

## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN SIRIGU THROUGH ECOTOURISM IN THE KASENA-NANKANA EAST DISTRICT OF GHANA

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses a study that evaluated the socio-politico-economic status of women in Sirigu. The women are engaged in the promotion of their age-long cultural traditions espoused through pottery, painting, basketry and values as an alternative means to securing their livelihoods. Employing a case study approach, the study made use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in data collection and analysis. All 450 women participants, who were members of the Sirigu Women's Organization for pottery and Art (SWOPA), were contacted through a questionnaire administration. Furthermore, 10 leaders of the community were also engaged through in-depth interview (IDI) schedules. The study revealed that members of SWOPA were empowered socially, psychologically, economically and politically. The study also revealed periodic refresher training opportunities availed at the centre to women as a contemporary benefit. It is recommended that the youth of Sirigu especially the girls, be encouraged to join the arts and crafts apprenticeship to ensure the continuity of the traditional heritage pioneered by the women of SWOPA. It is also suggested that the relevant government agencies should be proactive in attempts at organizing annual exhibitions for women groups to take opportunity and showcase their works to a larger audience for better patronage.*

**Keywords:** SWOPA, Women's Empowerment, Ecotourism, Art and Craft, Culture, Sirigu

### Background

The concept of women's empowerment shot into the limelight due to feminist critiques and debates on the existing paradigms. Discontent with the largely apolitical and economist 'Women in Development (WID)', 'Women and Development (WAD)' and 'Gender and Development (GAD)' models in prevailing development interventions of the 1970s and 1980s, Third World feminist in particular called for a paradigm shift that centres women's empowerment (Tandon, 2016). Empowerment as a concept is characterized by a shift from a deficit-oriented to a more strength-oriented perception. The former victimizes while the latter is emancipatory and thus agentic. Tandon explains empowerment in its emancipatory meaning as a word which brings up the question of personal urgency, one that links actions to needs and results in collective change. Empowerment, according to Tandon, also aims to bring out a broader analysis of human rights and social justice.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) defines the concept, "women empowerment," as a process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices. They classify education, training and awareness-raising as well as the building of self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality, as important tools for empowering women and girls to claim their right (EIGE, 2018). The EIGE categorizes women's empowerment into five components; namely, (i) The women's sense of self-worth (ii) Their right to have and to determine choices (iii) Their right to have and access to opportunities and resources (iv) Their right to have power to control their own lives both within and outside the home and finally, (v) Their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a

more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. Internationally, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (2002) agreed on eradicating poverty through the empowerment of women throughout their life cycle in a globalizing world. The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights, condition for social justice and ways to building a sustainable, just and developed society (See Beijing Declaration, 1995).

In Africa, there are several countries that have embarked on initiatives for empowering women. In Kenya for instance, policies are implemented to eradicate gender-based discrimination and violence against women such as rape and sex trafficking. Zimbabwe offers its women legal protection on domestic violence and sex harassment related issues. In Mozambique and Burundi, there is an implementation of government policies such as the family code which allows for gender equality in family matters. There had also been a fair increase in the employment of women into the non-agricultural sector in South Africa (also see African Union on the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, 2004). More recently, speaking on a women's empowerment platform, Women Deliver 2019 Conference held in Vancouver in Canada, Miss Natasha Wang Mwansa of Zambia pointed out that social accountability and capacity building were key elements to women empowerment in communities the world over.

In Ghana, demographic records reveal that females far outnumber males. According to the Ghana Statistical Service [GSS] (2013), females constitute 51.2% of the country's total population. The 2014 Demographic and Health Survey (GSS, 2013) also indicates that about one-third (33.8%) of all households in the country are headed by women, with higher proportions (37.1%) in urban compared to rural areas (29.8%). These statistics suggest that females constitute a substantial percentage of wage earners in many families and participate fully in the economic and social development of the country, even as their contribution is frequently undervalued in national accounts (see Roles, Representations and Perceptions of Women, ISSER Final Report for SLIG Project, 2016). Similarly, the Women's Manifesto for Ghana (2004, p.10) has noted: "Years of colonial domination and poor economic policies since independence have made Ghana underdeveloped and poor". The manifesto further says again that "certain ecological zones and social groups such as women, children and the disabled have suffered particular forms of hardship" (p.12).

Tourism/ecotourism at the local, regional and international levels in each country has become a force to reckon with especially as it is noted to corroborate with the lives of the poor and destitute women in order to enhance their economic prospects and improve their self-esteem (Rout, 2015). As the fastest growing industry, tourism indeed has shown potential in not only contributing to but also championing women empowerment. In this regard in particular, the UNWTO (2008) for example, reveals that women make 60-70% of the total tourism workforce, but again the main contention here is that most of these jobs are usually menial. The Global Report on Women in Tourism 2010 confirms that tourism can act as a vehicle for the empowerment of women whilst highlighting the remaining challenges for gender equality in tourism. The UNWTO along with UN Women, a division of the UN working towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, has been working towards enhancing the positive impact of tourism on women's lives and to bring gender issues to the forefront of the tourism industry. Many NGOs, such as the *Maseualsiuamej Mosenyolchicauani (Indigenous Women Acting Together)* in Mexico, and the Kenya Association of Women in Tourism (KAWT), work towards raising awareness of women in the tourism industry and giving women the opportunity to advance in the field.

Elsewhere, Ong, (2009) clearly reveals how tourism, with the embedded element of social entrepreneurship, can perfectly work as the key to unlock doors for women. From the aforementioned examples, it is therefore undoubtable that tourism especially community-based and rural-tourism has created chances and opportunities for women empowerment. In fact, a joint UNWTO/UN Women report "*Global Report on Women in Tourism 2010*" (p.48) explains the empowerment bit further as follows:

*Tourism can also help poor women break the poverty cycle through formal and informal employment, entrepreneurship, training and community betterment, not all women are benefitting equally from tourism development. In some cases, lack of education and resources may prevent the poorest women from benefitting from tourism development. While in some regions tourism helps empower women, in other regions, tourism negatively affects the lives of women and perpetuates existing economic and gender inequalities".*

Thus, Women's empowerment can be achieved successfully through distinct forms of tourism such as rural tourism, ethnic tourism, tribal tourism and ecotourism. Women who are members of the Sirigu Women

Organization for Pottery and Arts (SWOPA) Project (an association) in the Kasena-Nankana East District of the Upper East Region are no exception. They engage in pottery, painting, basket weaving, batik tie and dye as well as the production of other cultural artifacts. SWOPA has established an ecotourism centre aimed at empowering women with skills in art works. The centre generates revenue and uses this to empower women financially as well as promote the arts, crafts and culture of the community. The organization also aims to restore the local traditions and culture, bring into the limelight the old and pristine arts and crafts of the forebears of Sirigu. In the context of this background, it is only prudent that the women members of SWOPA who live with and manage the ecotourism project are put on the 'spotlight' to underscore the role of the project in empowering women by asking such critical questions as: how are women empowered through their engagements in tourism/ecotourism related activities in Sirigu? What are the various ways through which women are empowered through art and craft related ecotourism? And are there cultural barriers debarring women empowerment in the community at large? This is what the study sets out to uncover.

### **Problem statement**

According to the UNWTO (2010), women constitute a majority of the tourism workforce, but they tend to be in the least paid positions and are given the lowest job statuses. In order to promote gender equality, empowering women should be the utmost goal of the tourism industry through creating opportunities for women and spreading awareness of gender issues in order for women to empower themselves, and seek a better quality of life for themselves, their families and their communities. More women than men live in poverty (UNFPA, 2008), more so after toiling hard, the woman gets lower priority and sometimes remain unpaid. So those women face discrimination in the economic sphere every day, and sometimes struggle for some economic independence. It is also true that rural art and craft works enhances the souvenir trade but these notwithstanding some authors have critiqued the lack of creativity in these works which hampers their sales potential.

The Sirigu Women for Pottery and Art (SWOPA) Project works to improve the access to innovative skills and production funds for the promotion of the pottery and art. Pottery and art are the traditional heritage of the people of Sirigu and its environs. Over the years, SWOPA has mobilized the women toward the promotion of their traditional art and pottery as alternative livelihoods. Unfortunately, even the paintings portrayed by these women on walls of their houses depict the status of women as subservient to men in the community. The women paint men upright, which symbolizes strength while women are painted lying down, a sign of weakness. Such depictions do not reflect the empowerment paradigm for which SWOPA mobilizes the women. The significance of this study lies in the fact that findings of it will help champion women empowerment issues by policy makers for consideration in national policy formulation with respect to developing and implementation of interventions and programmes with a view to "driving women empowerment through ecotourism development" which was the theme for the maiden edition of the Women in Tourism Summit in Ghana held at the Accra International Conference Centre (AICC) on the 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018 geared towards making women key players in the twin sectors of tourism/ecotourism and hospitality.

### **Women's Empowerment: What the Literature Says**

Within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report (1995), women's empowerment has been defined as the expansion of choices for women and an increase in the women's ability to exercise choices. Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) also note that empowerment is the enhancing of an individual's or group's capacity to make choices and transform. Kabeer (1989) also posited that empowerment is a redial transformation of power relations between women and men so that women have greater power over their own lives and men have less power over women's lives. Empowerment is also seen as improved capabilities and entitlements which help people to exercise rights and opportunities of full participation in society (Sen, 1998).

Rosaline (1989) as cited in Assimeng (1990) sees empowerment as: a process by which people, women in this case, acquire real powers and command real resources within their locality; by that means recognized power over material resources and recognized power institutionalized within the political structure. It constitutes an affirmation of confidence that one has the tools, the mechanisms and the resources to make decisions capable of solving one's problems. The literature also associates empowerment with personal control. For instance, Rappaport (2002:p.119) points out that empowerment should mean, "Enhancing the possibilities for people to control their own lives". Cochran (2003) believes that people understand their own needs far better than anyone else and as a result should have the power both to define and act upon them. Kwapong (2008) in contributing to the debate opines that empowerment entails the ability and freedom to make choices in the social, political, and

economic arenas. From the above definitions and interpretations, the concept of women empowerment connotes women's independence in terms of access to productive resources that enable them to wean themselves off abject poverty and to contribute effectively towards the upkeep of the family especially taking care of their children's education and health needs but on the other hand, Baden, Green, Naana and Peasgood (1994) contend that different ethnic groups are characterized by a variety of kinship systems with different implications for access to resources and decision making power by gender.

### ***Women's Empowerment through Ecotourism***

According to Zareba (2010), ecotourism is a brilliant opportunity for women to grow both professionally and personally, while remaining to be part of the local community where they live and work. Ecotourism is based on the local resources, heritage and uniqueness of a place and so it allows women to find sustainable livelihood that brings economic benefits and personal satisfaction. In this regard, Gender Empowerment Measure (1995) has stated that economic empowerment includes having control over income and family resources, ownership of assets, access to markets and representation of women in particular in economic decision making roles. Zareba (2010) further mentioned women of the Central and Eastern Europe in an example as women who were working as mayors, NGO activists, local government officials, teachers and entrepreneurs and this enabled these women to initiate sustainable tourism related projects, especially in a case of ecotourism and heritage tourism development. However, past development initiatives, including ecotourism, have often also seen women's voices sidelined as development consultants, researchers and government officers seek the opinions of village heads or chiefs, the vast majority of whom are men or consult village development committees which have no female members (Scheyvens, 2000).

Several studies have been conducted on the dimensions of women empowerments. Meanwhile when considering whether or not a community has been empowered by an ecotourism venture, Scheyvens (1999) stated that it is necessary to consider four dimensions of empowerment; namely: Social, Psychological and Economic and Political empowerments.

***Social Empowerment:*** Combaz and Mcloughlin (2014) explain social empowerment as the process of developing a sense of autonomy and self-confidence as well as having a sense of identity, leadership relations and social belongingness. Scheyvens (2000) mentioned social empowerment as a situation in which a community's sense of cohesion and integrity has been confirmed or strengthened by an activity such as ecotourism. A tangible expression of social empowerment can also be seen when ecotourism indirectly or directly results in greater local access to services, such as water supplies or health clinics. According to Lama (1998) women's groups use tourism as a source of revenue for community projects and gave an example of the Langtang women of Nepal who performed cultural dances for tourists and used the funds to raise and restore their local monastery within the community. When discussing the Langtang Ecotourism Project in Nepal, similarly, Scheyvens (2000) unveils that women are the 'keepers of cultural traditions and knowledge' because many men found employment in towns or with trekking parties and were away from home for longer periods of time. Women maintained the traditions and therefore built strong communities through supporting religious functions, producing handicrafts, speaking local dialects, wearing traditional dresses and performed the traditional songs and dances when guests came visiting. Batool (2017) in contributing to the discussion on social empowerment of women indicates that it is necessary for them to be empowered through the works they do and find these meaningful. Batool further opined that meaningfulness of work becomes second to none because it corresponds to life satisfaction when seeking to empower women psychologically.

***Psychological Empowerment:*** Psychological empowerment refers to an individual's ability to make decisions and have control over his or her personal life characterized by a sense of perceived control, competence and internalization (Masi, et. al. 2003). According to scheyvens (2000), when ecotourism is developed in a culturally sensitive manner, there seems to be a good chance that it will lead to psychological empowerment. Furthermore, women are often at the centre of efforts to preserve aspects of tradition. Swain (1993: 49) mentioned in an example that claims that "the production of ethnic art by Kuna women in Panama and Sani women of China serves as a viable way to resist cultural assimilation". Scheyvens (2000) further again discussed the Langtang Ecotourism Project in Nepal and notes that ecotourism initiatives which respect and show interest in aspects of traditional culture can, therefore, be empowering for local people. On the contrary, Scheyvens notes again that psychological disempowerment can also occur if the ecotourism development makes local people feel that they are somehow inadequate or inferior, or if they feel they have no control over the pace and direction of

development. In this regard, a local community which is optimistic about the future, has faith in the abilities of its women, and is thus relatively self-reliant and demonstrates pride in traditions and culture, and can be said to be psychologically powerful. In many small-scale, less industrialized societies, preservation of aspects of tradition is extremely important in terms of maintaining a group's sense of self-esteem and well-being (Mansperger, 1995) but despite the significant roles played by women in maintaining traditional institutions, Kamal (2015), is of the view that diverse cultures of the world have also got within them systems that create an environment for women discrimination.

**Economic Empowerment:** Economic empowerment is also related to a community's access to productive resources in an area targeted by ecotourism. When ecotourism focuses on preservation of natural resources, economic livelihoods of local people may be threatened. For example, the establishment of protected areas in Africa has often reduced access to hunting and agricultural lands and it may also lead to an increase in the number of wildlife species such as elephants, which threaten people's crops (Ashley & Roe, 1997). Scheyvens (1999b) also alluded to the fact that because women carry out a lot of the day to day work in tending crops whilst also collecting water from areas where wild animals come to water, thus making them particularly vulnerable to attacks from such animals. However, Gupta and Shah (1999) mentioned women in Himachal Pradesh, India, who formed groups to rally against use of wood for fuel by tourism enterprises, even when men made money by selling wood in this way. They have also become actively involved in joint forest management programmes in areas where tourism has placed increasing pressure on the scarce resources, thus stopping illegal felling of trees. Aside from the provision of resources to empower women, it is also a truism that women in many places in Africa have been deprived of formal education for long and in this regard, the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education (2005) stipulated that providing non-formal education related skills for women especially in the rural areas, who missed formal education in life will help promote gender equality through the provision of vocational and life skills related trainings. This has become necessary because women in many parts of the rural world were deprived of education and economic opportunities because of cultural conservatism and patriarchal attitudes of the society towards the women (Mussaret & Anwar, 2005).

**Political Empowerment:** It is a well-known fact that women constitute half the human race and so to be liberated, they are not to first of all see themselves in rivalry with men but instead in the context of their own capacity, women should be more interested, alive and active in the affairs of society (Devi & Lakshmi, 2005). Scheyvens (2000) argued that if women are to be politically empowered through ecotourism, their voices and their concerns should guide the development of any ecotourism project rising from the feasibility stage through to its implementation. Women should also be involved in monitoring and evaluating the project over time and participate in broader decision-making processes. It is contained in the literature that, most of the ecotourism activities in Abai Village (Thailand) are engaged or managed by women and their participation was seen as vital for the success of the homestay project in the Community Abai Project (CAP) in Thailand. In CAP management, women participants had full rights in decision making in the village ecotourism activities. In this community a woman is the head of the CAP organization and further claims are that women are able to take up multiple roles both as domestic workers and homestay operators and the political structure at the village level gave women the exclusive rights to participate fully in decision making process especially in matters that related to ecotourism development (Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2016).

## Methodology

### *Study Area*

Sirigu is located in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The community is located in the eastern part of the Kasena-Nankana East District which shares boundary with the Bongo District to the east. The village comprises five communities; namely: Guwonkor, Busongor, Wuingo, Nyangolgo and Basengo. It is a rural community located about 31km away from Bolgatanga, the Upper East Regional capital and it covers an area of about 1,675 km<sup>2</sup> (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). There are two main seasons; the first season is characterized by warm, dusty, dry and hazy harmattan which blows from the Sahara Desert during late November to early March which indicates the period of absence of rainfall. Temperatures are usually modest by tropical standards (26<sup>o</sup>C 28<sup>o</sup>C). The second season, a wet season which starts from May to October (Ghana Meteorological Service Department, Bolga, 2010) is the time which the local people in the area are able to plough their land and plant for food and vegetables to feed families. The vegetation of the area is mainly Guinea savanna consisting of semi-arid scrubland with natural vegetation limited to widely spaced trees, shrubs, and grasses. The main occupation of the people is subsistence farming of predominantly millet, sorghum, and groundnuts which have consistently

declined in yield because of soil depletion, and they also keep herds of cattle, flocks of goats and sheep, including poultry and guinea fowls (Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 2008). Figure 1 depicts a map of the Upper East Region showing the location of Sirigu in the region in Ghana.

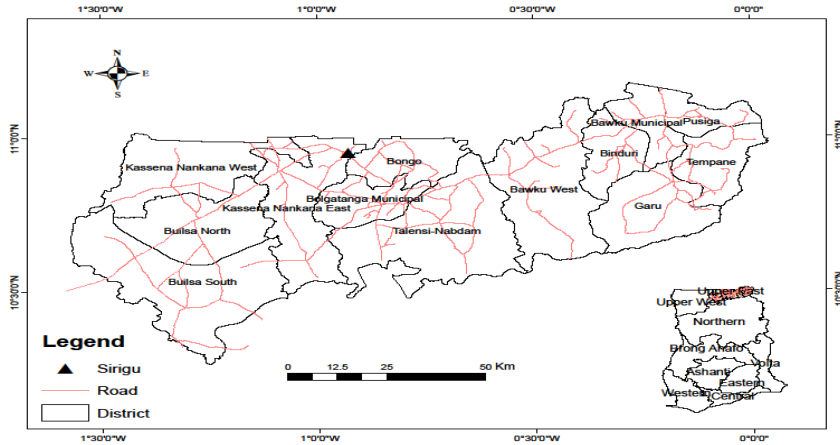


Figure 1: Map showing the location of Sirigu in the UER of Ghana

Source: Cartography Unit, Dept. of Forests and Forest Resources Management [UDS] (2019)

Retail of commodities such as foodstuff, sheabutter and handicraft items made by women is also a common economic activity mostly undertaken by the women in the community. There are also a few salaried workers working as teachers in the primary, JHS and SHS. There are three main religious groups (Christians, Muslims and Traditional groups). The Christians are mostly Catholics. The Traditional groups make up the majority in population with Muslims being the least in the community. Their traditions give rise to the artworks they do which attracts visitors. The main language spoken among the people of Sirigu is the Nankam language. It is a language of the Gur family belonging to a larger group of languages that are historically related to the Niger-Congo languages (Naden, 1988).

#### *Tourism Potentials of Study Area*

With regard to tourism potentials, the Sirigu community is well known for its basketry, pottery, traditional architecture and wall paintings. The Sirigu Women Organization in Pottery and Arts (SWOPA) houses an ecologically friendly accommodation centre which provides a comfortable home for tourists at its guesthouse. The organization was founded by Madam Melanie Kasise (a retired educationist) to serve as a “vehicle” for empowering the women of Sirigu through the production of quality canvas painting, basket wares, pottery and art in order to serve as an income generation venture and to also preserve the traditional art forms and culture of the community. The facility also houses a tourist (visitor) information centre and a showroom where the wares of the women are exhibited for sale to visitors. There are demonstrations areas where sheabutter processing is done therein. Visitors take interest in learning the sheabutter extraction process and also buy the handicrafts as souvenirs. The traditional art and pottery of Sirigu are the creations of the women of the community and they use the natural colours of the earth including traditional motifs to beautify their houses. The pots they mould are multipurpose and of diverse designs (see figure 1). Some of the popular moulds are kitchenware, storage ware, decorative or gift items (souvenirs) including ritual ware (Kwoyiga and Apusiga (2017).



Figure 2: Women artist at work producing pots, baskets, wall paintings and canvas painting at the SWOPA centre

### Study Sample

The target population of the study was women who belong to the SWOPA association and who are all engaged in craftworks. The study also solicited views from some key informants such as the communal leaders (chief, elders, assemblyman in the Sirigu community). The sample size of the women working at the Sirigu Women's Organization for Pottery and Art (SWOPA) was determined using the census approach. The study aimed at studying every unit or everyone in the population since the target population involves only women hence the need to use the census approach. In this approach, every item in the universe is selected for data collection and the universe might constitute a particular place, a group of people and any specific locality which is the complete set of items which are of interest to any particular situation or study. One of the advantages of this approach is the accuracy element as each unit is studied before drawing conclusions and results based on this are less biased (Business Jargons, 2019). Thus, the census approach was deemed to provide this study with a true measure of the population and detailed information about small subgroups (according to expertise) as sourced in the community. SWOPA has a membership of 450 women and all were contacted for the study as captured in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Sample Size Determination

Category of Craft Expertise	Number
Pottery	210
Canvas Painting	82
Mat and Fibre treatment	27
Basketry	93
Batik, tie and dye	38
Total	450

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Most of the respondents were met at the SWOPA centre when they report for duty but some others also were traced to their homes using the snowball method to elicit their responses. Aside from the members of SWOPA, the study also contacted some key informants (male respondents) such as the chief, the assembly man and two elders to elicit information on how they think women are empowered through ecotourism in the community.

### Study Design

The research design used was a case study approach based on a descriptive cross-sectional design. The choice of case study approach is as result of many reasons. Among these are: 1) it views the phenomenon under study as a unique case within a given physical, socio-cultural, economic and political context and seeks to collect data in

order to explain patterns and relationships existing under specific context, 2) it offers the opportunity to critically examine the units of analysis in detail and in context, 3) it also ensures precision and strengthens alternative explanations identified from other sources. Case study research is aimed at enabling the investigator to grasp and understand an individual, a group, a community, a social situation or an issue in order to take decisions that take into consideration the special and peculiar circumstances surrounding the case being investigated (Kumekpor, 2002).

#### *Data Collection and Analysis Techniques*

Interview schedules/guides were used to elicit information from the field during the research. The IDI schedules were used to obtain information from the leaders while members of SWOPA were contacted with the use of questionnaire. The data collection lasted a period of one month spanning December 30 through to January 30, 2019. Administered questionnaires was examined after data collection to check for completeness, accuracy and consistency of responses in order to detect and eliminate errors. Microsoft office Excel (2013) was used to process the quantitative data. The data was processed into statistical tables and charts for interpretation and discussion. Processed data was then analyzed and discussed with the qualitative responses serving to augment the quantitative data gathered.

### **Results Analysis and Discussion**

#### *Demographic characteristics of Members of SWOPA*

The demographic characteristics of the 450 respondents (women) who were members of SWOPA is shown in Table 2. The survey revealed 2% of the women were aged between 25-34 years, 8% aged between 35-44 years, 52% were between the ages of 45-54 years and 38% fell between the ages of 55 years and above. The survey showed women from Guwonkor sub-community were in the majority (75%) and also found traditionalist to be in the majority (64%) probably the reason accounting for why they still stick passionately to traditional arts and crafts. Majority of the women (84%) had no formal education where as 16% had just primary level of education. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of the women were married, 4% were divorcees while 24% were widowed.

The results again analyzed from the data and indicated in Table 2 reveals that 210 of the women were into pottery. Out of these, 4 were between the ages of 25-34 years, 25 fell within 35-44 years, 154 were also between 45-54 years and these formed the majority while 27 were above 54 years. A total of 93 were into basketry out of which 58% of them were between 45-54 years. The women who were into painting were 82 in total and out of this 24 of them (about 30%) fell within 45-54 age cohorts and 53 (representing 65%) were above 54 years. The survey revealed majority of the women (52%) were between the ages of 45-54, followed by women between ages 55 years and above (38%). This result is an indication that there is a lack of interest among the youth in the art and craftwork trade in Sirigu.



Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of women in SWOPA N=450

Variables	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>	25-34 years	9	2
	35-44 years	36	8
	45-54 years	234	52
	Above 54 years	171	38
<b>Section of community</b>	Guwonkor	336	75
	Basengo	114	25
<b>Educational Status</b>	None	380	84
	Primary	70	16
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	310	69
	Divorced	19	4
	Widowed	121	27
<b>Religion</b>	Christian	162	36
	Traditional	288	64
<b>Expertise in SWOPA</b>	Pottery	210	47
	Painting	82	18
	Mat/Fibre	27	6
	treatment	93	21
	Basketry	38	8
	Batik tie and dye		

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

The revelation that majority of the women (84%) had no formal education seems to confirm the claim that women in many parts of the rural world are deprived of education and economic opportunities because of cultural conservatism and patriarchal attitudes of the society towards women (Mussaret & Anwar, 2005). This result could also imply the low educational level of the women is probably one of the reasons for which the ecotourism facility was established to empower women in Sirigu who were not privileged to gain access to formal education. Hence skills training through non-formal method were given through the SWOPA centre. An interviewee during IDI stated as follows:

*SWOPA has really improved the lives of our women. Most of our women have not had formal education but they have now learned skills at the centre which earns them a living. Even though basketry and pottery are common trades with many women in communities here. The craft the women of SWOPA produce here is of higher quality and this originates from the training at the SWOPA centre. We engage consultants with vocational skills expertise to handle them periodically in workshops at the centre on how to repackage their products. I think this in-service training is helping them a lot [IDI, January, 2019].*

The above response sourced through IDI seems to affirm an assertion by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education (2005) which stipulated that providing non-formal education related skills for women especially in the rural areas, who missed formal education in life helps in promoting gender equality through the provision of vocational and life skills. The study also revealed that majority of the women (69%) were married with a few widows and divorcees which is indicative that most of the women lived in full complement families (ie husband, wife and children). It was highlighted from the study that many of the women were into pottery (47%) and this was important because SWOPA first started with pottery. Basketry was later included as one of the areas of skills training (indicated by 21% of respondents) while other skills such as painting, fibre treatment and batik tie and dye were introduced later. It was revealed that most of the women had worked for a period of 5 to 15 years and this offered them enough opportunity to master the skills necessary for their craftworks.

### Forms of Women Empowerment in Sirigu through SWOPA

The parameters of empowerment are shown in table 3 and the indicators with regard to social empowerment showed that 66% of the women belonged to social groups within the community. This was made evident in the study through the social sub-groups 'unearthed' namely: Akantaaba, Songora, Pupienu, Abilatio and Anogtaaba groups who met regularly (attested by all respondents) to discuss matters relating to family welfare of members (see figure 3 on a women sub-group meeting at the SWOPA Centre).



Figure 3: Women in a meeting at the SWOPA centre

The study further brought to the fore the fact that the women felt a sense of belongingness as they worked alongside their colleagues in the art and craft sub-group related professions, thus tapping from one another's talents. This result supports the findings of Combaz and Mcloughlin (2014) who stated that the social empowerment of women is the process of developing a sense of identity, leadership relations and social belongingness. Close to 90% of respondents indicated interactions were very cordial with a further 74% indicating they had opportunities to meet and interact with foreign visitors at the centre. Those who never met foreign visitors were away at the time of their arrival in the community.

Table 3: Indicators of Empowerment based on Respondents' Views

Variables	Yes	%	No	%	Total%
<i>1.Social Empowerment Indicators</i>					
<b>I belong to a group</b>	296	66	154	34	100
<b>We perform cultural dances to let guests feel welcome</b>	450	100	0	0	100
<b>We meet often to discuss issues of common interest</b>	450	100	0	0	100
<b>We interact with tourists at the SWOPA centre</b>	333	74	117	26	100
<b>Interaction among members of subgroups is cordial</b>	400	89	50	11	100
<b>Guests come to some of our homes for homestay</b>	450	100	0	0	100
<b>Through activities at SWOPA we now have a borehole facility in Sirigu</b>	450	100	0	0	100
<i>2.Psychological Empowerment Indicators</i>					
<b>I am a committed and active member of SWOPA</b>	114	25	336	75	100
<b>I am self-fulfilled as I earn my own income</b>	405	90	45	10	100
<b>Women have the right to spend their own money without seeking permission from their husbands</b>	401	89	49	11	100
<b>Men play leadership roles in SWOPA</b>	0	0	450	100	100
<b>I handover the money I earn to my husband</b>	0	20	360	80	100
<b>My husband respects me as I support family financially</b>	90	73	120	27	100
<i>3.Economic Empowerment Indicators</i>					
<b>Tourism generates income to the SWOPA Project</b>	330	80	90	20	100
<b>I currently perform an income generating activity</b>	360	72	126	28	100
<b>I earn income from my handicraft through tourism</b>	225	50	225	50	100

<b>I personally spend the income I earn.</b>	333	74	117	26	100
<b>I am a major contributor to family income</b>	146	32	304	68	100
<b>Tourism activities give me the urge to do my work</b>	153	34	297	66	100
<i>4. Political Empowerment Indicators</i>					
<b>I have been elected to a position of influence in SWOPA</b>	30	7	420	93	100
<b>A woman is leader of the SWOPA Project in Sirigu</b>	450	100	0	0	100
<b>All leadership posts are taken up by women in SWOPA</b>	450	100	0	0	100
<b>Decision making regarding SWOPA rests with women</b>	450	100	0	0	100
<b>We have a woman leader (chief) in Sirigu</b>	272	65	158	35	100
<b>Culture discriminates against women due to Gender</b>					

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

N=450

All respondents affirmed to homestay being an attraction in the community to which some families benefited from bookings by guests who opted to stay with host families thus boosting the social capital. A borehole facility drilled in the community through proceeds from tourism related activities at the SWOPA centre was cited as a useful social intervention brought in through the project. This finding also seems to exemplify sections of the literature saying that tangible expression of social empowerment can also be seen when ecotourism indirectly or directly results in greater local access to services such as water supplies (Scheyvens, 2000). Aside from the benefit from potable water, the borehole premises also served as an important social networking place for the women in the evenings when they meet and interact.

With regard to psychological empowerment, a fair percentage of respondents (25%) were active in their respective groups reflected in their commitment to attending monthly meetings and payment of dues. Dues were used to support members financially through granting of 'soft loans'. It was revealed that through this, 90% of respondents felt self-fulfilled that they now worked to earn their own income and had an opportunity to save portions of the income or even borrow. All respondents attested that the works they engaged in were meaningful and this gave them motivation, hence showing consistence with the literature put forth by Batool (2017) who opined that meaningfulness of work becomes second to none which corresponds to life satisfaction when seeking to empower women psychologically. All respondents (100%) did agree that men never played any form of leadership role or control over the SWOPA project, the reason being that these SWOPA related "trade professions" in the community have been women-led from their ancestry and this also supports the assertion by Schevven (2000) who notes that people would feel they are somehow inadequate or inferior, if they have no control over the pace and direction of development in connection with their communal ecotourism agenda. About 73% of women (respondents) indicated earning respect from their spouses owing to the financial contributions they made towards the upkeep of the family from their craft related businesses. A few respondents (20%) 'Allegedly' tendered monies earned from their handiworks to their husbands, citing reasons that, some financial capital was borrowed from them and so it was only proper after making income from sales, such debts were defrayed. Contrarily, 80% earned income themselves without any external funding with a further 89% indicating they did not need to seek permission from husbands before expending their income.

Touching on economic empowerment, close to 80% of respondents affirmed awareness on tourism related activities generating revenue to the SWOPA centre which came from overnight stays at the guesthouse and from other four homestay related operatives in the community. Other sources of revenue accrued from fees charged from few tourists engaging in do-it-yourself activities (painting) and lessons on sheabutter extraction processes. Other sources of revenue included visitors going on village tours and patronizing souvenirs displayed at the facility's showroom. Undeniably, more than half of the respondents (72%) mentioned they performed other income generating activities which included selling farm produce, firewood, sheabutter and also obtained income from craftworks (sale of earthenware pots, baskets and beadworks including batik tie and dye) in the surrounding village markets while some tourists bought some of the earthenware products as souvenirs. The aforementioned responses seem to be in consonance with the literature espoused by the Gender Empowerment Measure (1995) which stated that economic empowerment of women include having control over income and family resources, ownership of assets, access to markets and representation in economic decision making roles. Respondents hinted that all women in SWOPA had their areas of skill expertise with some earning income ranging between 100ghc

and 1500ghc monthly from both sale to local people and a fair bit of the earnings from tourists patronising these as souvenirs. From a perspective of the respondents it again was revealed that the organization had provided a better marketing platform for local products (pots, baskets and batik tie and dye) locally produced for domestic markets and sale to tourists at the SWOPA centre. Tourists appreciated the cultural significance of Sirigu through patronizing homestay, eating local foods from traditional caterers including participating in do-it-yourself craft learning sessions. Respondents explained they earned a “fair bit” from ecotourism thus reflecting the views of Fairburn-Dunlop (1994) who stated that the ability of women to improve their lives through tourism can be likened to the case of Samoan women who amidst their community’s fear of negative impacts of mass tourism and tourist’s failure to appreciate the cultural significance of *tapas*, came up with the alternative to “print *tapa* patterns onto clothing and tie-dying sarongs for tourists”, which were of interest to the visitor and to which the visitors patronized. Intriguing however is the fact that, 66% of respondents emphasized tourism related activities and visitor arrivals did not spur them to work hard since international arrivals to them were currently dwindling but domestic demand on the other hand looked promising.

On political empowerment, it also came to the fore that 7% of respondents in SWOPA affirmed being elected to leadership positions within the association for specific tenures either as leaders of the sub-groups, or as elected secretaries and treasurers to the mini-associations and indeed all positions in the mother association (SWOPA) were contested for and occupied by women. To the respondents, these democratic credentials being exercised were of relevance to building self-confidence among the women and this gave further impetus to their desire to manage their own business development affairs. In this regard, decision making regarding SWOPA related matters also rested solely with the women of the organization. The women themselves also commended the community’s efforts at installing a “women’s chief” (leader) to whom matters relating to women affairs were referred to first for adjudication. The impact of cultural norms and practices on women empowerment were also highlighted in the study. Since the chiefs and elders are the custodians of culture and traditions and as any modifications to these must emanate from them, it is prudent it is discussed herein under political empowerment. From the results of the study, about 65% of the respondents (women) indicated they were not discriminated against and were part of decision making at the chief’s palace. On the contrary, 35% affirmed cultural norms and practices excluded their contributions to general societal development and further alleged women were not encouraged at public fora to air ideas geared towards solving problems in the community. This assertion seems to support the findings of Baden, et. al. (1994) who noted that different ethnic groups are characterized by a variety of kinship systems with different implications for access to resources and decision making power by gender. Women were equally not allowed at funeral meetings and in local shrines where sacrifices are performed on behalf of the community thus also alluding to Kamal (2015), to the effect that diverse cultures of the world have systems that create an environment for women discrimination. The findings from this study also hints that the culture of Sirigu allowed women in decision making processes to some extents only. They were allowed sometimes to participate in community meetings especially meetings with the chief but on rare occasions. This finding was corroborated from the leadership of the women in the community who had this to say:

*In our culture, it is always the sole responsibility of the woman to take care of the home. If you are a woman and you are absent from home for a long period of time due to anything either than death, then you are likely lose your position as a wife to another woman. Women in this community work hard in order to keep their home. We are rarely involved in decision making and excluded from many cultural practices. This has become a cultural norm in the community which is a form of discrimination [IDI, January, 2019].*

The chief of the community thinks contrary to what the women said. He reiterates as follows:

*Our women are always allowed in decision making processes at fora in this community although sections of our traditions refrain them from certain cultural engagements. They participate in most community meetings where they contribute to discussions that ensue and this is forbidden in most neighboring communities. With regard to decision making in our community, they are not discriminated against. We even have a women leader in the community who is always present for our meetings [IDI, January, 2019].*

The two opposing views expressed in IDI gives a hint that the women are seeking attention in terms of involvement in aspects of community life to which culture debars them. On the other hand, the men also contend that their level of involvement in community matters now seems improved and this again confirms the opinion of Kamal (2015) that, diverse cultures of the world have systems that create an environment for women discrimination.

### Conclusion

The SWOPA project provides various opportunities for women in the community especially empowering them with skills in pottery, basketry, painting and batik tie and dye. The ecotourism centre is also helping in preserving the culture of Sirigu for posterity. We also conclude that, the results of the study implies pottery and arts as aspects of ecotourism have contributed tremendously to economic and social empowerment of the women in Sirigu community relative to psychological and political empowerment. This is evidenced by the responses as: (1) they belonged to various social sub-groups and played leadership roles (2) felt a sense of belongingness (3) had access to markets and representation in economic decision making roles in SWOPA. Increased income generation and skills development reflected in refresher training were stated. Although the women have made some thrives in psychological and political empowerment, they are still “left behind” in some areas because they are discriminated against within realms of cultural values. This is evidenced in some of the concerns raised by the respondents on discrimination against them through cultural practices. By virtue of their gender, they were not allowed to sit in funeral meetings and at the family shrines which were seen as areas deficient in empowering them politically in the community.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and concerns raised by the women, the following recommendations were proposed:

- i. The youth especially the girls of Sirigu should be encouraged to join the arts and craft centre as apprentices through educating them on the benefits of maintaining the cultural heritage championed by the organization to ensure the sustainability of culture.
- ii. Efforts should be made by the relevant state ministries and agencies such as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Upper East Regional Coordinating Council and the Ghana Tourism Authority including gender-based development partners to organize and sponsor art and craft exhibitions outside Sirigu so that the works of the women will be appreciated by a larger audience to increase patronage.
- iii. The organization should actively promote visitor participation (do-it-yourself sessions) in the production process of the artifacts and other traditional wares. Visitors taking part in pottery activities, basket weaving and tie and dye related activities will add to the activities engaged in by visitors and encourage longer stay.

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