwal 1997). Men create a barrier to women's capacity-building by claiming women cannot bury, while on the other hand the women make fun of men doing domestic work. Power can be exercised both constructively and repressively. Women's subjective understanding of their responsibility in sexual relationships results in a view of their own body as a tool to reduce quarrels, because some of the female participants saw male disruptive behaviour as the failure of women to satisfy sexual needs.

The barriers are not only embedded in subjectivity and gender relations, but also in religion and the Kusasi marriage customs in Nagbere. Empowerment includes both agency and structures and the gender hierarchy found in the ritual of marriage and in the Pentecostal church affects the behaviour of both men and women in Nagbere. By referring to passages of the bible, sexuality is conceived of as a gender-specific issue of morality and sin. Sex for pleasure for women is perceived as close to sin, while men's sexual needs and the social acceptance of multiple sexual partners for men is protected by the interpretation of men's nature (Arnfred 2004). In the Kusasi tradition of marriage it is viewed as a marital obligation to agree to having sex. I would explain this behaviour among the female participants in relation to the fear of being cast out of the patriarchal marriage because of women's weak fall-back-position among the Kusasis. This fear also maintains the idea of sex as the property of men because women do

not want men to feel threatened. Sexual ties therefore become a conscious strategy among women to manage and prevent future uncertainties (Moore 2010).

Security is also found in Christianity, and together with the Kusasi marriage tradition, represent essential practices of the everyday life of people. These institutions are known, create safety and organise their society. Building on the subjective understanding of the participants, traditional customs and religious practices create law and order. One of the male participants underlined the importance of improving the traditional practices and it was also expressed that the traditional inheritance system creates security. The people in Nagbere should therefore not be pushed to abandon this safety net, but rather be encouraged to improve the potential of tradition and religion to truly create development in the society. The ritual of marriage secures the patriarchal lineage in terms of reproduction and gives women access to property, but it is also a celebration of attachment and emotions such as love and affection. In addition marriage is a celebration of an important transition in people's lives, and it provides training to youth in order to facilitate the transfer from adolescence to adulthood. Contrary to the view of Stølen and Vaa (1991), religion is not always a source of powerful gender doctrines that hamper change, but it can also inspire negotiation of the social organisation.

For the participants from Nagbere, Christianity brings purpose to life and is an arena where people get rid of frustration and find comfort and guidelines for how to live their life. Such guidelines are found in the Ten Commandments and especially in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is a collection of sayings and teachings of Jesus and is considered the fundamental principles of Christianity. The most important part of the Sermon when it comes to ethics is the Second Great Commandment that states: "You should love your neighbour as yourself" (Mattew 22: 39). The core value of Christianity concerns advocating for equality between people despite class, race, age, gender and ethnicity. Jesus dedicated himself to challenging patriarchal structures in the patriarchal society he lived in. Jesus included female disciples and acted respectfully towards women. He healed and embraced all types of people and required that compassion, charity and love were reflected without limitations at both the level of ideas and the level of behaviour. Examples of this are the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29-37) and when Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13: 10-17). This manifests that inspiration can be found in Christianity to achieve gender equality based on respect, mercy and charity. It can be used more actively to strengthen and encourage cooperation when it comes to childcare and inspire more initiatives similar to what the Pastor showed in the baptising ceremony in Nagbere.

7.2 Summing up and the way forward

With the experiences from the research in mind I want to present some lessons learned when it comes to making use of women empowerment as a developing strategy. Empowerment is embedded in the three dimensions of the gender lens; subjectivity, symbolic representations and institutions. Empowerment has the potential to strengthen human development, but to achieve this, a more holistic approach needs to be taken. I argue that in addition to the three dimensions mentioned, gender relations need to be included, because it is a relation of power that determines the level of cooperation within the family. The gender lens is subject to change and continuity, and in the process of negotiating for power norms, values and rules are defined, deconstructed and redefined, and used both by individuals and embedded in institutions. But continuity and change in Bawku West District also take place separately from the intervention of a local NGO, because patriarchy is constantly negotiated. The ability among beneficiaries to bring about change depends on knowledge and resources; but it takes time to affect both the level of idea and the level of behaviour. In order to allow women empowerment to strengthen the level of cooperation between husband and wife, men need to be included. Not only because men claim authority over women on the basis of traditional customs, but because their different understanding of empowerment can create confusion. Men can also feel threatened when women's expanding room to manoeuvre challenges their veto-power. I have used room to manoeuver as the individual ability to deal with challenges and opportunities, but it can also be used collectively and go across the micro, meso and macro level. One example of this is the advocating for better intestate succession laws, which takes place both in local women's group in Nagbere and lawyers' groups in Accra.

The women in Nagbere are outsiders to the lineage and dependent on marriage to get access to resources embedded in a patriarchal social organisation. This is an argument for better cooperation between husband and wife. Women empowerment has less potential to bring about change when it creates more intra-family tension. Women find ways to negotiate patriarchy, but it will be more sustainable if also men can contribute to support the process.

Structures of constraints that halter women empowerment are not only embedded in gender, but also ethnicity and religion. Both men and women maintain sexuality as a space where empowerment is oppressed, because of the influence of the Kusasi traditional norms and the Pentecostal church's interpretation of religious scripts. But both traditional customs and Christianity represent security and have a potential to improve the process of empowerment.

I would therefore recommend CSRC to put more emphasis on including traditional and religious authorities in their Women's Rights and Domestic Violence Campaign in order to better address gender inequality in Bawku West District. By referring to the work of Jesus, The Pentecostal Church could be used as a source of inspiration for negotiating patriarchy.

CSRC should continue using groups, because they function despite the lack of funding and it strengthens the ability to access and exercise collective power. In order to better advocate for cooperation within the family women and men should be encouraged to share land, because giving women separate land and the sole responsibility for it will support a feminization of family responsibilities. To allow women to expand their status within both productive and reproductive work, I would recommend training men as caretakers in order to also expand their status in reproductive work. This will facilitate stronger cooperation between husband and wife within the family.

I would also recommend CSRC to agree on the Kusasi word they use to describe empowerment, because conflicting definitions can create confusion and have consequences for the process of empowerment in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix I Discussion Guide Group A

Dimension 1: The frame of the support given by CSRC

1. Can you please describe the project (women's rights to access and control land) given by CSRC? (How many meetings, how often)
2. When did you take part of the project given by CSRC? How long have you benefited?
3. How did you hear about it? How long have you known about the project/organization. Have you been given any training before?
4. Was it your decision to take part in it?
5. Why did you decide to take part in it?
6. Was there any preconditions set up by the CSRC for participating?
7. In what way does it provide support? Type of support; gift, loan. What is the time frame of the support? (How often?)
8. In what way has the support offered by CSRC been helpful? How do you benefit from it?
9. Has the support of CSRC, when it comes to access to land, given you challenges?
10. Do you feel the project is designed for you? Were you consulted before the project was designed?
11. In your opinion, how could the work of CSRC be improved/ strengthened to support you more in your everyday life?
12. Looking back, before the support of CSRC what was the main challenges you had to face when it comes to access to land and cultivation of land? Does it provide more opportunities now?
    What about within your family (husband-wives-children); how did the main challenges and opportunities affect the family?
13. Looking forward what do you think will be the outcome of engaging in the project?

Dimension 2: Definition of Empowerment and Gender

1. Do you know the term empowerment?
2. Does it exist a term for it in your community? Please describe empowerment.
3. The project aims to give you more power. You can use power to many things:
   - To take control
   - To strengthen you from inside
   - To cooperate with other community members
   - To bring about change
   Please, rank them in time of importance. Which of them do you feel the project is supporting?
4. In your opinion, is there a final destination for empowerment or is it part of an on-going process that will change according to time?
5. Do you feel empowered?
   - Do you feel you are able to make choices in order to change your life?

- Take part in decision-making
- Negotiate for power

6. Do you know the term gender? How do you understand the term gender?
   - Are there some activities and responsibilities when it comes to cultivation of the land that is gender specific? Can you please explain?

Main research question: How is the emphasis on empowerment of women influence their ability to improve their room for manoeuvring within the family?

1. Can you please describe your average working day when it comes to agricultural production? Please draw a daily timeline.
   - What are the most challenging tasks during the day? Please rank the challenges in times of importance.
   - Has something changed after you got support from CSRC to access land?
2. Please describe how your family organize the agricultural production. (Who has responsibility for what?) What are the most important priorities of your family during the rainy season? Please rank them after time of importance.
   - What is your responsibility within the family when it comes to agricultural production?
   - What are the main opportunities derived from the project when it comes to agricultural production?
   - What are the main challenges? Please rank the challenges in time of importance.
   - How has the support offered by CSRC changed this? In what way? Are you satisfied with the changes?
3. How is the emphasis on women empowerment supporting your ability to improve the room to manoeuver? Opportunities/Limitations
4. Please describe challenges and opportunities you have in the family when it comes to agricultural production.

Sub question: How does women empowerment lead to changing gender relations and what are the consequences of this?

1. Which role do you have in the family?
   - Describe your role as a wife from sunrise to sunset.
   - How is the relationship with the husband? Do you understand each other?
   - Does your husband give you encouragement and support?
   - What does your husband do for you in domestic work (fetching water, child-care, to get labour in harvesting)
2. How is the level of cooperation in the family?
   - If you need help to complete the responsibilities within the family, who do you ask for help?
   - How are the decisions when it comes to agricultural production taken in the family? Who decides where and what to plant on the land?
   - Are you able to take part in decision-making? Can you influence the decisions? In what way?

3. How is the level of quarrels when it comes to decision-making about the cultivation of land) in your family?
   - Are you able to discuss issues and challenges that you face with your husband?
   - Are there quarrels between you and your husband? What are they about?
   - When do quarrels become conflict? What are the reasons for that?
   - How are the quarrels solved?
4. Has the support of CSRC when it comes to access land, changed your relationship with the husband? In what way?
   - Has it affected the level of discussions and quarrels between husband and wife within the family when it comes to agricultural production? Why/why not?
   - Has it affected the level of cooperation between husband and wife in the family when it comes to agricultural production? Why/why not?
   - Do you think your husband because you get this type of support?

Appendix II Discussion Guide Group B

Dimension 1: The frame of the support given by CSRC

1. Please can you tell me what you know about the support given by CSRC to assure women access and control over land? Can you please describe the project? (How many meetings, how often)
2. How did you hear about it? How long have you known about the project.
3. When did your wife take part of the project given by CSRC? How long have you benefited?
4. Have you been given any training from CSRC?
5. Who decided to take part in the project that tries to promote women's rights to land? Did you influence the decision? Did you support the decision? Why did your wife take part in it?
6. Were there any preconditions set up by the CSRC for participating?
7. In what way does it provide support? Type of support; gift, loan. What is the time frame and frequency of the support? (How often?)
8. In what way has the support offered by CSRC been helpful when it comes to agricultural production? How do you benefit from it?
9. Has the support of CSRC when it comes to give women access to land, given you challenges?
10. Do you feel the project is designed for you? Were you consulted before the project was designed?
11. In your opinion, how could the work of CSRC be improved/ strengthened to support you more in the everyday life?
12. Looking back, before the support of CSRC what was the main challenges you had to face when it comes to agricultural production? Does it provide more opportunities now? What about within your family (husband-wives-children); how did the main challenges and opportunities affect the family?
13. Looking forward what do you think will be the outcome of the project?

Dimension 2: Definition of Empowerment and Gender

1. Do you know the term empowerment?
2. Does it exist a term for it in your community? Please describe empowerment.
3. The project aims to give you more power. You can use power to many things:
   - To take control
   - To strengthen you from inside
   - To cooperate with other community members
   - To bring about change
   Rank them in time of importance. Which of them do you feel the project (women's access to land) is supporting?
4. In your opinion, is there a final outcome of empowerment or is it part of an on-going process that will change according to time?
5. Do you feel empowered?

- Do you feel you are able to make choices in order to change your life?
- Take part in decision-making
- Negotiate for power

6. Do you know the term gender? How do you understand the term gender?
    - Are there some activities and responsibilities when it comes to cultivation of the land that is gender specific? Can you please explain?

7. Some projects aim to support people in their everyday life by reducing gender inequality. Do you agree with this? Why/why not?

Main research question: How is the emphasis on empowerment of women influence their ability to improve their room for manoeuvring within the family?

1. Can you please describe your average working day when it comes to agricultural production? Please draw a daily timeline.
    - What are the most challenging tasks during the day? Please rank the challenges in times of importance.
    - Has something changed after the women got support from CSRC to access land?

2. Please describe how your family organize the agricultural production. (Who has the responsibility for what)
    - What are the most important priorities of your family during the rainy season? Please rank them after time of importance.
    - What is your responsibility within the family when it comes to agricultural production?
    - What are the main opportunities derived from the project when it comes to agricultural production?
    - What are the main challenges? Please rank the challenges in time of importance.
    - How has the support offered by CSRC changed this? In what way? Are you satisfied with the changes?

3. Please describe challenges and opportunities you have in the family when it comes to agricultural production.
    - How do you overcome the challenges? Why do you do it this way?
    - Are you able to take the opportunities that exist?

Sub question: How does women empowerment lead to changing gender relations and what are the consequences of this?

1. Which role do you have in the family (when it comes to agricultural production?)
    - Describe your role as a husband.
    - How is the relationship with the wife (s)? Do you understand each other?
    - Does your wife (s) give you encouragement and support?
    - What does your wife (s) do for you in the agriculture sector?

2. How is the level of cooperation in the family? (when it comes to agricultural production)
    - If you need help to complete the responsibilities within the family, who do you ask for help?

- How are the decisions, when it comes to agricultural production, taken in the family? Who decides where and what to plant on the land? When to harvest?
- Are you able to take part in decision-making? Can you influence the decisions? In what way?

3. How is the level of quarrels when it comes to decision-making about the cultivation of land in your family?
   - Are you able to discuss issues and challenges that you face with your wife/ wives?
   - Are there quarrels between you and your wife /wives? What are they about?
   - When do quarrels become conflict? What are the reasons for that?
   - How are the quarrels solved?

4. Has the support of CSRC when it comes to access land, changed your relationship with your wife/ wives? In what way?
   - Has it affected the level of discussions and quarrels between husband and wife within the family when it comes to agricultural production? Why/why not?
   - Has it affected the level of cooperation between husband and wife in the family when it comes to agricultural production? Why/why not?
   - Can the empowerment of the women be of a threat to the men?

Appendix III Discussion Guide Group C

Dimension 1: The frame of the support given by CSRC

1. Do you know Community Self-Reliance Centre? Please can you tell me what you know about the support given by CSRC to assure women access and control over land in Nagbere.
2. If yes, how did you hear about it? How long have you known about the organization and their work to assure women's rights?
3. Why do you not take part in the projects offered by CSRC?
   - Was it your decision to not take part in it?
4. Were you given a chance to take part in the project? Do you wish you would have been able to take part?
5. Have you been given any training from them?
6. Do you know of any preconditions set up by the CSRC for participating?
7. What do you think about the work of CSRC?
8. In what way does it provide support? Type of support; gift, loan. What is the frequency of the support? (How often?)
9. Do you know somebody taking part in the project? In what way do you think the support offered by CSRC to access land has been helpful for them? Do you think the support of CSRC has given them challenges?
10. Do you feel the project is designed in a way that can also fit your community?
11. In your opinion, how could the work of CSRC be improved/ strengthened to support you more in the everyday life?
12. In your community what is the main challenges you have to face when it comes to your role in agricultural production? Does it exist opportunities to develop the agricultural production?
    What about the inside the family; what were the main challenges and opportunities before?
13. Looking forward what do you think will be the outcome of the women's access to land support?

Dimension 2: Definition of Empowerment and Gender

1. Do you know the term empowerment?
2. Does it exist a term for it in your community? Please describe empowerment.
3. You can use power to many things:
   - To take control
   - To strengthen you from inside
   - To cooperate with other community members
   - To bring about change
   Rank them in time of importance.
4. Is there a final destination (outcome of) for empowerment or is it part of an on-going process that will change according to time and situation?

- Do you feel empowered? Do you feel you are able to make choices in order to change your life?
- Take part in decision-making
- Negotiate for power

5. In your community what is the major bottlenecks for empowerment?
6. Do you know the term gender? How do you understand the term gender?
   - In your community, are there some activities and responsibilities when it comes to cultivation of the land that is gender specific?
   - Why is it important to focus on the different needs of women and men in order to give participants the best support?
7. The project offered to community members of Nagbere aims to support them in their everyday life by reducing gender inequality. Do you agree with this strategy? Why?

Main research question: How is the emphasis on empowerment of women influence their ability to improve their room for manoeuvring within the family?.

1. Can you please describe your average working day when it comes to agricultural production? Please draw a daily timeline.
   - What are the most challenging tasks during the day? Please rank the challenges in times of importance.
2. Please describe how your family organize the agricultural production. (Who has responsibility for what)
   - What are the most important priorities of your family during the rainy season? Please rank them after time of importance.
   - What is your responsibility within the family when it comes to agricultural production?
3. Please describe challenges and opportunities you have in the family when it comes to agricultural production.
   - How do you overcome the challenges? Why do you do it this way?
   - Are you able to take the opportunities that exist?
4. Can you please describe your room to manoeuver within the family? Room to manoeuver: room where you deal with opportunities and challenges.
   What limits your room to manoeuver within the family?

Sub question: How does women empowerment lead to changing gender relations and what are the consequences of this?

1.
   - Describe your role as a wife.
   - How is the relationship with the husband? Do you understand each other?
   - Does your husband give you encouragement and support?
   - What does your husband do for you in domestic work (fetching water, child-care, to get labour in harvesting)
2. How is the level of cooperation in the family? (when it comes to agricultural production)

- If you need help to complete the responsibilities within the family, who do you ask for help?
- How are the decisions when it comes to agricultural production taken in the family? Who decides where and what to plant on the land?
- Are you able to take part in decision-making? Can you influence the decisions? In what way?

3. How is the level of quarrels when it comes to decision-making about cultivation of the land in your family?
   - Are you able to discuss issues and challenges that you face with your husband? "Yes, we are able to confront them."
   - Are there quarrels between you and your husband? What are they about?
   - When do quarrels become conflict? What are the reasons for that?
   - How are the quarrels solved?

4. Has the relationship with your husband changed in time (the last 10 years)? In what way?
   - In the past, how was the level of discussions and quarrels between husband and wife within the family when it comes to agricultural production?
   - In the past, how was the level of cooperation between husband and wife in the family when it comes to agricultural production?

Appendix IV Indebt interview with Key-informants

<u>Introduction</u>
> What is your name?
1. What is your position in CSRC?
2. What is your task?
3. How long have you worked here and how did you get the job?

<u>CSRC</u>
4. When did African Initiatives start supporting CSRC?
5. Where do the Women Rights and Domestic Violence Campaign get its funding?
6. In your opinion what are the strengths of the organisation?

<u>CSRS and the women empowerment project</u>
7. Please describe the women rights campaign with emphasis on access and control over land.
8. What is the timeframe of the project?
9. Why did you choose to work in Nagbere?
10. What are the objectives of the campaign?
11. How was the process of establishing the project, who were consulted?
12. How did you enter into Nagbere?
13. What are the conditions for participating? (Married, widows, age, religion ect.)
14. What type of support is given to the women? (gift/loan)
15. What is the frequency of support (How often during a month?)
      Funding
16. How is the project funded? Are there any conditions how to use the money?
- **Empowerment and gender**
17. How do you understand empowerment?
18. How long have the organisation been working with empowerment /using the concept?
19. What do you think are the major bottlenecks for empowerment in Nagbere?
20. How can they be solved?
21. How do you understand gender?
22. Why is it important to draw on gender trying to achieve development?
23. What are the challenges CSRC face challenging gender inequalities?

<u>About the communities they work in</u>
24. Is Nagbere special?
25. How many people live there?
26. In the establishment of the women's Rights Access to land, what type of challenges was there?
27. Is it more difficult to work in a community that follow different religions?
28. What do you think about transferring knowledge from Nagbere to other communities in the area?
29. Norfing also exists in Nagbere, who are they?