

Being a Poor Woman, With Many Others

**Research about the Livelihood Strategies of Women
in Nyariga, Upper-East Region of Ghana**

Janita Zwartevelde

Picture at the front page: Women Weaving Baskets in Nyariga-Doone, made by the author.

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Bachelor Thesis Cultural Anthropology

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Picture at page 26: The Main Road in Nyariga, made by the author.

Picture at page 31: Janita making Field notes, made by the author.

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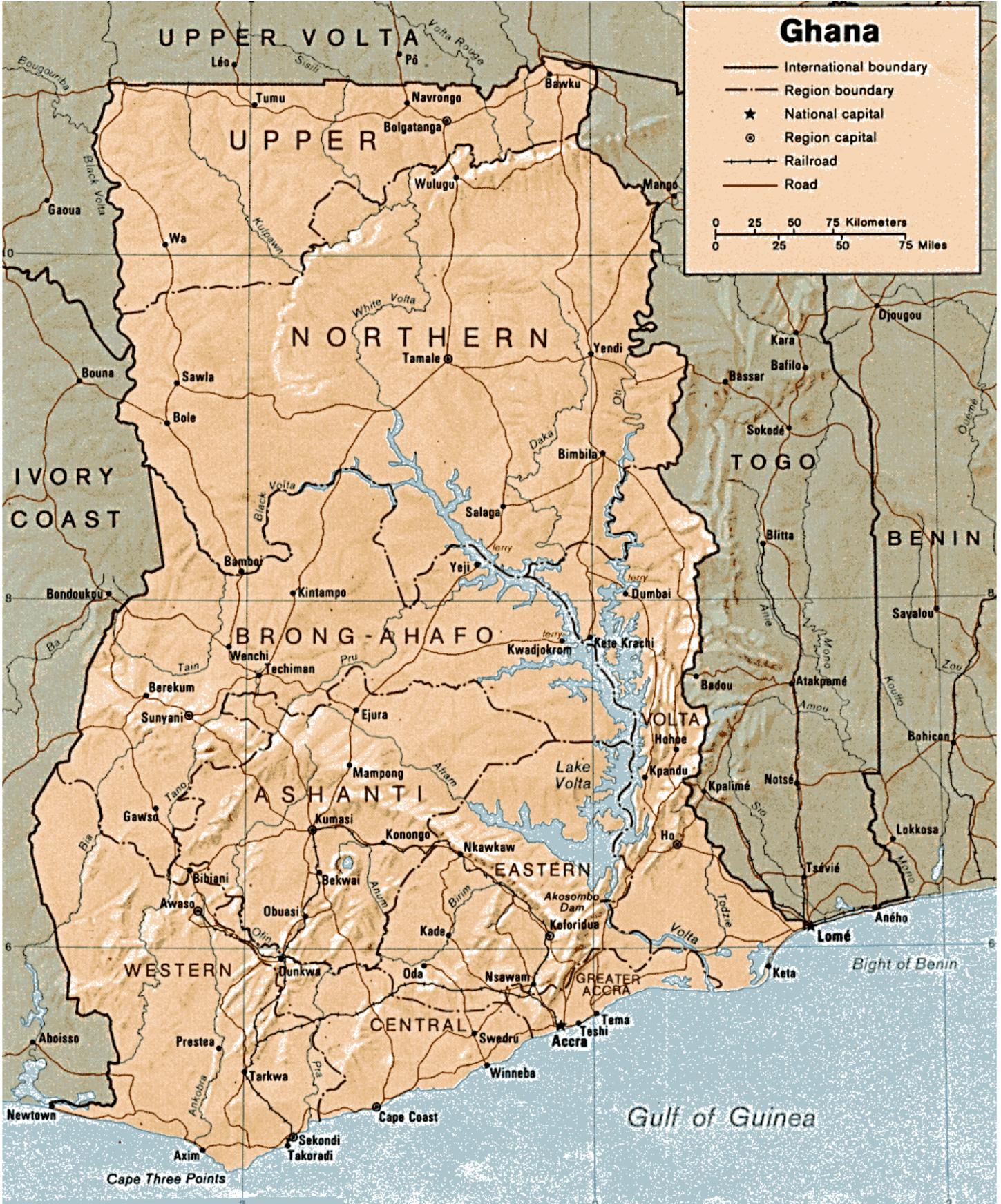
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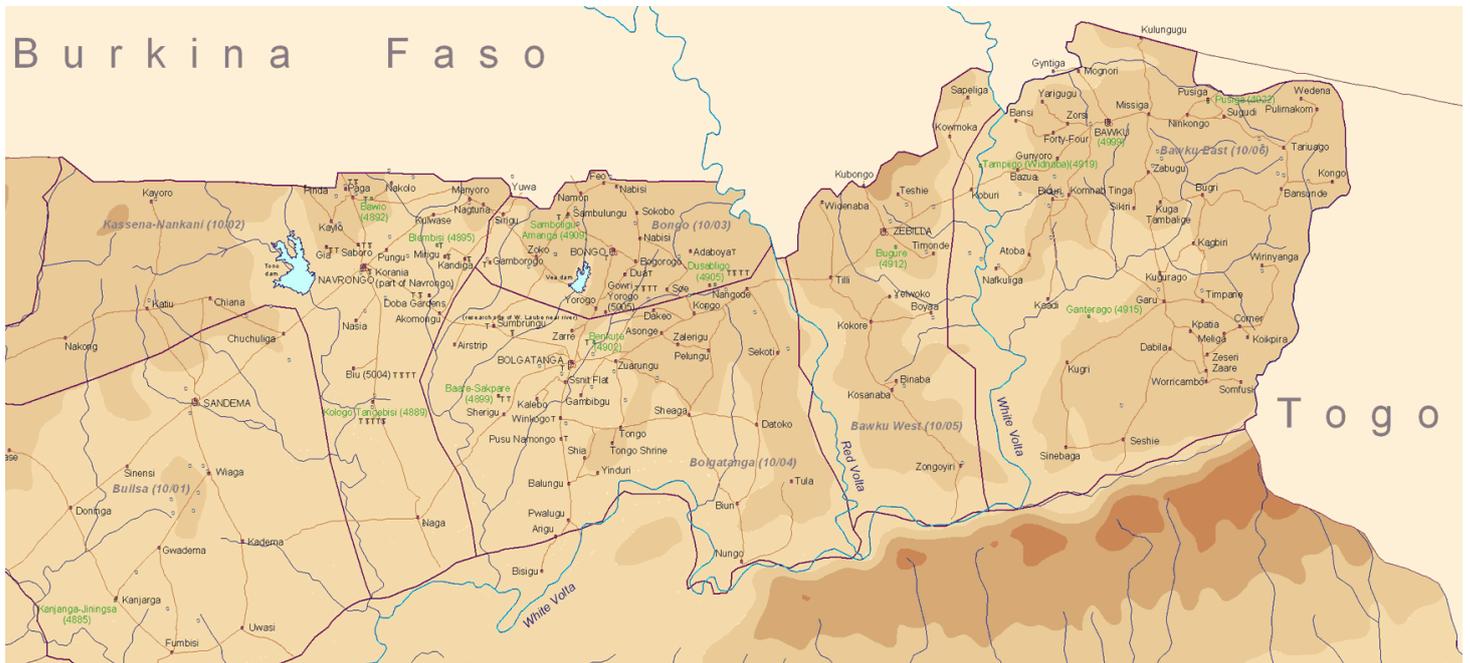
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(source:

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghana_regions.png)



Preface

Before travelling to Nyariga in the Upper East Region of Ghana, I had little idea of what to expect. Although I had written an extensive research proposal, in which I made clear what I wished to study in Nyariga, things turned out differently while conducting the research on site. Within a few weeks, I found it necessary to change the topic of my research. This change was a stressful time in my research. There were several other taxing moments in the preparation-phase of my research and in the process of writing my thesis. I feel now that I was only able to overcome these small crises and moments of doubt with the help of a few special people, whom I want to particularly thank in this preface.

First of all, I wish to express my gratitude to the Dutch-Ghanaian organization ‘Meet Africa’. With the help of this organization I was able to find a host family in the village of Nyariga. This same organization was also willing to help me when I had some minor problems during my stay in Nyariga. Some of these problems were personal in nature; others were related to my research. However, ‘Meet Africa’ was available to listen to my story, to assist me and to solve my problems. In addition, I want to thank the Dutch and Belgian volunteers of Meet Africa. They were the ones who brought joy to my stay in Nyariga, and exerted themselves to distract me when I experienced frustration because of the difficulties in my research. On this note, I want to especially thank Charlotte van der Weijde, my friend from the Netherlands, who was also in Ghana for her research.

Secondly, I want to thank John Arikabo and the rest of my lovely host family in Nyariga. My ‘father’ John, my ‘mother’ Rose, my ‘aunt’ Comfort and my ‘sisters’ Blessing and Mary gave me a wonderful time in their home. They taught me the proper ways to behave in Nyariga, as well as telling me about their village and their country. Most importantly, they adopted me as their own daughter, which made it possible for me to call Nyariga my home. Besides my family, I would also like to thank all the other people of Nyariga, especially my informants, who were willing to tell me about their personal lives and to give me the information important to my research. Of all these people, I can hardly express how grateful I am for the help of Celestine Atanga, my interpreter. She voluntarily helped me with my research, brought me in contact with my informants and allowed me to enter her life.

Without Celestine, I believe I would never have had the information necessary to write this thesis.

Despite the fact that I had a Ghanaian home and that I had a wonderful time in Nyariga, there were times in which I missed Douwe (my boyfriend), my parents and sisters a lot. Being able to talk to them over the phone and send text messages and email helped me to bear my stay in Nyariga, because I knew that they supported me in my work. Without this, my time in Nyariga would not have been the same. I also want to thank them for allowing me to go to Ghana and leave them. I know that even though they missed me, they still supported me in my dream to go to Nyariga to listen to the voices of the people there. Most of my thanks go to Douwe, who not only supported me during my fieldwork, but also during the writing of my research proposal and thesis. When I was frustrated about my writings, he was the one who brought me many cups of tea, as well as holding his famous pep-talks. Besides Douwe, my parents and sisters, I would also like to thank the rest of my Dutch family and friends, who supported me with messages and phone calls. Their attention made my stay in Nyariga and conducting my research easier as well.

Last but not least I wish to thank my supervisor Geert Mommersteeg. His advice, patience and motivation were essential for the execution of my research and the writing of this thesis. Without his reading and his comments, I would have never been able to set up and conduct my research and to write my thesis.

Introduction

Some people want to cross a river. One feels the water and sees the water, one only sees the water but does not feel the water. The last one does not see the water and does not feel the water. What is it?

This question was asked me by my ‘sister’ Blessing¹ in my host family. For me the riddle was a strange one, until I heard the answer. The person who wants to cross the river is a pregnant woman carrying a child on her back. It was not strange that I had really no idea what kind of answer it should be. Here in the Netherlands we don’t have woman who need to cross the river afoot. Likewise, we do not have many women carrying their children on their back. Nevertheless, in Ghana, and in particular in Nyariga, the women do. Moreover, it is perceived as normal by the community. The carrying of children on the back is not the only difference between women in Ghana and women in the Netherlands. In fact, the daily lives of the women in Nyariga are totally different from the daily life of most Dutch women in the Netherlands.

The thesis ‘Being a Poor Woman, with Many Others’, sheds light on the daily lives of the women in Nyariga. This thesis is based on my ethnographic fieldwork in Nyariga, a small village in the Upper East Region in Ghana. I lived in Nyariga from the eight of February 2011 till the fifteenth of April 2011. The riddle at the beginning of this chapter was asked me on the first evening of my stay in Nyariga. Especially this riddle stressed the importance and the visibility of women in Nyariga. Not only in daily life are the women visible, but also in riddles. This visibility made me aware of the importance of women in the society of Nyariga. I decided to focus my research on these women, with the goal to highlight the strength of women in poverty situations. Simultaneously, I want to contribute to the scientific knowledge about this topic. In this way, my research functions as a detailed illustration to the scientific literature about women and poverty in general. Besides these scientific goals, the results gathered during my fieldwork will also be used for social purposes. Especially, I have the ambition to use the stories of the women of Nyariga to raise awareness about the strength of the women in Nyariga, while they are living in poverty.

¹ Most of the names of my informants have been replaced by fictitious names, to ensure their privacy.

This thesis will serve as well the scientific goal as the social goal, since the central question of my research is a descriptive question: ‘What form of poverty are the women in Nyariga facing, and how to they deal with this poverty?’ This central question is divided in five sub-questions, which are answered in the three empirical chapters (four to six) of this thesis. In the fourth chapter, the first sub-question of my research will be analyzed: ‘What are the women in Nyariga lacking and how could their poverty be defined?’ The fifth chapter will explain the answers on the second and third sub-question of my research, namely: ‘Which facilities in Nyariga are available for the women to help them to deal with their poverty?’ and ‘which external facilities are available for the women of Nyariga to deal with their poverty?’ The last empirical chapter combines the fourth and the fifth sub-questions of my research. The fourth sub-question is the following: ‘What activities are the women of the village of Nyariga performing to deal with their poverty?’ The fourth sub-question is an elaboration of this question, since it concentrates on the sustainability of these activities: ‘How sustainable are those activities performed by the women to deal with their poverty?’

Before I start with these three empirical chapters, first the scientific theories about women and poverty are elucidated. Secondly, the context of my research will be illuminated in more depth. Thirdly, the methods and population of my research are highlighted. Finally, after the empirical chapters, the theories and results are combined with each other in the conclusion of this thesis.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Background



Chapter 1 – Theoretical Background

1.1 Poverty and Development

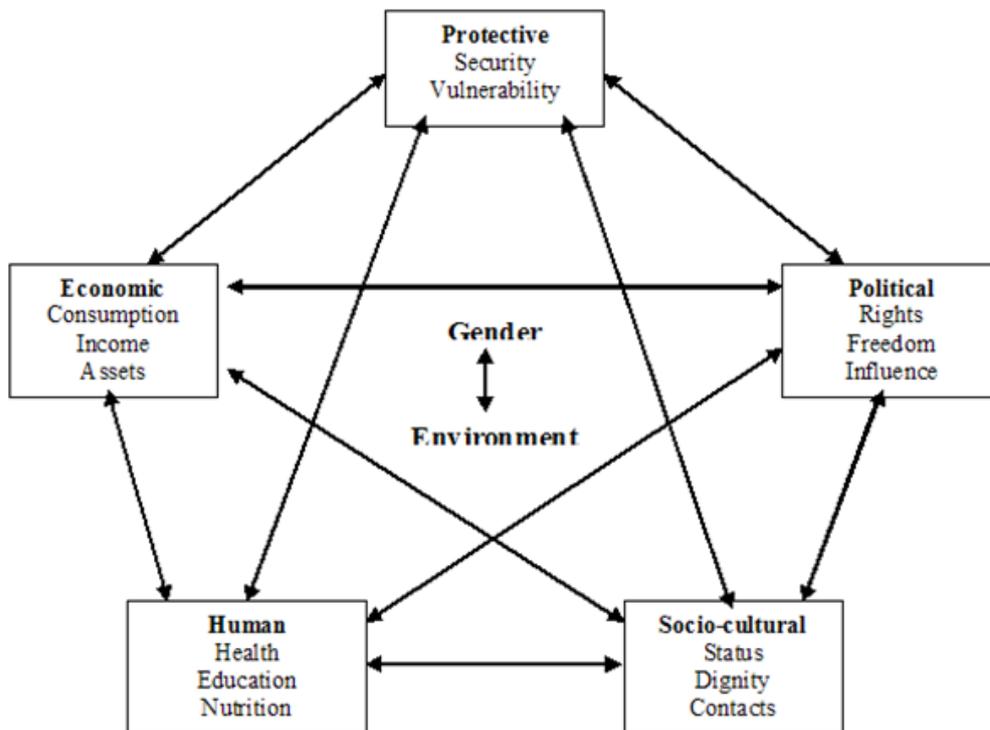
Development studies have not been dominated by the economic and political analyses of poverty and development since the 1990s. Yet there has been increasing attention paid to the multi-dimensional analysis of poverty, which highlights dynamism, cross-cultural practices, meanings and discourses of poverty and development. This change within the field of development studies has resulted in increased attention on the views of the local poor themselves. Based on the argument that poverty and development experiences are heterogeneous, this attention on the views of the poor was necessary (Arce&Long 2000: 1). An example of a study which especially focuses on these views of the local poor is called ‘Voices of the Poor’ (Narayan et. al. 1999). "Voices of the Poor" focuses on questions about what it means to be poor, and how the poor are coping with their poverty. This study demonstrates that there is not one form of poverty; but many different forms of poverty. The so-called "sustainable livelihood approach" has brought about roughly the same results. This approach will be described in more depth in the following paragraph.

According to Arce & Long (2000:4), this recognition of the heterogeneity of poverty has been an important theoretical change. The authors argue that this theoretical change was necessary for development studies. In their opinion ethnographic research has contributed significantly to this change, and can even become more important by paying attention to the differences in poverty experiences instead of making generalizations about those experiences. In my opinion, Chambers (2007) has proved that ethnographic research has indeed added to this change in development studies, since his paper about poverty and ill-being contrasts the economic approaches of studying poverty with the ethnographic ones. According to Chambers, the economic approach of studying is almost equivalent to the concept of income poverty. In his opinion, this concept is a limited measurement of poverty, because it does not include “assets, wealth, shelter, clothing, vulnerability, disability, access to education and services, transport and communication or the environmental and other effects of where poor people live” (Chambers 2007: 17).

Chambers’ criticism of the economic approach is not the only one; many other scientists and policy workers have also criticized this approach. However, the income level is still used as an important measurement in the study of poverty. At the same time, based on these criticisms, a new theory about poverty has evolved, which focuses on the

multidimensionality of poverty. The multidimensionality approach distinguishes five core dimensions within the concept of poverty (see Figure 1). These dimensions are the economic, human, political, socio-cultural and protective dimensions. All five dimensions are interrelated. The topics included in each dimension are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Interactive Dimensions of Poverty and Well-Being.



OECD 2001: 39.

Figure 1 illustrates not only that poverty consists of five core dimensions which are the most important part of the multidimensionality approach; it also demonstrates that poverty is influenced by gender and environment. Gender and environment have an influence on all those five core dimensions which make up the poverty experienced by the poor. As the OECD (2001: 40) argues: ‘poverty is not gender neutral’. Similarly, the influence of the environment has to be taken into account. These two factors, gender and environment, are also interrelated. Thus all together, gender, environment and the five core dimensions of poverty, demonstrate that poverty is a heterogeneous experience instead of a homogeneous one. This knowledge about the heterogeneity of poverty has contributed to a new definition of poverty. In particular, the Sustainable Livelihood Approach, developed in the 1990s has played a major role in the changing knowledge about poverty. The next paragraph will discuss the influence

of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach on the studies about poverty. Besides, the criticisms on this approach will also be addressed.

1.2 Vulnerability and the Livelihood Approach

In the previous paragraph, it was shown that poverty has different dimensions, which are interrelated to each other. In addition, it was shown that the five dimensions of poverty alone are not enough to study and understand poverty holistically, since solely focusing on the five dimensions of poverty makes the study of poverty too narrow. Highlighting the vital aspects of poverty, like vulnerability and social exclusion, makes the study of poverty more holistic. Taking into account these vital aspects elucidates the process which makes people poor. The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) unravels these processes, by focusing on the different poverty situations in poor areas (Krantz 2001). Another benefit of this approach is the fact that the SLA focuses on the abilities of poor people. In line with this, the SLA is seen as a positive study of poverty, since it demonstrates how poor people are able to survive (de Haan 2006: 9).

While the Sustainable Livelihood Approach was introduced by the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, the SLA is most often associated with the famous paper of Chambers & Conway (1991). This paper has become a foundation for the implementation of the SLA in many different development policies (Krantz 2001). Since the work of Chambers & Conway is a significant contribution, I will take an in depth look into the main topics of their paper. Subsequently, the application of this theory in the development policies will be highlighted. Lastly, this paragraph elucidates the shortcomings of this approach.

The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA)

The aim of the paper about the SLA written by Chambers & Conway (1991) was to explain and elaborate on the new concept of SLA in the policy world. In this approach, the fact that people are living in a fast changing world is a crucial starting point. According to the authors, this fast change has resulted in an increased uncertainty for the people living in this world. These two concepts of change and uncertainty made the poverty-line thinking less applicable to the real experiences being faced by poor people

From the 1970s and 1980s onwards, people have been more aware of the increasing uselessness of the poverty-line thinking in poverty and development studies. This increased awareness is also represented in the three objectives of the SLA. The objectives of the SLA

are the following: “capability”, “equity” and “sustainability”. With capability, the important ideas of Nobel-Prize winner Amartya Sen are included in the SLA. Although Sen’s famous book was written almost ten years later², his ideas about the relationship between freedom and development were already present. In the livelihood approach, the term ‘capability’ refers to the opportunities of a person to perform his basic functioning (Chambers & Conway 1991: 4). With the aim of equity, a ‘less unequal distribution of assets, capabilities and opportunities’ is aspired to (Ibid.). The aim of sustainability can be considered in two different ways. First of all, it refers to the environmental sustainability; secondly it refers to the social sustainability. Both are important for this new approach, however, in this thesis, the latter is particularly important³. Later, the concept of social sustainability will be outlined.

The three different aims of the SLA are brought together in the working definition of this approach:

a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term. (Chambers & Conway 1991: 6).

According to Chambers & Conway, the simple definition of a livelihood is the following: ‘a means of securing a living’ (Ibid.). In both definitions, the concept of heterogeneity comes into play, in that the means of securing a living are different from person to person. Means of securing a living are age, gender, social status and other factors. These factors and their interrelatedness make poverty and the ways of dealing with it extremely personal. In the analysis of the livelihood, four categories required for a means of living, are studied⁴. Firstly, the people and the capabilities they have; secondly, the activities, to see what the people do to secure a living; thirdly, the assets of these people in order to get insight into the means those

² In his book ‘Development as Freedom’, Sen (1999) argues that freedom is a necessary facet for development. In his book he makes a division between different types of freedom, which are all related to each other and strengthen each other. These different types of freedom also all influence the development.

³ For more information about the environmental sustainability, see Chambers & Conway (1991: 9-10).

⁴ The Sustainable Livelihood Approach of Chambers & Conway is particularly focused on the household as a social unit for analysis. However, other applications of this approach have showed that it can also be used to study smaller or larger social units. My research will focus especially on individuals, namely women.

people have. In the end, the gains or outputs are studied, which is ‘the living’ (Ibid: 7). According to the authors, the assets are the most complex category. However, they are of crucial importance for the understanding of the SLA, which makes it necessary to explain the assets in more depth below.

The category of assets is divided into tangible and intangible assets. The tangible assets consist of stores and resources, which are the material means of making a living. Food, but also jewelry and cash are examples of these stores, land and livestock are examples of the resources (Ibid: 7-8). The intangible assets are also divided into two subcategories, namely claims and access. Claims are, for example, demands or appeals for support. Access concerns the opportunity to make use of a resource or store (tangible assets), but also the possibility to have access to information, food or other necessities for making a living. To make a living, not only these different tangible and intangible assets are used, but also the knowledge and the creativity of the people themselves (De Haan 2006: 1).

Social Sustainability and Vulnerability

In the approach of Chambers & Conway, the concept of ‘making a living’ is not enough to analyze poverty. In their approach, the focus is on making a sustainable living. As previously explained, sustainability refers to both environmental sustainability and social sustainability⁵. Only the last one will be given attention in this thesis. Chambers & Conway explain social sustainability as follows: “social sustainability refers to whether a human unit can not only gain but maintain an adequate and decent livelihood”. In their subsequent explanation, Chambers & Conway make a division between the negative dimension (reactive) and the positive dimension (proactive) of social sustainability. With the reactive dimension, the ability to deal with stresses and shocks is implied. Additionally, with this dimension, the vulnerable aspect of poverty is finally reached, since every livelihood and human being is vulnerable to stresses and shocks⁶. In fact there is an important difference between stresses and shocks, as Chambers & Conway (1991: 10) demonstrated: “stresses are pressures which are typically

⁵ My research does not include environmental sustainability, since my thesis is more focused on the activities performed and choices made by the women themselves. This does not mean that environmental sustainability is not relevant to this topic, it only means that it was not possible to include both aspects in this small study.

⁶ It should be mentioned that poverty and vulnerability are not the same, but that these two concepts are closely related to each other. Moser (1998) explains the difference between poverty and vulnerability in her article about urban poverty worldwide. Her following quote explains this difference: ‘although poor people are usually among the most vulnerable, not all vulnerable people are poor’ (1998: 3).

continuous and cumulative, predictable and stressing (...) while shocks are impacts which are typically sudden, unpredictable and traumatic.”

In the SLA, the concept of vulnerability is divided into external aspects (the stresses and shocks to which a livelihood or human being is subject) and internal aspects (the possibility of coping with those stresses and shocks). For a full picture of a particular livelihood, the ability to avoid but also to deal with stresses and shocks and to recover from them should be taken into account. Focusing on these abilities will demonstrate that livelihood strategies can also change temporarily to take the shape of a safety mechanism, called a coping strategy (de Haan 2006: 3). However, this reactive dimension is not the only aspect which makes a livelihood sustainable. In addition, the positive dimension should be taken into account, which focuses on the ability of a human being to change and improve his livelihood. This positive dimension can be related to the anthropological concept of agency. In his definition, Kottak (2008: 287) defines agency as the ordinary and extraordinary practices and actions of individuals, which are performed to influence, transform or create the world in which they are living. According to the Haan (2006: 3) agency is both externally as internally influenced, as it is both embodied in the individual, but also embedded in social relations among different individuals.

In conclusion, the relationship between social sustainability and vulnerability can be explained as follows: a socially sustainable livelihood is a livelihood which ‘can avoid or resist stresses and shocks’ or which is ‘resilient and able to bounce back’ from these stresses and shocks. The activities performed by a human unit, and the portfolio of the tangible and intangible assets can be used to deal with and to prevent stresses and shocks, which reduces vulnerability (Chambers & Conway 1991: 11). These important concepts within the SLA can all be used to demonstrate how poor people are ‘active decision-makers’ with agency (Krantz 2001: 21-22). Despite these positive aspects of the SLA, some criticisms on this approach have evolved. The most important and relevant on the SLA are described in the section below.

Critics on and Shortcomings in the Sustainable Livelihood Approach

De Haan (2006: 15) concludes his paper about the Livelihood Approach and African Livelihoods with the statement: “African Livelihoods have become increasingly individualized, diversified and multi-local, and their dynamics pose important challenges to the livelihood approach”. This quote demonstrates that the SLA is not always applicable to every situation. Other authors have also given comparable critiques on the SLA. In the policy world, as in the scientific world, limitations of the SLA have also been found⁷.

Two different criticisms of the SLA are relevant for this thesis. Firstly, social relations are not clearly enough included in the SLA. De Haan stresses the importance of power-relations in understanding poverty: “life is a power play, livelihood is political and poverty is not only the result of bad luck, ignorance or hazard but primarily the exclusion by others” (2006: 8). De Haan is right in his argument, nevertheless, when the SLA was implemented, there was much less attention for the important facet of power in poverty.

Another relevant criticism, related to the first one, is that the SLA does not pay enough attention to gender differences. The ground for this limitation is that the SLA was mainly focused on households. As the focus was on the household, inequalities, power differences and poverty differences within the household were not considered. However, to draw a realistic and holistic picture of poverty for a particular group, it is also necessary to highlight the differences within a household or other social unit.

Much of these criticisms has been taken into account and has changed the way of studying and thinking about poverty. One point is that the attention for women living in poverty has increased.

1.3 Women and Empowerment

From the 1950s onwards, different ways of looking at women living in poverty have been used. It all started with the welfare approach, which was followed by the equity approach, the anti-poverty approach, the efficiency approach and the empowerment approach. Most of the changes in these approaches can be related to the bigger changes in poverty studies in general, but also to major changes in feminism and gender studies. Considering the many changes

⁷ The criticisms I will mention below are not the only ones on the Sustainable Livelihood Approach. An important range of critiques are the methodological difficulties of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach. More information about these difficulties can be found in the article of Krantz (2001).

which have taken place, this thesis cannot illuminate all the different developments in the studies about women and poverty⁸. Some choices had to be made, and only the most important developments in the study about women and poverty will be discussed here. Firstly, the basis of the attention for women living in poverty will be highlighted. Secondly, some major changes will be discussed, which are relevant to the contemporary situation. Finally, the contemporary situation in the study of women living in poverty will be described.

The United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) can be seen as a major breakthrough for attention on the role of women in development. With this breakthrough, attention on the role of women in development processes increased. Before, this important role of women was often invisible or unnoticed. The Decade for Women brought about a change in this invisibility of women (Moser 1989: 1799). This Decade also integrated women into the development process, in which their opinions were taken into account. From this time onwards, three schools of thought about women and development have evolved. Each approach evolved from the criticisms on the ones before. The first school of thought was the Women in Development (WID) approach. This one was followed by the Women and Development Approach (WAD), which was finally followed by the Gender Analysis in Development (GAD). Most often, some ideas from the former school of thought were represented in the next school of thought, as the next school of thought tried to solve the shortcomings of the former school of thought⁹.

The most important and relevant aspects of these three approaches, and in particular the aspects of the GAD, are described below. Firstly, in every approach the awareness that women can contribute to the economic development is a central point. Before this awareness, the conviction that women played a role solely in the family was commonly shared. Based on different studies, scientists and policy makers became aware that women can significantly contribute to the economy. As a result, many income-generating projects for women were founded (Moser 1989; Vijayamohan et. al. 2009). Although scientist and policy makers became aware of the fact that women were able to contribute to the economy, most scientists overlooked the fact that women still had different roles in society, which gave these women different needs than men. Simultaneously, women were also being perceived as a homogeneous group in which the different needs within this group were neglected (Moser

⁸ For more information about the welfare approach, the equity approach, the anti-poverty approach see Moser (1989) and Vijayamohan et. al. (2009). For more information about the efficiency approach and the empowerment approach see Moser (1989) and Vijayamohan et. al.(2009).

⁹ More information about these three schools of thought can be found in Vijayamohan et. al. (2009).

1993). In fact, as well as the differences between men and women, the differences between women are important to highlight. Focusing solely on women gives only part of the story and, in fact, women need to be analyzed in relation to men and also in relation to other women (Moser 1993: 3; Abu-Lughod 2008: 468-469). Unfortunately, the first attempts to pay attention to the differences between men and women and the relationship between these two, resulted in a stereotype division of society and labor between men and women. For example, men were related to public life and women with private life. The reaction against this stereotype was the attention on the 'triple role of women', instead of solely highlighting the role of a woman as caretaker. The following three roles of women are part of this 'triple role of women'. Firstly, women are the 'reproductive workers' which includes childbearing but also the upbringing of their children. Secondly, women are "productive workers" since they function as 'secondary income earners'. Lastly, women are the ones who undertake the community work. In addition, this last point is, according to Moser, part of the gender-ascribed role of women. The caretaking role which is ascribed to many women in the world is also performed in community work (Moser 1989: 1799-1801). Women who have to perform all three tasks are restricted in their time. If the limited time of the women is used for one particular task, less time remains for the other tasks. In line with this, Moser argues that policymakers need to take this triple-role of women into account, because investing in the productive role of women imposes limits on their reproductive role or their work in their community.

As previously mentioned women and men also have different needs. With regard to these different gender needs, Moser (1989: 1803) makes a division between 'strategic gender needs' and 'practical gender needs' of women¹⁰. Strategic gender needs are based on the subordinate position of women in comparison to men. Practical gender needs are based on the concrete conditions in which the women are living. Most often these needs focus on the domestic arena where most women are active (Ibid: 1803). In her article, Moser demonstrates that it is important to fulfill both the strategic gender needs and the practical gender needs. For example, she criticized employment improvement for women, which focuses on the skills the women already have which can be performed at home. In Moser's opinion, these attempts do not challenge the gender division of labor. However, I am in doubt if challenging the gender

¹⁰ Gender needs are not the same as women's needs. The latter is based on the biological needs of women, while the gender needs are based on the social needs of a woman, which is related to the social position of women in society (Moser 1989: 1803).

division in labor should be the goal when one is focusing on women and development. Is it necessary to transform a whole society to fulfill strategic and practical gender needs? This doubt does not mean that equality cannot be a means of development. It only means that full equality may be too ambitious as the sole means of development and the sole outcome of it. However, I agree with the goals of the GAD and Moser to form a more equal power relation between men and women.

The goal of equality is represented in many different approaches related to women and development. A significant one is the empowerment approach. This approach is focused on the empowerment of women by supporting their grassroots mobilizations (Vijayamohan et al. 2009). It is interesting to note that this approach is based on the ideas of NGOs and feminists from developing countries. In addition, this approach elucidates the interrelationship between power and development. However, power cannot be given to women, but should emerge from inside. Before it can emerge from inside, women need possibilities and choices to influence their lives. This focus on possibilities and choices shows the relation between the Empowerment Approach and the Livelihood Approach. According to Vijayamohan et al. (2009), the triple role of women is also highlighted in this approach, as well as the strategic and practical gender needs of women. However, there is a small difference: in the empowerment approach; the emphasis is on the practical gender needs, which should triple down to the fulfillment of the strategic gender needs of women. For example, by focusing on the need for seeds for the farming activities of women, equality between men and women can be improved.

Despite all these important goals of the empowerment approach, there are also some criticisms of this approach¹¹. The most important postmodern one is that the empowerment approach creates a 'hierarchy among different aspects of women's lived realities' (Vijayamohan et al. 2009: 31). In this hierarchy, the paid labor of women is perceived as the most important one.

Despite this criticism, the empowerment approach is still a useful approach in my opinion, since it takes into account the participation, agency and grass-roots mobilization which make women active decision makers. Attention to these personal lives makes sure that women cannot be seen as a homogenous group, as my case study in Nyariga will also show.

¹¹ For more information about the critiques criticisms on the Gender and Development paradigm in general see Singh (2006) and Botchway (2001).

Singh (2006) is also very convinced that attention needs to be paid to the uniqueness of every woman; in line with this she is plying for an ‘identities of women framework’. This framework has no major differences with the GAD; it only emphasized the differences in the identities of women more explicit. Singh is right in applying for an attention for the heterogeneity of women living in poverty. However, I do not agree with her fear of the word of homogeneity. I will argue that some aspects of the lives of women are highly comparable with each other, which makes them a homogeneous group in these aspects. The following parts of this thesis will illustrate what is meant by this.

Chapter 2

Context



Chapter 2 – Context

2.1 Poverty in Ghana

The country of Ghana is located in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 1957, Ghana became independent from British domination. The capital, Accra, lies in the south of the country near the Gulf of Guinea. Ghana is divided in ten different regions (see Maps of Ghana, page 9), and 138 districts. This research focuses on the Upper East Region in the North of Ghana. The district capital of this region is Bolgatanga. The situation in this region is different from the situation in the southern regions of Ghana, as the Upper East Region is one of the three poorest regions of Ghana (Whitehead 2008). The other two are the Upper West Region and the Northern Region; both are situated in the northern part of Ghana. According to Saaka (2001), twenty percent of the Ghanaian population lives in these three regions, yet eighty percent of the population in the North is part of the poorest ten percent of the whole Ghanaian population. In short, most of the poor people in Ghana live in the three Northern regions of the country.

Poverty in these Northern regions is based on different factors, such as the climate and the location, but also on the colonial history of the country. The North of Ghana has a so-called ‘landlocked’ position, especially compared to the Southern regions of Ghana. In contrast to the North, the Southern regions are located near the sea, which has resulted in global trade, interests and important institutions in these regions (Owusu 2008: 455-456). This is not the case for the Northern regions. In fact, these differences between the economic activities between the North and the South of Ghana have also been influenced by the colonial presence of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British in Ghana. The socio-economic policies during this colonial time, but also during the post-colonial time, denied the Northern Regions “the opportunity to develop its potential, hence denying the region a basis for creating more income generating activities” (Botchway 2001: 142).

In addition, the climate in the North also influenced the difference between the North and the South. The North of Ghana is characterized by a savannah climate of dry and wet periods. In fact, the Northern regions are experiencing just one rainy season a year. Concerning this particular climate, the economic activity in this region, namely agriculture, is extremely uncertain. However, many people in the North are dependent on this economic activity (Crawford 2008: 244).

Finally, also at the political level important differences between the North and the South can be underlined. The large presence of governmental institutions in the South is an

example of this difference, while the government is less clearly represented in the Northern parts of Ghana (Owusu 2008: 455-456). The decentralization project has attempted to change this unequal situation at the political level in Ghana (Crawford 2008). The idea and execution of this decentralization project has been reformed from the 1970s onwards, but the major reform took place in the 1990s, which resulted in the contemporary execution of this project. The decentralization project is based on one important assumption, namely that local representations of governments lead to larger political participation. This political participation results in the recognition of local needs, to which the local government is responsive. Together, this should result in the reduction of poverty in a particular region. The execution of this project took place in the medium-sized and small towns of Ghana. Bolgatanga, the capital of the Upper-East Region of Ghana, but also the district capital of the Bolgatanga district was included in this project. However, there are no clear development results of this project in the Bolgatanga region, the Bolgatanga district still experiences severe poverty (Ibid.). How this poverty looks like in Nyariga will be described in general in the next paragraph of this chapter. The specific poverty situation for women in Nyariga will be described in more depth in the empirical chapters.

2.2 Poverty in Nyariga, the Upper East Region of Ghana

Driving to what would be my home for the next two months was one of the most stressful moments in my life. In a pick-up, with my mattress on the roof and my bike on the back, we were driving in the dark evening to my host-family in Nyariga a small village in the Upper-East Region close to Bolgatanga. Driving in the dark evening, gave me the idea of being in the middle of nowhere. I didn't see anything. I only felt the road when we were trying to get around the holes in the road. This moving on the road made me to lose all of my orientation. There were no other cars and the sounds of the surrounding were calm and quiet, but more important for me: there was no light to see something of the place where I would stay for nine weeks. I was wondering: where am I?

Nyariga is a village of approximately 3000 citizens; the village is located in the Upper East Region of Ghana. One part of the village (Nyariga-Doone) is part of the Bolga District. Doone (in the name Nyariga-Doone) means up to the valley. After the valley, which divides the village, the Doone-part of the village is reached. The other part of Nyariga is part of the Bongo-district. In fact, there is no clear difference between those two parts of the village.

Most of my research focuses on the Bolga-part of Nyariga, as most of my data has been gathered in this part of the village. Besides the Doone part, my research has also focused on the Junction, the entrance point of the village. This entrance point comprises of one main road crossed by a smaller road which leads to the smaller villages around Nyariga, like Yorogo. The main road has one small bridge over the small canal which crosses the road. The junction is an important part for the whole village of Nyariga, since many shops are located here. The junction is also the place for the market, which takes place every three days. This market is the place where the citizens of Nyariga can buy and sell animals, baskets and ingredients. The shops in Nyariga are few, and they have almost all the same assortment, like soap, ingredients, water and other goods for daily needs.

As stated above, Nyariga-Doone is part of the Bolga district in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Bolgatanga is also the capital of this region; therefore a lot of governmental institutions are located in Bolgatanga. The distance to the city is not very large, but the road is bad, which makes it a longer travel than necessary. When Bolgatanga needs to be visited, the citizens of Nyariga will go by feet, use their bike, their motorbike or make use of a taxi. In fact, going by feet is the most used way of travelling. Since Nyariga has no hospital, the citizens of Nyariga are forced to go to Bolgatanga if they need to make use of the hospital. For smaller medical problems, the Nyariga Community Clinic can be visited. Roughly the same can be argued for the market, since the market of Nyariga is small, clothes and school-materials need to be bought in Bolgatanga.

On March 31 2011, Nyariga-Doone had a population of 1241 people. This amount of the total population includes 183 children below five years old. The total population is divided over 87 extended families; these 87 families are living in 105 compounds¹². Most families have a small size of land around their compounds. The compounds are widely divided over the village, which makes Nyariga an outstretched village. The number of citizens in Nyariga is still growing. The largest ethnic group in Nyariga is the Frafra-people. The local language of these people is also Frafra. Different religious groups, among them Muslims, Christians and traditionalist believers, are living in Nyariga. Both the Christians as the Muslims have their own buildings. For example, there is one mosque, and a second one will be build. One evangelical church will be build, and the Catholic Church is already in use.

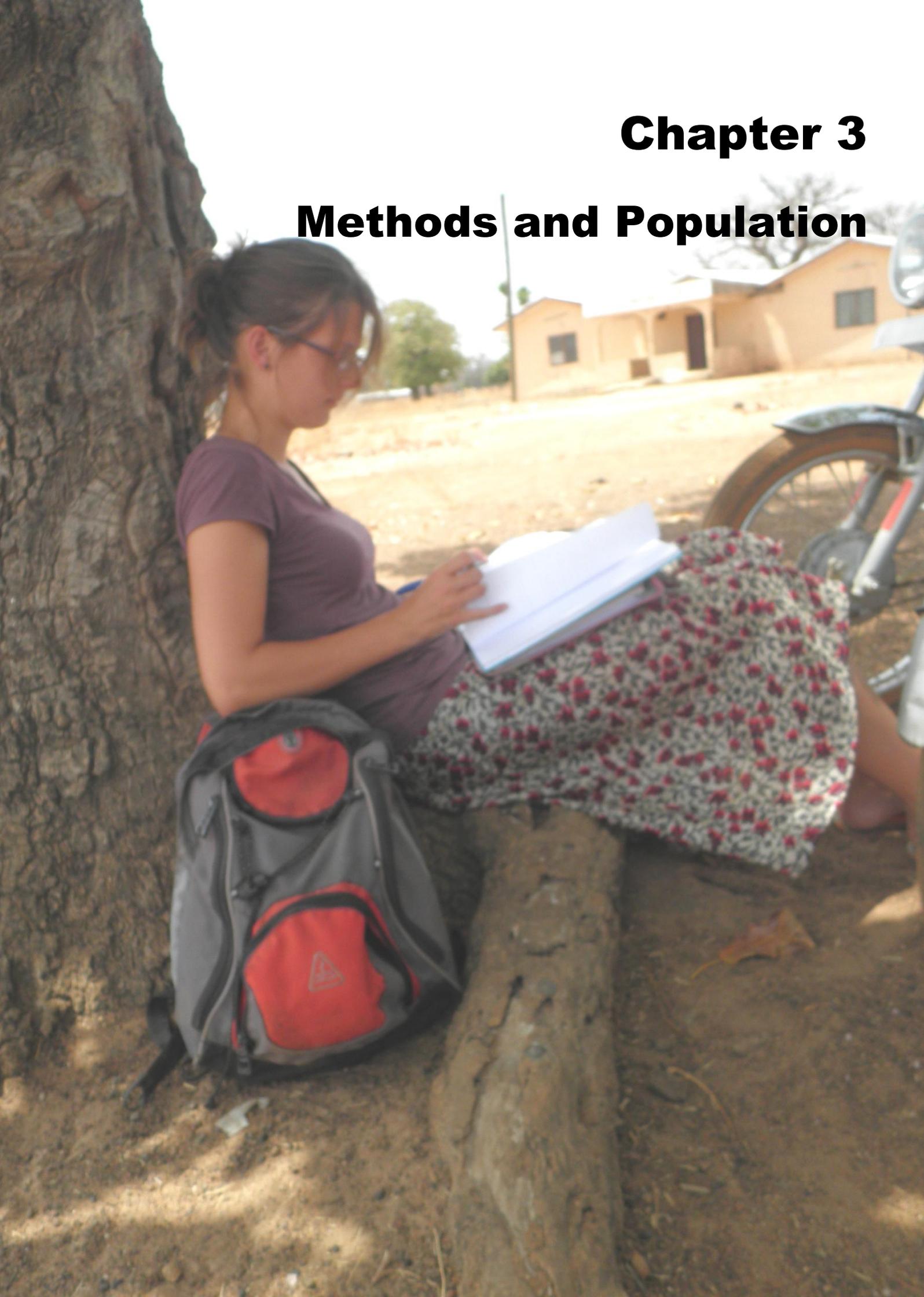
The year cycle is divided in two main seasons in Nyariga, namely the dry season (January till May) and the wet season (June till December). In the wet season, most of the

¹² These data have been collected for this research by James, a citizen living in Nyariga-Doone.

farming activities take place. These farming activities are very important for the livelihoods of the citizens of Nyariga. However, the harvest of the farming is uncertain, and most often not enough for the whole year, so also non-agricultural activities are necessary for the citizens of Nyariga. These non-agricultural activities are mainly executed in the dry season. In fact, Nyariga has a major lack of job-opportunities, which makes it difficult for the citizens to search for income generating activities in their village. Five people in Nyariga-Doone have a monthly-paid job. Two of them are teachers, two are watchers at schools in Bolgatanga, and the last one works for a governmental organization. The other citizens are performing small income generating activities, like weaving and selling baskets, selling ingredients and sewing clothes. The weaving of baskets is the major income generating activity in Nyariga. This has two reasons. First of all, it is the traditional handicraft of the village. Second, different organizations focused on this activity to make it possible for the citizens to sell their baskets outside Nyariga. With this, the market for the baskets has increased and much more citizens became involved with this activity to generate more income. Chapter five will pay more attention to these organizations.

Chapter 3

Methods and Population



Chapter 3 – Methods and Population

From February until April 2011, I lived in Nyariga, a small village in the Upper-East Region of Ghana. Here, I conducted my research about women and the poverty-related problems they experience in their daily lives in Nyariga. This research is based on qualitative and ethnographic methods. The most important method was participant observation. Living in the village of Nyariga, I was able to participate and to observe in the daily lives of its citizens. As a woman, I was also able to gather access to the daily lives of the women of Nyariga. Participant observation was not solely used to gather this insight in the daily lives; it was also applied as a tool to build rapport with the women (DeWalt&DeWalt 2002: 43, 92). Participating in village-life enabled me to verify the information and stories told by my informants.

During my fieldwork, I had some difficulties in speaking the local language, which made it impossible to have many informal conversations with the women of Nyariga, as most of them were not able to speak English. Although informal conversations are a key aspect of the method of participant observation, the local situation in Nyariga posed practical limits on the use of this method. As a result, I chose to gather information through unstructured interviewing. Together with my interpreter Celestine, I visited different women living in Nyariga and I spoke with them about their daily lives, their families, their struggles and other topics which were relevant for them. During these talks, my interpreter acted as a translator.

I used the same strategy in the clinic and when I was observing and participating in the activities performed by the medical staff of the clinic. During my research, I went with the nurses of the clinic to different houses in Nyariga-Doone where the nurses spoke with the women about health problems and the preventative measures. With these home-visits I gained insight into the health-related problems of the women, and I was allowed to ask the women in more depth about these problems and the relation with other daily problems. During these meetings, the nurses of the clinic translated my questions and the answers of the women, as they did in the clinic. Some days, I was present in the clinic to be acquainted with more women from Nyariga. While the women waited in the clinic, I talked with them and gathered more data for my research. Some of these women were able to speak English; others were not able to do so. When a woman was not able to speak English, the nurses volunteered to translate. In some cases, I spoke with the women in the clinic and I visited them at home. Sometimes I visited a woman alone, but in case she was not able to speak English, I went to her house together with Celestine. Not all the topics I discussed with my informants were

relevant for my research; however these topics were still helpful to formulate new questions. Sometimes I used the issues, brought up by one woman, in other interviews to compare problems and strategies relating to poverty. Finally, the things I observed in daily life in Nyariga were also used in the interviews, this to verify my interpretations and to uncover the motivations behind these activities. In short, I used both participant observation and unstructured interviewing to gather the data for my research and to combine the things I saw with the things I heard while I was living in Nyariga.

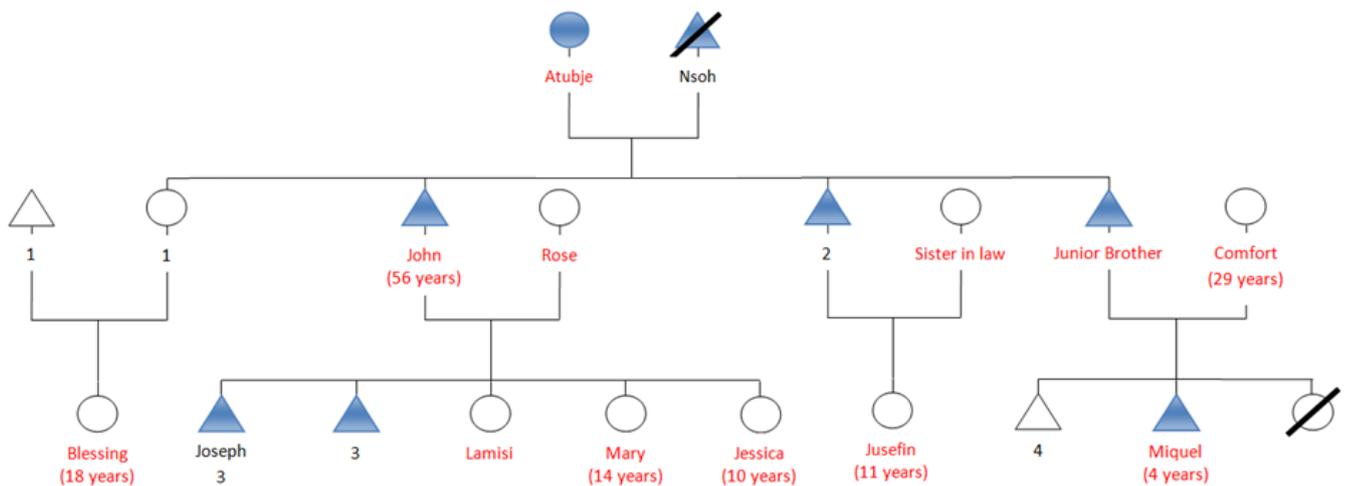
Most of the women I spoke with during my research were mothers. Some of them had very young children, others were already grandmothers. Some of these mothers were teenagers. Not all the women included in my research were married. Most of the women were married, others had lost their husband. Some teenage mothers did not have any contact with the father of their child; they were single mothers. Some of the married women were living together with their husband, others were living together with their husband and the other wives of the man, and others were living alone, while their husband was working somewhere else. Only a few women had completed their education, others had to leave school before they completed it, and others did not have any education. These differences in educational backgrounds explain the differences in the knowledge of the English language. Some women spoke English really well, others had some knowledge about the English language, while others did not know a word. Some of the women did not have a job; others were performing different income generating activities. Most of them were farmers, but most others were performing a second income generating activity. These activities will be described in chapter seven. The ages of the women included in my research were also really diverse. The youngest informant was fifteen years old, while the eldest one was sixty-nine years old. Most of the women were between twenty-five and forty-five years old. Some of these women have always lived in Nyariga; others came to Nyariga because their husband was living here. Evidently, my research population was a really diverse group. However, they all shared the fact of being a woman in Nyariga.

The selection of my informants was based on the so-called ‘purposive sampling’ (Boeije 2010: 35). This method of sampling takes the needs of the study into account. For example, I decided to include only particular women in my research, because they could teach me “about the issues that are of importance to the research” (Ibid.).

During my entire research, I lived in Akaribo’s house. This household was the most important source of data for my research, as most of the people living in this house were female. As figure two illustrates, one of the women in the household was grandmother Atubje,

three others were mothers, and five of them were young girls between the ten and twenty years old.

Figure 2: John Akaribo’s Family, Three Generations Deep¹³



Two of the girls in Akaribo’s house, Blessing and Mary, were important informants in my research. Every evening we ate together. This gave me the opportunity to ask a lot of questions on Nyariga and their perspectives for the future. Sometimes I asked too many questions, as Blessing said: “Janita, Janita. Questions, questions, questions. Why are you always asking so many questions?” However, this high number of questions did not pose significant problems for my research, as my ‘sisters’ still answered my many questions and gave me information.

Besides my ‘family’ as the main source of data, they also functioned as the basis for my research. They were no real gatekeepers, as my host-family was the returning basis of my fieldwork. My ‘family’ gave me the access to the village of Nyariga, but they did not remove themselves from the screen of my research. In addition, they gave me the ascribed identity of “Akaribo’s daughter”. With this ascribed identity, it was not difficult for me to gain insight into the daily lives of the women of Nyariga. In contrast with the experiences of Katherine

¹³ Figure 2 is based on the viewpoint of John Akaribo. The names written in red are the ones who are living in Akaribo’s house in Nyariga. Numbers 1 (John Akaribo’s sister and brother in law) are living in Sumbrungu with their children. Number 2 (John Akaribo’s younger brother) is living in Ivory Coast, while his wife and daughter are living in Nyariga. The numbers three are living in Accra. In addition, also number four is living in Accra. He is adopted by his uncle, who is also living in Accra.

Lutz, this role as “daughter” did not result in responsibilities which limited my fieldwork (Ibid: 205).

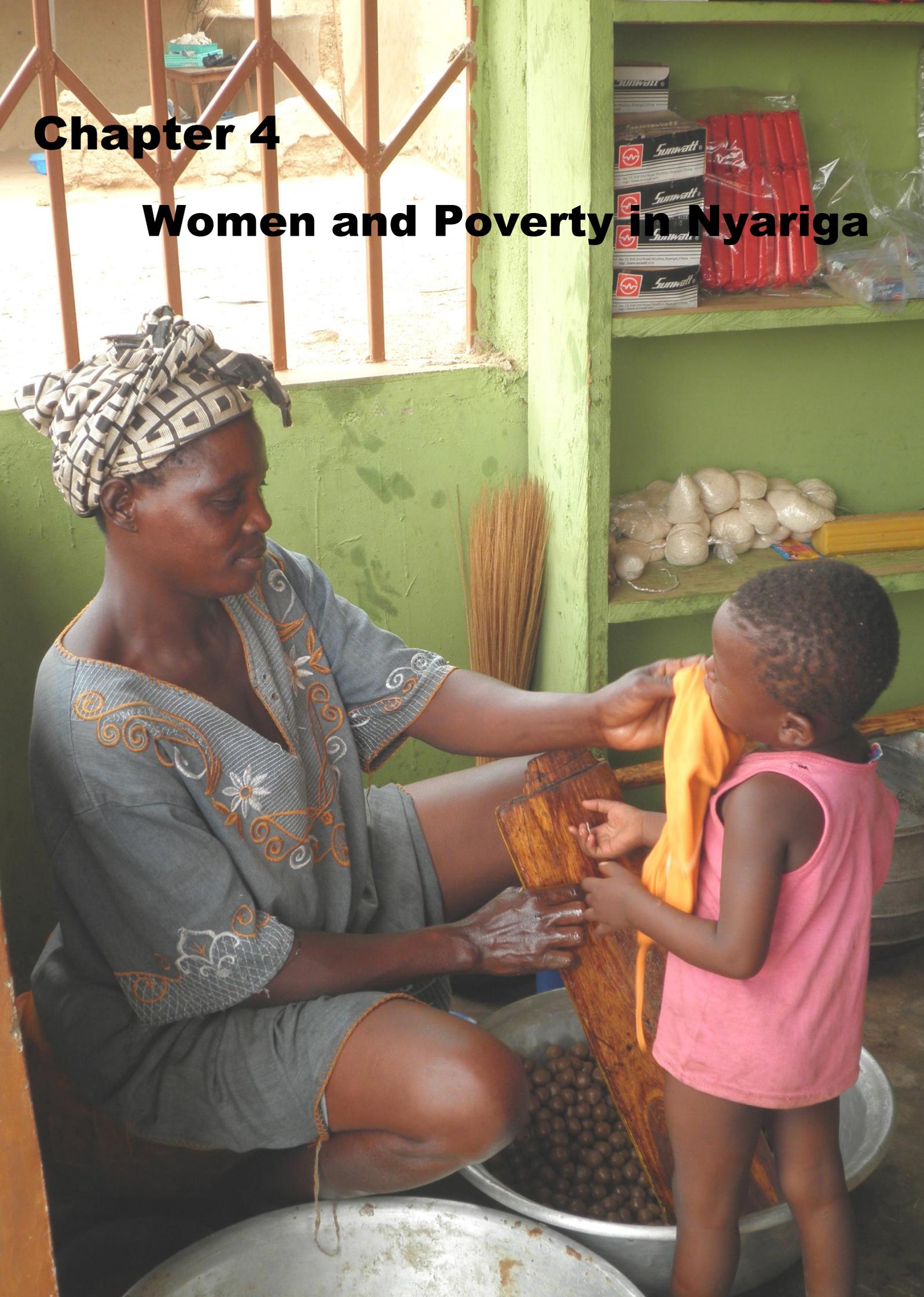
Besides the women in Akaribo’s house, the man in the house, John Akaribo, had been the Governmental Assembly-Man of Nyariga for twelve years. For this reason, John possessed a lot of knowledge about the poverty situation in Nyariga, which made him the key-informant in my research. Outside my family, the directress of the Primary Girls School also was a key informant. The directress was living in Bolgatanga, which allowed her to take an objective view on the situation of women in Nyariga. As a woman who was able to speak fluent English, it was not difficult for me to talk with her about my research and her views of it. Roughly the same can be said for my interpreter Celestine Atanga, who also possessed a lot of knowledge about the situation of women in Nyariga and was able to speak English.

Although I spoke some women more than once, I do not want to call them my key-informants as I was not able to have informal talks with them, due to the language difficulties. Only Dilys, a woman who was selling food at the Junction, could have been my key-informant, but I met her at the end of my time in Nyariga, which made it impossible to see her as my key-informant.

Lastly, it is important to note that I reciprocated during my research. First of all, I had to pay my interpreter for the work she did for me. Second, I gave a short presentation at the end of my research time in Nyariga, with the goal of presenting my findings and to verify the data I gathered during my research. Lastly, I gave my informants pictures of themselves, which I took during my fieldwork and after the interviews. Although my research was a learning experience and I was not able to bring a significant contribution to the lives of the women of Nyariga, I tried to give them something in return with the presentation and the pictures.

Chapter 4

Women and Poverty in Nyariga



Chapter 4 – Women and Poverty in Nyariga

“Here in Nyariga the women are suffering. We do not have money, and because of that, a lot of women cannot buy sticks for weaving. Also our children are suffering, because sometimes we do not have enough money to send them to school. When it comes to food we are also suffering, because sometimes the children cannot eat before they go to school.”

(Interview with Eshun, 38 years old and mother of 4 children).

Sitting on a mattress in her house in Nyariga-Doone, two days after the delivery of her fourth child, Eshun is telling me the story of women and poverty in Nyariga. Her newborn baby is sleeping in a flour sack on the same mattress, her eleven-year-old son is also at home today, and her daughter of sixteen came home from school with some of her friends to help her mother to communicate in English with me. Besides them, an old lady is present. She is Eshun’s sister-in-law and she is helping Eshun to take care of her newborn baby and the other children. This sister-in-law is living in the same compound. In total, fifteen family members are living in this compound. The husband of Eshun is sitting outside since he does not need to care for the baby, as “he cannot even hold the baby, because he is a man”.

As a wife, a mother and a woman living in Nyariga, Eshun showed me the struggles she faces in her daily life. Many of these struggles and poverty-related problems are shared by many women living in Nyariga. The quote of Eshun underlines the problem of too little financial means and the suffering caused by it. In fact, not only the women in Nyariga are poor, also the men are facing poverty. However, this thesis is solely about the role of women in Nyariga, hence I will focus on their poverty-related problems and the larger effect this has on the community. The lack of money is not the starting point of the poverty-related experiences for the women; many other factors influence the poverty they are experiencing. These factors are described below.

4.1 The Roots of Women’s Poverty

A significant and visible factor contributing to women’s poverty is the lack of education, since education for girls was regarded as less important than education for boys. As a result, in some cases, girls have not attended school at all, because there was no reason for sending a daughter to school. The following quote of John Akaribo illustrates this: “No, I am the only

child who attended school. There were no education opportunities here, and my parents did not understand the value of education. Especially there was no girl child education. The girls were for marriage, and then the parents could get cows". The high level of illiteracy among women in Nyariga, in comparison to its level among men, shows that this statement is right; there was no need for sending a daughter to school. It was more important for a girl to have skills for the household tasks and to know how to take care of her husband, than sending her to school. In fact, this is one of the main reasons for the high level of uneducated women in Nyariga. Another, related fact is that sometimes the girl had to quit her education before she completed it. If there was not enough money, the girl was the first who had to quit her education, which was also Eshun's case. Eshun had to quit her education after Primary six, because her mother did not have the financial means for her education and Eshun's father was not at home. Eshun had to quit her education and was expected to help her mother in the household. As many other women, Eshun is still facing the consequences of this lacking education: "I am still suffering from it. Now I don't have anything, so I cannot get a job and I don't have any help".

Many other women in Nyariga are facing the same problem. Take for example Comfort, who is 29 years old. During her childhood, Comfort lost her parents and her father's second wife raised her. However, this woman was not able to finance Comfort's education. The relationship between her unfinished education and her present poverty is described by Comfort in the following words: "I have no work, so there is also no money. Because of my illiteracy I have no work, because I cannot get any job. So I don't know what to do". Quotes like those of Eshun and Comfort are not solely used to show the reasons for their poverty. The same quotes are employed to explain women's difficulties in the upbringing of their children.

4.2 Responsibilities of Women and the Need for Money

The previous paragraph illustrated that many women describe their poverty in economic terms. This paragraph describes why it is so important for the women to have enough money. First, money is used in different ways and the money serves different purposes. In general, money is used for the education of the children, but also for food and medical care. As Asaaba, a woman of 46 years old, told me: "With money, we can take care of our children, but now it is difficult to take care of them". Asaaba is not the only one who highlights the relationship between the shortage in the financial means and the difficulties in raising the children. Also Mariam, a widow told me comparable problems.

Mariam is around thirty years old and she is the mother of four children, two of them are twins. Six years ago she lost her husband and she came back to Nyariga to live together with her family, since her mother was willing to help her. Despite of this help, Mariam is still facing problems in the upbringing of her children: “My children have some difficulties in school, because their school uniforms are toned, so I need money to buy new ones, but I don’t have that money. I also need money for books and food for them”. Interesting to see is that, although the public primary education is free in Ghana, many mothers face problems with the education of their children because of school uniforms, schoolbooks and the typing fees¹⁴. Every time when a mother described the problems regarding the upbringing of her children, she underlined the difficulties in sending her child to school and feeding her child. The food problem is related to the climate in Nyariga, since the harvest of farming is not enough to be used for the whole year. As a result, the food and other products need to be bought at the market. However, without money, it is difficult to buy the food and other products. Eunice, a mother of four, demonstrated that this food-problem increased since she became a mother: “Only since I have children I am dependent on my husband. When I am alone, I do not depend on anyone to get food, but now I also have to feed my children.”

The problems of education and food are both related to money. At the same time, both problems are related to the responsibilities of the mothers to take care of their children. However, not only mothers are responsible for their children, also other women living in the same house look after the children. Ayinbota, a woman of 69 years old, is an example. Every time I biked through Nyariga, I saw Ayinbota sitting on the ground weaving baskets. Usually, she was not alone, but accompanied by some small children. She laughed with these children, corrected them, and gave them food to eat. In some cases a small boy of three years old slept on a matt next to Ayinbota. At first, I expected these children to be Ayinbota’s own children, but later on I discovered that they were her grandchildren. Although the mothers of these children were alive, Ayinbota was the one who took care of them in daytime: “I am weaving and when my grandchildren have no money, I will give it to them for food. In the afternoon I give some money to the children to buy some food. Like now, there is nobody at home, so I am the one who is taking care of the children.”

¹⁴ Typing fees need to be paid by the students. This payment is used by the teachers to go to Bolgatanga to copy the exams, so that the students will have a printed exam. If the money is not paid by the student, the exam will not be copied and the student may not make his or her exams.

In fact, the overall story of Ayinbota is interesting. When Ayinbota was 46 years old, she had three children, one child was twenty years old, the second one was nine years old and the youngest one was two years old. Unfortunately, at this age, Ayinbota lost her husband. From this time on, Ayinbota had to take care of her children alone. Moreover, losing her husband was not the only problem in Ayinbota's life. One year ago, Ayinbota lost her son, at that time he was 32 years old. Her son was also married and father of one child. At present, not only Ayinbota is a widow, but also her daughter-in-law. Although there are many differences between the lives of Ayinbota and her daughter-in-law, there is one important similarity between them as Ayinbota explained: "It is all the same, because you have to work all alone to take care of your children. Your husband isn't there anymore to help you, so my daughter is in the same situation as me."

Ayinbota and her daughter-in-law are not the only widows in Nyariga. In fact, there are many widows living in Nyariga. Most of them are experiencing the same problems. However, most women have different forms of dealing with their widowhood. Nevertheless, many of the problems faced by widows are also faced by other women in Nyariga. Other women also drew attention to the importance of financial means to take care of their children. All this is related to women's responsibility to take care of their children.

As Priscilla, one of the women who work at the 'Department of Women' in Bolgatanga, said: "Here in the Upper East the poverty rate is so high and everything is trusted unto the women. The women have to take care of the children and the men do not take their responsibility". This opinion about the division in child care is general held in Nyariga. Jocelyn, the directress of the 'Department of Women' demonstrated that this division is also a consequence of poverty. Many people are uneducated, but because of the marriages and the pregnancies the women cannot go back to school, so they have to perform income generating activities while they are taking care of the children.

In some cases the men help their wives with paying the school fees or food for the children, but in other cases they do not. However, in both cases the heaviest burden is on women. The difference between married women and widows is that married women still have the possibility to receive financial assistance from their husbands to take care of the children while the widows do not even have this possibility.

In short, it can be concluded that it is really important for women to have the financial means to take care of their children. At the same time, it is also clear that many women are experiencing a shortage in these financial means. The fact that many women are uneducated

makes it difficult for them to earn money. However, the next paragraph demonstrates that not only the lack of education is the reason for this difficulty in earning money.

4.3 Women in Nyariga and Job Opportunities

As described in chapter three, the Southern parts of Ghana have more economic activities than the Northern parts of the country. Many youngsters have left Nyariga to go southwards (“downside”) to find a job. According to Abugre (23 years old) around five hundred people from Nyariga went to the Southern cities (Accra, Kumasi, Tamale, Sunyani etc.) to find a job, because they were not able to find one in Nyariga. Nevertheless, many women and mothers experience difficulties in going downside.

First of all, most women from Nyariga have difficulties with speaking English, based on the problems in their educational background. The local language, Frafra, spoken in Nyariga and the Bolga-district, is not spoken in the other parts of the country. The importance of language, together with the small scope of the area where Frafra is spoken, makes it hard for the women to find a job.

Secondly, the responsibility of the women to take care of their children and their husband prevents the women from leaving Nyariga. Most of the women have to stay close at home to take care of their children. As Asana, a woman of 54 years old and mother of four children explained: “A man is able to leave the children and to travel, but a woman is not able to do so.” Sometimes, the social contacts can help women to work outside Nyariga during the day. Family members or other women take care of a woman’s children while she is working. Ayinbota, who takes care of her grandchildren, illustrated this possibility. In some cases women look after the children of one of the co-wives of their husband. One woman told me about the positive sides of the fact that her husband had married more than one wife: “When I am not at home, the other women can take care of my children. And when they are not at home, I will take care of their children”.

However, even with the help of family members or other women, mothers are not allowed to go to the southern regions for a longer time to find well-remunerated work. This restriction on the women’s movement is based on the custom of the bride wealth, which is paid by the family of the man to the family of the woman. Although the bride wealth does not officially prevent the women from leaving her husband’s house, in psychological terms it does. If a woman wants to leave her husband’s house, for work or something else, she is not allowed to leave together with her children. The children are part of the man’s family, and

have to stay there. For many women, this is a real obstacle to leave the house, as the woman is not sure whether another woman will look after of her children. Due to poverty, it is not granted that someone else will take proper care of the children. Cynthia Ayoore, the leader of the widows group in Nyariga Doone, demonstrated that widows are experiencing the same problem: “As a widow you can’t leave the house with your children. If you leave, the husband’s brothers will take care of your children.”

However, this does not mean that there is no woman in Nyariga who has left her children in search for work. For example, Magdalena’s mother did. Magdalena is a girl of 15 years old and she is attending the Junior High Girls School in Nyariga-Doone. At the end of the rainy season in 2010, Magdalena’s mother and father left Nyariga to go to Kumasi. They will come back in the rainy season in 2011. Besides Magdalena, her parents also left her older brothers and sisters behind. Her father’s brother and wife are taking care of Magdalena and her siblings. The day I met Magdalena, she was weaving baskets to earn some money for her typing fees. While she was weaving for money, she was not able to go to school. In fact, she had asked her parents to send the money, but they were not able to do so in time. The reason why both her parents went to Kumasi is probably because their children were old enough to take care of themselves.

According to Tahiru Aberinga, a man of around forty-five years old, who is the director of the Nyariga Craft Society, the travelling of the women to Southern Ghana can produce more problems. Aberinga highlighted these problems in the following answer to my question about the importance of the Nyariga Craft Society and the weaving of baskets ordered by this organization. In his answer, Aberinga elucidated the historical problems Nyariga had, because of the movement of some women.

“The reason why we founded the Nyariga Craft Society is because we had a problem in Nyariga. There is no business for women, so a lot of women went downside to look for small jobs to earn some money for clothing and the education of their children. This problem had two effects, first it resulted in divorces and secondly, there were a lot of school dropouts. Let me explain both results. First, the problem of the divorces. It is the tradition that a woman belongs to one man. But when the women go southwards, some of them get an affair. If they have an affair, the husband can do two things. He can accept it, or he can divorce from his wife. When the man decides to divorce, the children will suffer. When the man divorces, the children will stay with him, but the other wife of the man will not take proper care of the children, because they are not her own children. So the children will suffer from this.

The second result is that when the women are looking for work downside, the children also have to search for jobs so that they can earn money for their school fees. But in Nyariga, it is really difficult to earn money; so many children also went downside.”

To prevent these consequences of the women’s movement to the southern regions, Nyariga Craft Society was founded. However, as the next chapter shows, the Nyariga Craft Society is not the only organization related to women and basket weaving.

Chapter 5

Facilities in and around Nyariga



Chapter 5 – Facilities in and around Nyariga

Biking through Nyariga is biking through a wide area. In the whole village, only a few large buildings can be seen. Most of these buildings are the Primary schools and the Junior High Schools. The functions of the other four buildings are less clear, until you take a closer look and read what is written on them. On the building closest to my house is written in red and blue: “Nyariga-Doone Mothers Club Craft Centre. Supported by the Blessing Basket Proj. & Whole Foods Market. U.S.A.”. Biking to the junction, at the left hand, another large pink building arises: “Nyariga Craft Society”. Closer to the junction, at the right hand two other large buildings are located next to each other. A better look needs to be taken, before the names of the buildings can be discovered. On the white with green building, the name of the building is painted: “Nyariga Community Craft Centre. Funded by the Blessing Basket Project & Whole Foods Market”. Also two paintings, one of a woman who is weaving and one of a woman who is carrying some baskets, are painted on the front side of the building. In front of this building, a large yellow building is located. Above the entry, in big red capital letters, the following is written: “NYARIGA COMMUNITY CLINIC”. On the main road, a small sign board shows that this building is financed by the Japanese Embassy. (Field notes).

As was described in the previous chapter, the lack of money is the biggest problem according to the women themselves. Different organizations have tried to overcome this problem by establishing income generating projects for the women. Nevertheless, also other areas of the lives of women, like health care and education, have been taken into account and supported by governmental and non-governmental organizations. This chapter elucidates the different facilities which can be used by the women to make their poverty-related experiences less severe. Firstly, the facilities related to the basic needs of the women are discussed. Secondly, the non-governmental organizations providing income generating activities for the women are analyzed. In this paragraph, one governmental organization located in Bolgatanga is described too. In fact, there are much more (non-)governmental organizations which focus on the women of Nyariga, however these organizations were less relevant for daily-lives of the women, than the ones illuminated below.

5.1 Facilities Related to the Basic Needs of the Women in Nyariga

In short, there are four important facilities in Nyariga, which can be used by the women to deal with their poverty. The first one is the Nyariga Community Clinic. This small clinic in Nyariga was founded in 2005 with the help of the Japanese Embassy. The clinic has five different rooms which are used for medical purposes. The first one is the delivery room, followed by the room of the midwife, Abugreine. Pregnant women can come to Abugreine to control their pregnancy and their unborn child. Abugreine also assists during the deliveries. The third room is the consulting room. One nurse is always sitting there to help her patients with their health-problems. Outside this room, one of the medical staff registers the temperature, the weight and the blood pressure of the patient. The room next to the consulting room is called the 'Emergency Room', but in fact this room is used for the storage of the different patient files. There is also a bath-room in the clinic, which is used both as the place where the patients can urinate, and as the place where the woman after delivery can take a bath. Last but not least, the Nyariga Community Clinic also has a pharmacy, however, there are not always enough medicines. It should be clarified that the clinic has no room for surgeries. Secondly, there are also no rooms for the patients to stay a night in the clinic. If the patient is very ill, or in need of surgery, he or she has to go the Regional Hospital in Bolgatanga.

If the patients have a health insurance, they do not need to pay for the medical care. However, if they are not insured, or if the insurance has expired, the patients have to pay for the care they receive. Young children are automatically insured if their mother is insured. The same accounts for elderly above the seventy years; they also have free insurance. Every patient has a personal health insurance identity card, with date of birth and the date of expiry. In this way, the medical staff in the clinic can control the insurance of their patients.

The medical care is not solely available inside the clinic, but also outside, since the medical staff executes particular activities to bring the medical care closer to the citizens of Nyariga. Examples of these activities are home-visits, where the citizens can inform the nurses about their personal health-related problems and where they can share some information about hygiene and illness prevention. These home-visits take place three times a week. Other villages are visited by the nurses of the Nyariga Community Clinic too. Further activities are the weighing of the babies, which is done on a monthly basis; vaccination of small children and sharing information about seasonal illnesses. Last but not least, every month some food from the World Food Program is distributed among mothers of children until five years old and women who are giving breastfeeding.

Secondly, there is the Ve-a-Dam which is an irrigation project, located closely to Yorogo and Bongo, as the second map of Ghana at the beginning of this thesis shows. The Ve-a-dam was founded in 1964 as part of an irrigation system. As was stated earlier, Nyariga has only one rainy season during the whole year. The rain falling in this short period of time is not enough to use the whole year. The irrigation system was founded to supplement the rainy season and to enable the citizens of Nyariga to farm throughout the year. Even in the dry season, the people of Nyariga are able to farm rice. According to John Akaribo, the founding of the irrigation system was really important: “The poverty is highest among women and children. Poverty affects them most. This is because of education, but also because of food. Many families cannot eat three meals on a day. But with the irrigation system, the living standard has changed”. The negative aspect is that with the use of the irrigation system, the amount of mosquitoes has increased in Nyariga, which resulted in an increasing number of malaria-patients.

Thirdly, Nyariga has many boreholes and wells. Most of these wells are property of the families themselves, while the boreholes are owned by the community. Most of these boreholes are funded by the government; while the wells are dug by community members. With the wells and boreholes, the water is closer to the houses of the people of Nyariga. Now they do not need to walk a long distance to get water. The first borehole was established in 1976, from this time onwards more and more were built. One day, the borehole close to Akaribo’s house spoiled. The community had to repair this borehole by themselves. John Akaribo told me that the community is divided in different groups and that each group is related to a particular borehole. Each group has its own technician, who is responsible for the reparation of the spoiled borehole. When a new part of the pipe needs to be bought, every member of the group has to pay for it.

Fourthly and lastly, Nyariga has a small market at the junction, which takes place every three days. The market day of Nyariga is the same day as the market day in Bolgatanga. The market in Nyariga enables the women to buy and sell food, but it also enables them to sell their baskets to the traders who will sell the baskets in Bolgatanga. However, most of the baskets are woven for the organizations described below.

5.2 Organizations related to Basket Weaving

The quote from my field notes at the introduction of this chapter makes clear that at least two different organizations in Nyariga are involved with the weaving of baskets. In fact, there is

also a third organization, which is related to the Widows and Orphans Ministry in Bolgatanga. This organization does not have its own building in Nyariga, but has its own groups of basket weavers. In this paragraph attention will be paid to the three organizations which are related to basket weaving. I will start describing these organizations chronologically, regarding their year of foundation.

Nyariga Craft Society

The Nyariga Craft Society was founded in 1990 by Tahiru Aberinga and is officially registered in the Bongo-part of Nyariga. In 2007 the organization was registered as a Non-Governmental Organization. In the Nyariga Craft Society baskets are woven to be sold in Japan and France. Tahiru Aberinga underlines the importance of the Craft Society, and the reason for the foundation of this organization:

“The Nyariga Craft Society is an organization which promotes the handwork in Nyariga and other villages. The main focus is on the weaving of baskets. Our main aim is to empower women with this handwork, so that they are able to stay back at home so that they can take care of their children and to finance the education of their children. (...) I started this organization to overcome the problems in Nyariga.

When I was in school, I was able to go to school through the weaving of baskets. I was weaving the baskets by myself to get money for my education. Then I thought that it was good to put women together in a group. This would be innovative, and then they could weave their baskets together and work at home so that they can take good care of their children and they will get a peaceful relation with their husband.

Our organization works with different groups of people. We are not only working with women, however the largest part of people of our organization is women. I think that around eighty percent are women as our main focus is on them. If a woman gets money, the money will be used on three angles. The money will be used for her husband, her children and herself. That is the reason why we are focusing on women. When we spent the money on men, it has a limit, but if you help the women, you will help the whole family. Besides this, women are more time-punctual than men and women are quicker (...).

Our organization goes beyond Nyariga; different villages around our community are included in our project. When we receive an order, we inform the group which is about this particular model, because every group is trained in a particular model. But sometimes it is such a big order, that it is above the capacity of the group. Then we

will train another group in that particular model so that they can also make that particular basket. So we are still training some groups.

The quality of our baskets is really good. They are also very innovative and we try to make the baskets very attractive to the buyers. When we started in the Upper East Region, there were just two models of baskets. When we became involved in Nyariga, we introduced more models. As the Nyariga Craft Society, we try to combine fashion and tradition with each other, but the fashion is changing fast, so every year we get four to five new models. We are the only organization which is combining fashion and tradition with each other.”

In short, this organization can be described as a grassroots organization, which is solely focused on the poverty-related problems of the women in Nyariga and in other communities. The organization tries to overcome the problems the women are facing, by generating more income generating activities in the village, to make sure that the women are able to earn some money and to take proper care of their children.

Blessing Basket Project and the Doone-Mothers Club

The Blessing Basket Project is an organization based in the United States, founded by Theresa Wilson¹⁵. The mission of this organization is ‘to reduce poverty in developing countries by Paying Prosperity Wages for artisan products. This unique financial model creates a cycle of entrepreneur driven growth resulting in permanent financial independence for the artisan’¹⁶. This organization is active in four different countries, namely Bangladesh, Madagascar, Uganda and Ghana. Abdulai Asuah, the director of the Blessing Basket Project in Nyariga explained how the Blessing Basket Project became involved in Nyariga. As the story demonstrates, the involvement of this organization in Nyariga was really different from the founding of the Nyariga Craft Society. However, their activities in Nyariga are comparable.

“In 2000, life in Nyariga was not good for the youth living here. So a lot of youth travelled to Accra to search for jobs. Also the weavers went there and they started

¹⁵ The word ‘Blessing’ in the name of this organization is not based on religious convictions. In fact, the name is based on the experiences of the founder, Theresa Wilson. When she was experiencing a difficult time in her life, she received many cards and wishes. She collected these cards in a particular basket, which she called ‘the Blessing Basket’. One day, she decided to help other women in the world, who are also facing difficulties, and she started the organization: ‘the Blessing Basket Project’.

¹⁶<http://www.blessingbasket.org/>

weaving baskets in Accra. When the youth was living in Accra, they slept in uncompleted buildings and they had a lot of problems in finding a job. In September 2004 Ayine, a boy from Nyariga was selling his baskets at the traffic lights in Accra. There he was met by Alexander Kedje from the Shape Lives Foundations. This man decided that he wanted to trace where these boys were living. He saw 65 youngsters living and staying in an uncompleted building. All the youth were still having the school age. He was wondering why they did not go back home. He decided to help them and gave them the opportunity to weave in Nyariga and to complete their education. The youth agreed with this idea, and he transported the youth back home to Nyariga. When the youth came back home, there was enough market for their baskets. The women realized that this was a very good business so everybody joined the project. All youth, who came back, went back to school and all of them completed the Junior High School and most of them are now in the Senior High School.

When the youth came back to Nyariga, I was also living here, but I did not have any job. When mister Kedje came, they called Assembly Man Akaribo that they wanted someone who assisted this project voluntarily. They needed a volunteer, to organize the transport of the baskets. I was convinced that the project was a really good project, because there was no middle man, so the money was paid directly to the weavers. So I became the volunteer. I have been the volunteer since 2005 till 2007. In 2008 Theresa came and visited Ghana. She was impressed that I did this work for three years now, but without paying. So she decided to pay me as a fulltime worker.”

While the project was in fact founded to help the youth to stay in Nyariga, the project is now mostly used by women. In total eight-hundred weavers are related to the Blessing Basket Project, six-hundred of them are women. These women are united in thirteen different women's groups (the Blessing Basket Project has fifteen groups of weavers in total). The largest group of women consists of forty weavers; the smallest one includes fifteen female weavers. Since the Blessing Basket Project became involved in Nyariga, the orders for baskets have increased, as the following table shows:

Table 1: Amount of ordered baskets (Blessing Basket Project Nyariga)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Amount of ordered baskets</i>
2004	2.664
2005	5.000
2006	9.400
2007	10.000
2008	12.000
2009	12.800
2010	17.450
2011 (till April)	8.405

Abdulai Asuah gave the following comment on this table: “I hope you see that we have weaved for years, but that we did not have a market. Now we have.” At the same time, Asuah notes that “We don’t want our weavers to continue weaving baskets. Because of this, we guide the weavers to use money they earn with weaving carefully and to establish something with which they are better off.” This is in line with the aim of the Blessing Basket project, which is defined by Asuah as follows: “Our aim is to link the artisans to the international market and to reduce poverty. We want to do this in two ways. First, we want to help the rural poor of Ghana with producing design and reach the international market with handicraft. And secondly, we help them to use their money to develop their own lives”.

The growth of the market is not the only improvement for the women who were weaving long before the Blessing Basket Project became involved in Nyariga. Another improvement is the following, as explained by Asuah: “First we were weaving the baskets for the market. So we needed to use the middlemen. But sometimes those men run away with the baskets without paying for it. With the Blessing Basket Project we pay directly to the weavers.” In addition, the Blessing Basket Project pays the weavers more than any other organization does, according to the director Asuah. When there is no order for baskets, the weavers can be supported with micro-credit so that they will have some money when there is no order.

Moreover, since the Blessing Basket Project became active in Nyariga, they have assisted different (local) development initiatives. Many of these initiatives are closely related to the activities of the Nyariga-Doone Mothers Club. The Mothers Club was founded in 1991

by the illiterate women of Nyariga-Doone. They came together to weave baskets, but also to mobilize themselves for education, health care and other activities. Madame Adombilla played a significant role in the founding of this group of women. Madame Adombilla is forty-eight years old, she is married and mother of six children. The women's group was founded, because "it is important to have women in the same network, so that we are strong together". When the group was founded, ten to fifteen women were part of the group. Now, more than hundred women are associated with the Mothers Club. The Mothers Club serves different goals. First of all, they assist each other, when a particular woman needs help. Secondly, they are registered as a group, which made it possible for them to have a bank account. It is important for the women to have this bank account, because it made it possible for them to receive a loan from an NGO or another organization. However, registering for a bank account showed also the limitations of the women; for a bank account a signature is needed, but many women are illiterate which made it impossible for them to give their signature. As a group, just one woman needs to give her signature.

This group of women founded the Nyariga-Doone Girls School in 1998, to give their daughters a better education and a better future. The result was a two-classroom building for the Junior High School for girls and a Primary School for girls. With the help of the Blessing Basket Project an additional classroom for the JHS3 and an office for the staff were built. The Nursery in Nyariga-Doone was also built with the help of the Blessing Basket Project. With the description of these developments, it must be underlined that these results were only possible because of the real devotion of the women and the mothers of Nyariga.

Another improvement in the girl's school was the construction of a borehole to provide clean water for the girls. Additionally, some of the students of the JHS are supported by the Blessing Basket Projects with solar lights and books. The Blessing Basket Project also paid the school fees for some of the youths. Another activity related to the Mothers Club is the roofing of the Mothers Club Craft Centre. The Nyariga Community Craft Centre was also built with the help of the Blessing Basket Project. And finally, the Blessing Basket Project supported the youth and the weavers with bikes. The 'Well bicycle association' gave the bikes and the Blessing Basket Project paid for their shipment.

Widow groups in Nyariga and the Widows and Orphans Ministry (WOM)

According to Cynthia Ayoore, more than hundred widows live in Nyariga. Most of these widows are united in the two widows groups of Nyariga. The first group was founded in 1993, and after some problems and an increase in the number of widows in Nyariga, a second

group was founded in 1996. The two groups are related to the Widows and Orphans Ministry (WOM) in Bolgatanga, which was founded by Betty Ayagiba. Betty Ayagiba is a strong, busy and very passionate woman, who is resolute to help the widows in Ghana. Her motivation to found this organization was explained by her as follows:

“I became a widow by myself. When I became a widow, I was working in the hospital. There I met a lot of women who were not able to pay their hospital bills, because they were widows. So this touched my heart and I decided to mobilize those women together so that they will now have access to their basic human rights.”

According to Ayagiba, it is important that the widows are organized together, because this makes it easier to educate them about their rights, which is needed to help prevent the mistreatment of widows. The second reason for the importance of widows-groups is the following: “As a group, the women can share their experiences with each other and they can encourage each other in their personal activities. It is good to do this instead of being alone”.

Another contribution of the WOM to the lives of the widows in Nyariga, is that the WOM receives orders for baskets from the United States of America. The widows can weave the baskets for this order, and earn some money. Besides this, the WOM also assists the children of the widows with financial and material means, to guarantee that they have access to schooling. Lastly, the widows can also come to the office of the WOM to ask for a loan or micro-credit, in order to improve their personal livelihoods.

Cynthia Ayoore demonstrated the importance of being part of the widows-group. In 1994 Cynthia lost her husband, and she was left alone with two children. Cynthia was a widow for seven years when she became part of the widows group. Very soon, she became the leader of this group. Since Ayoore became part of the group, her life has improved through the help of the group-members and the WOM. The following two quotes illustrate this: “The Widows and Orphans Ministry is really important, because with them we get an order for baskets, so they sell the baskets for us.” And: “My life has improved. First I thought about my problems and I cried, but the group taught me that once there is life there is hope. So now I am not crying anymore.”



Chapter 6

Livelihood Strategies

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Chapter 6 – Livelihood Strategies

The fourth chapter has taken an in depth look at the poverty situation in Nyariga and the consequences of this poverty for the women living in Nyariga. Many of these women face problems in earning enough money to take proper care of their children, their husbands and themselves. Chapter five analyzed the possibilities the women have to earn some income to deal with their poverty. Additionally, it also showed the basic facilities which can be used by the women to deal with their poverty. In that chapter, the attention for the women themselves was limited, and especially the organizations and facilities were described. This chapter goes back to the stories of the women of Nyariga.

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the women of Nyariga are no passive victims because of their poverty situation. In fact, the women of Nyariga are active agents. The poverty does not make the women desperate, but they try to find different solutions to deal with their poverty. Within these solutions found by the women, there are many similarities. However, there are also some differences between the attempts to deal with the poverty. This chapter will shed light on the strategies of the women in dealing with their poverty. At the same time, some of these strategies created other problems; these new problems will also be analyzed. Following the sixth chapter, this chapter starts with a paragraph which highlights the income generating activities performed by the women. This paragraph also demonstrates how the women use the facilities described in the fifth chapter, and how they transform these possibilities to their own needs. Furthermore, this chapter elucidates the social livelihood strategies, like having children and being part of an association.

6.1 Income Generating Activities

In this paragraph, firstly, the activity of basket weaving will be analyzed, as it is the most important source of income in Nyariga. Secondly, the female shop-owners and market-women will be described. Thirdly, the work of the food and drink sellers in Nyariga will be elucidated. Fourthly and finally, the particular income generating activities, for which some training is necessary, like hairdresser and seamstress, are illuminated. Every sub-paragraph pays attention to both the positive and the negative aspects of these income generating activities.

Basket Weaving in Nyariga

No day in Nyariga passes without seeing a woman weaving baskets. In fact, every place which is visited, people are weaving basket. Some of them weave alone at home; others weave together under a tree in the village. Some weave the baskets together with other women close to one of the different craft centers in the village. Often a radio with Ghanaian music is turned on. While the women are weaving, most of them are sitting on a mat on the ground. A small bowl with water stands on the ground, which is used by the women to make the grass and the baskets wet. In this way it is easier to weave the baskets. Sometimes, when the women weave, some men help them with the coloring of the grass for the baskets. Large bowls with boiling colored water on a fire are used to color the sticks for the weaving. On these days the women bring their sticks, and while they are waiting until the coloring of their sticks is finished, they weave baskets, and chat with the other women waiting at the same place. (Field notes)

This quote from my field notes demonstrates that the weaving of baskets cannot be separated from village life in Nyariga. Everywhere I went during my fieldwork, I could not neglect the importance of the weaving of baskets for the women, as almost every woman was involved in this process. At the same time, the women underlined the personal importance of the weaving of baskets, like Asana did. Asana is 54 years old, she is married and mother of four children. I interviewed her and her sister-in-law. Her sister-in-law, Abugri, is sixty years old. Abugri is a widow and mother of four children. I asked these women what made them powerful. Abugri answered that children make their mother more powerful, in addition to this, Asana said the following: “I agree that children make their mother more powerful, but I think that the same can be said of weaving, because without weaving a woman is not able to take care of her children.” Another woman who was weaving baskets during the group interview, told me that the weaving of baskets made her feel proud: “I am proud of myself because of my hard working. Without hard working, I don’t know what to do with my children”. These two quotes show the importance of weaving baskets in relation to taking care of the children. This does not mean that women start weaving when they become a mother. Hamdia, a woman of 44 years old and mother of five children started weaving when she was a child of 11 years old. She learned the techniques of weaving from her mother who was also a weaver. Ten years ago, Hamdia became involved in the Blessing Basket Project as one of their weavers, which improved her life and the life of her family. Also the husband of Hamdia is a weaver,

which makes the whole family dependent on weaving. The importance of the Blessing Basket Project is stressed by Hamdia as follows:

“The Blessing Basket Project helps you to get a market for the baskets. When you have finished your baskets, you will get money. So you are not dependent on selling anymore. With the orders, we are sure that the baskets are attractable for the market. Also the colors and the shape are decided by the customer and not by us. (...) Weaving helps me a lot, it keeps the family going, and then we have no problems. Because of the weaving our children can go to school. So we are able to take care for our children.”

The importance of the weaving of baskets is even more stressed when an in depth look is taken at the reasons why some women started learning the skills of weaving when they came to Nyariga. Some of these women felt obliged to learn how to weave baskets, like Francisca, one of the teenage mothers in Nyariga. Francisca is nineteen years old; she is married, and she has a one-year-old daughter. I met Francisca when I went to the monthly weighting of the small children in Nyariga. Francisca told me that she lives in Nyariga now, but that she was born in Sumbrungu, a village close to Bolgatanga. She met her husband in Accra, when both were working there. Francisca was learning to become a seamstress in Accra and her husband was working as a cleaner in Accra. In Accra, Francisca became pregnant. Her parents were not happy with that, because as a consequence, she could not finish her education in Accra. Francisca was forced to leave Accra and to go to her parents-in-law who live in Nyariga, while her husband is still living in Accra. Francisca does not get any money from her husband, so she has to earn all her money by herself. She tries to earn this money with the weaving of baskets, which she learned from her mother-in-law.

The story of Francisca demonstrates the importance of weaving baskets, even for the women who are not used to this work. A crucial facet of weaving, which makes it extremely important, is that it can be learned easily. No education is needed to learn how to weave baskets, only a relative or friend, who is willing to teach how to weave. Accordingly, the skills and the knowledge of weaving baskets are easily transferred among the women and girls in Nyariga. Eunice, a woman of thirty years old and a mother of four children also learned how to weave baskets: “I have not always weaved. First I did not do it, but when I came here I saw other people weaving. They taught me how to weave. Now a part of the group is teaching me the particular styles to weave.”

The money earned with the weaving of baskets is not solely used for the basic needs of the women. One woman explained to me that she weaves baskets to earn money, in order to pay the workers on her farm. This example demonstrates that the weaving of baskets can serve different goals. One day, this particular woman went to her rice field. On her way she met three other women who came back from the city. These women asked her if she had some work to do for them. The women closed a deal about the time and the money. The three women brought their children back home, one of them stayed at home to look after the children; the other two came back to work on the rice field to earn some small money. The farmer was only able to pay the women this money, because of the weaving of baskets.

Despite this importance of the weaving of baskets, some women demonstrated that the weaving of baskets generates various problems. The first thing the women told me is that the weaving of baskets is a very long process, as Eunice said: “The whole process of weaving makes it difficult. First you have to buy the sticks, than you have to turn them, then you have to color them and then you can start weaving. So this is all a long process which makes it difficult to earn money.” Many other women share this opinion about the difficulty of the weaving process. Some women take this as it is; other women decide to try to earn some money in a different way. Furthermore, Azuma used the process of weaving baskets to explain why she is no basket weaver: “Weaving is not fast, because it is a long process. But I needed my money fast.” How Azuma attempts to earn her money faster will be analyzed in the next sub-paragraph. Related to this problem is the problem of buying materials for the weaving of baskets. Some women stated that they do not always have enough money to buy the sticks for the baskets. Especially in the dry season the sticks are very expensive, which makes it even more difficult for the women to buy these sticks. This is especially a problem when the women are weaving their baskets for the local market. Sometimes they do not even make a profit when they have bought the sticks and sold the basket on the local market.

The long process of weaving and the difficulty in buying the sticks are not the only problems related to the weaving of baskets. Eunice countered a second difficulty, namely the health-related problems of weaving baskets. First of all, she argued that sitting on one place makes the weaving of baskets difficult, because “the sitting gives pains”. Another problem for the health of the women is that their fingertips bleed if they weave for a long time. Moreover, the women explained that their vision becomes blurred when they are weaving for a long time. Then they cannot see really well and they get a headache. Ayanore, who explained all these health-related problems to me during one of my home-visits with the nurses, summarized the weaving of baskets as follows: “weaving is not that healthy for the body”. To

deal with their health-related problems, some of the women go to the junction to buy drugs to oppress their pains. In some cases these drugs help the women a lot and made it possible for them to continue their weaving. However, the nurses of the clinic argue that it is better for the women to visit the clinic when they have these health-related problems.

Not all women in Nyariga are able to deal with their health-related problems because of weaving; now these women search for another way to earn some money. Godwin is an example of this particular group of women.

Shop Owners and Market Women

Godwin owns a small shop at the junction. In her shop, Godwin sells bread, water, soap, candies, oil and ingredients like salt and pepper. Godwin started with the selling of ingredients in 1996, in that year; she used a table on which she stalled her products. Godwin told me the reason of becoming a shop owner with the following words: “First I was weaving, but with weaving my bones were hurting, so I decided that selling was better for me than weaving.” This shop is really important for Godwin, because with the money, Godwin can buy food, clothes and sandals. However, Godwin is also facing difficulties in her work. An important difficulty is the fact that Godwin does not always have enough money to buy the goods she wants to sell in her shop. Godwin is not the only one who faces this difficulty. Many other shop-owners and market-women face the same problems. Godwin buys her products in Bolgatanga. She goes there on market days. On these days, her son works in her shop.

Azuma, a woman who has a table at the junction of Nyariga buys her products in Togo. Azuma buys her products in Togo, because: “When I go to Bolga I cannot sell it here, because the sellers from Bolga are also going to Togo, so the prices are then almost the same and then I cannot earn anything.” While Azuma goes to Togo to try to make some profits, she also faces some difficulties with this decision: “In Togo they are using the French money, but here we are using the Cedi. When the currency goes up, our small money becomes worthless in Togo. This makes my job very hard. If all currency in Africa is the same, it is much easier for us to buy and sell the products. Now our little money is valueless (in Togo.” To deal with these difficulties, associations are set up for the market women of Nyariga and the shop owners. Some of these associations make use of the cash rotating systems, as Azuma demonstrates as follows: “We are an association which comes together and holds meetings when necessary. You know, every three days it is market day in Nyariga. On market day, we all give one cedi contribution and this money is given to one particular person. The next

market day another person will get the contribution. So at the end, all association members will get their money. This money is used for sales, so that the person can buy the stuff to sell on the market. As our association, we also have a bank account, so that we can get money from NGOs or governmental institutions”. Faustina showed me the negative consequences of the women’s-market association of which she was part. Their group consisted out of five people, and they received loans from a particular NGO. However, some group members were not able to pay the money back on time, so they did not get a second chance to receive more loans. As she said: “It is difficult to start a new group, because you don’t know if you can trust a fellow. If one doesn’t pay, he will spoil the names of all the group members”. The consequences are not only clear in the existence of the group, but also in the personal lives of the members. As Faustina said: “First, when they gave me money, I could buy on my own, and then I would have made profit. But now, I have to buy on credit.”

In contrast, Godwin describes her relationship with the other shop owners positively: “We have a good relationship with each other. We don’t fight with each other so we have a good relationship. We also help each other. When one is going to the market to buy something, you can message this person, and then he will buy something for you.” This helping of each other is more important than the possible competition between the different shop owners.

The poverty in Nyariga makes the work of Godwin insecure. As she said: “With poverty, when nobody will buy my provisions, then I cannot make any profit. That shop there is closed, because it had many debts”. With this quote, the dependency of the shop owners on the citizens of Nyariga is highlighted. The food sellers face the same dependency.

Food and Drink Sellers

At the right side of the junction, there is a small path where some small buildings are located. Two of these buildings are owned by Dilys. Dilys is a woman who is forty-eight years old. She is the mother of three children and she takes care of her cousin, who is an orphan. Every day, Dilys wakes up at 5.30 in the morning and she starts preparing food. This market day, this was the same. When I arrived at 6.30 Dilys was busy preparing the food. She also bought a guinea-fowl this morning, which was killed and cleaned by a small boy. Dilys’s daughter is mashing the tomatoes. Under a small roof, water with rice is boiling. Dilys’s other cousin, who is a widow, is helping Dilys

with removing the leafs around the Kenkey¹⁷. An hour later, Dilys finishes cooking and she leaves the place to take a bath, because “you need to be clean when you are selling food”. Also the place which is used for the preparation of the food needs to be swept every time, because “people do not want to eat at a place where it is dirty”.

(Field Notes)

Observing Dilys while she prepares and sells food showed me the importance of her small business. Every aspect of her work is focused on having enough customers for the food, because Dilys is limited in her possibilities to earn money, selling food is very important for her. Dilys is born in the Upper West Region of Ghana, and she is from Dagati origin. Since Dilys is not from Nyariga, she does not know how to weave baskets. Because of this, Dilys decided to start cooking and selling food, because she knew how to cook. Dilys demonstrates that not only skills are important in selling food in Nyariga, but that also money is extremely relevant. In the afternoon, some customers came to Dilys to buy beans with rice, but the beans were already finished. Dilys said the following about this: “Now they want beans, but it is finished. If I had more money, then I was able to prepare more beans. Are you getting me?”

Dilys is not the only one who sells food in Nyariga. Various other women do the same. A large part of the women who sell food in Nyariga sell the food at the primary and Junior High Schools in Nyariga. Often this small business functions as a supplement to the incomes generated with the weaving of baskets. Like Adosinaba said: “With weaving alone I did not earn enough money. So I decided to try to make *porridge*¹⁸ and to see if there were some people who wanted to buy the *porridge* from me.” The amount of money earned with the making and selling of *porridge* is not enough, according to Adosinaba. However, she still sees the bright side of her decision to sell porridge: “It does not give me enough money, because I sell small, so it also gives me small money. However, the positive side is that I always have some *porridge* for my children to drink.” Adosinaba sells the *porridge* both at her house and at the Junior High School (JHS). At the JHS, Adosinaba always sells at the same place, namely the big tree behind the JHS. Under this tree, a small table and two stools are used for selling and eating the food. Big bowls with food, covered with plastic, stand on the table, and the students can sit on the stools or on the ground under the tree.

¹⁷ *Kenkey* is a typical Ghanaian dish, made from fermented maize. The maize becomes a compact paste of which a small ball is made, which is boiled and covered by plantain-leaves.

¹⁸ Porridge is a Ghanaian liquid dish, which is most often eaten as breakfast. Porridge can be made from millet or from maize, which is fermented, sieved and cooked.

One morning I saw Azuma selling food beside Adosinaba. Azuma is the woman who started with selling food at the girls' school. Her decision to sell the food at this place is explained by her as follows: "The girls at this school are my children and sisters. There was no food for them at their school, so that was why I decided to sell my food here. I started alone, but now I am working together." The fact that more women sell food at school is not experienced as a problem by Azuma: "Selling the food alone is good, but I am not the only one with problems. There are many other women in Nyariga with problems. They also want to solve their problems with money. So it is good that they are selling food too." The reason why Azuma decided to sell food instead of weaving is that weaving is not fast enough for her to earn money. As a widow, Azuma needs her money fast, since she is the one in the household who has to earn all the money. Azuma described her situation as follows: "I cannot say that I feel lazy and that I will not work for one day, because I have to take care of my children, so I have to work every day." Despite of her strong commitment, Azuma still faces difficulties in her work and in earning enough money: "The market for my food depends on the children, if they have money, then they will buy my food, otherwise they won't." Azuma is not solely dependent on the selling of food, when she is at home, she also weaves baskets. She does not weave the baskets while waiting to sell the food, because the place where she sells is too windy for weaving, according to Azuma.

Not only local food is sold in Nyariga by the women, some other women sell local drinks. Faustina sells *pito*¹⁹ at the Junction in Nyariga, close to the place where Dilys sells some food. The preparation of the drink starts two days before it can be sold. Besides Faustina, three other women also prepare and sell *pito* at the same place. The *Pito* is prepared and sold by two. Faustina learned this work from her mother in law. In 2007 her mother-in-law died, and from that time on Faustina does the work. Nonetheless, Faustina is still a basket weaver, because "with only *pito*-selling my gains are not that much, that is why I am still weaving".

Livelihood Strategies based on a Particular Training

Some of the women invested their small money in a particular job training. During my stay in Nyariga, I met four women who had some minor training. Two of them were seamstresses, one was a cloth weaver, and the fourth was a hairdresser. All of them followed education outside Nyariga, where some were able to complete it. However, not all four women were

¹⁹ *Pito* is a beverage made from fermented millet.

able to do so, because of the lack of financial means. Despite their uncompleted education, the women use their restricted knowledge to perform their job. For some, this particular job is a supplement to the income generated through weaving; others are fully dependent on the job. The most important facet I discovered during my conversations with these women was that, for all, it had been an independent choice to start learning their handicraft. As Belinda, a cloth weaver, said: “I thought of it myself and then I went to the woman to learn the techniques of weaving. I had to pay her, but she taught me the techniques. I knew that I had heart for this job, and I needed to do something to get money.” Belinda is a cloth weaver since 2003; the training took her two years. Belinda demonstrated that she is happy with her decision to start this work, because “with weaving I get money, so now I can help myself.” As many other women in Nyariga do, Belinda has diversified her sources of income. With only weaving clothes, Belinda is dependent on the market, because “If the people don’t buy, then I have no market. If there is no market, then I don’t get any money and without money I cannot buy more materials to weave again.” Hence, Belinda also sells food at the junction. In the morning she prepares the food, and then she goes to junction to sit and weave, while people can come to buy some food. Belinda sits at the Junction until the evening; her mother-in-law takes care of her children.

Unlike Belinda, Mariam started a training to become a seamstress but was not able to complete her education. Losing her husband contributed to this, as it became much harder for her to earn money. Despite her unfinished education, she uses her restricted knowledge to make and remake clothes. Furthermore, she also weaves baskets. Mariam explained that she has to do both activities to earn money. Nevertheless, she faces difficulties in the upbringing of her children. To deal with this difficulty, she left her husband’s house and came back to her father’s house in Nyariga. Here, her mother helps with the children: “When she finishes a basket, she will give me some money. The other persons in the house do not help me, because my brothers also have their own wives and children to take care of, so they cannot give me any monetary help. However, they give me some practical help”.

The story of Emmanuella is a comparable story, since she is a widow too. One year ago, after ten years of marriage, Emmanuella lost her husband; at that moment she was twenty-four years old. Emmanuella also lost her father, which made it impossible for her mother to take care of her children and to pay their education. Emmanuella had to quit her education, and started working to earn some money to complete her education. To earn money, Emmanuella trained for hairdresser. Nevertheless, she never went back to school and continues to work as a hairdresser.

Rebecca, another woman who started training for seamstress, is still training for it. The story of Rebecca is also a unique story. When she was fifteen years old, she became pregnant. Thereafter, she did not have money to complete her education at the JHS. After the delivery, Rebecca decided to go to Southern Ghana to earn money, which she used to buy a sewing machine. Meanwhile Rebecca' mother took care of her baby. Nowadays, Rebecca is learning, at the market in Bolgatanga, how to use the machine and how to make clothes. During the evening she sews clothes with which she can earn some small money which she spends on her ten-year-old son.

6.2 Social Livelihood Strategies

The high rate of uneducated women and the lack of job opportunities in Nyariga make it difficult for women to earn a decent income. The lack of job opportunities makes it impossible to rely only on income generating activities as a strategy to deal with poverty. Hence, the social aspects of women's daily lives are strategically used to deal with their poverty. Again, these livelihood strategies can create new problems or difficulties. This paragraph will shed light on the social livelihood strategies employed by the women in Nyariga. First of all, the importance of having children will be highlighted. Secondly, the importance of being part of a group or association will be analyzed.

Children and Family Planning

In general, it is important to have children in Nyariga, as they are an insurance for the future of their parents. Many women demonstrated this immeasurable value of children. Eunice, for example, said: "My children are my future". In addition, many women explained that children make a woman more powerful. Abugri stated this in the following words:

"The strength of a woman is her children. Without children, you will grow old and then you have nobody to take care of you. The children are always with the women, because she is the one who gives them food. Children are also the strength of the father, but children have more compassion for their mother, because she is the one who gave them food."

To ensure that children will take care of their parents, education is important. As Bukari, a 43-years-old woman and mother of four explained: "When they are well educated, they will be employed. With employment they can take care of themselves, but they can also take care of

me.” Bukari highlighted a second important benefit of having children: “It is for future reference. When you will pass away, your name will be remembered because of your children.”

Last but not least, for many women it is important to have children, as they can assist her in household tasks, allowing her to invest more time in her income generating activities. For the chores, the girl is generally considered as more suitable. For instance, Comfort was very happy when she discovered that she was pregnant with a baby girl. In the following words, Comfort explained why she was happy: “a girl will help me with fetching water, washing and cooking.”

In spite of the benefits of having children, women face various difficulties in motherhood. Most of these difficulties are described in chapter four; however, it is only considering the importance of having children that the following quote from my informant Godwin can be understood: “Children are brilliant but needy.” To deal with this contradiction, the women are advised to make use of family planning. With family planning, the advantages of having children are optimized, while the drawbacks are limited as much as possible. The most crucial argument behind the use of family planning is that it is advisable to have enough time between the children. First of all, this spacing is important for the health of the mother, but above all, it is used to ensure that the parents can take good care of their children. This benefit justified Eshun’s use of family planning: “First I will wait and see if I can take care of my children. This is also because of the money. Now, in this season it is too hot for farming, so we do not have anything to do. We do not have food and money that is why I am afraid to become pregnant again.” A considerable number of women applied family planning after having been informed about its importance by the nurses from the clinic. Notable is the fact that many women did not inform their husbands about their use of family planning. Eunice demonstrated that this is not related to domestic problems: “It is not that we have problems, but I did not find it necessary to inform him about it.” Despite the fact that some scientists, like Moser (1989), argue against the use of family planning as a poverty reduction strategy, this quote demonstrated that family planning is a livelihood strategy for the women in Nyariga.

Nevertheless, during a group interview I heard that not all women make use of family planning. Four of the women had lost some of their children and hence they said: “No, we don’t use family planning. As you see, some of us have lost our children, so if God helps us to become pregnant again, than we will give birth.”

Women Groups and Associations

In this chapter and the previous, the economic benefits of being part of a group of women, have already been explained. However, being part of these groups can also result in social benefits for the group members. Comfort described this very clearly:

“It is important for me to be part of the Mothers Club, because as the Mothers Club we come together. When we come together, we help each other. When someone is lacking something, we help each other. We are also teaching each other about what is good and what is not good, so we are advising each other. For example, we advise each other that it is not good to fight with your husband and his family. When it is your fault, then you may not fight again, because you are part of the family.”

A problem in the Mothers Club is that the group has become too big. For this reason, the Club has been divided into smaller sub-groups, to ensure that the women know each other and can each other advice.

Besides advice, the women help each other in practical ways, like plastering a house or preparing food for a particular funeral. As the women during a group interview said: “When someone has a funeral we will all contribute for the food for the funeral. And when someone wants to build or plaster a room, than we all will help with this work and carry the water.”

6.3 Concluding Remarks

Considering the different descriptions of the women’s livelihoods, one general conclusion can be drawn: every strategy encompasses some risks. Especially in a very poor situation, the women face much insecurity related to money, but also to illnesses. Some of my informants explained that they cannot solve this insecurity by themselves. In these cases, religion plays an important role. As Azuma, one of the market women said: “I have no way of solving these problems. I only remember God in my prayers, his grace can help me.” Despite the importance of religion, many women demonstrated that they still face many fears in their daily lives. Most of these fears are related to illnesses and lack of financial resources. The difficulty is that, despite the women’s active stance in the world, they can never be sure that they will not face any problems. The motivation which keeps the women going is the idea that they and most of their children are still alive. Adosinaba demonstrated this in the following words:

“God has given those children to me, which makes me proud. Because, I have brought people to this life, and now I have to struggle to take care of them. But still I am able to do so, that makes me proud.”

Conclusion



Conclusion

“Being a Poor Woman, with Many Others”, illuminated the stories of women in Nyariga. This thesis demonstrated that women in Nyariga are facing difficulties in their daily lives, because of the poverty in which they are living. Moreover, the thesis looked beyond the difficulties the women are facing, and outlined the strategies the women are executing to deal with their poverty. Looking beyond the poverty of the women was in line with the Sustainable Livelihood Approach, as it demonstrates how people are able to survive.

Many of the results gathered during my research are in line with the theories described in the second chapter of this thesis. First, the stories of the women about their difficulties demonstrated the multidimensionality of their poverty. The Multidimensionality Approach (Chambers, 2007) focuses on the interaction and interrelatedness of the different dimensions of poverty. The stories of the women highlighted the relationship between two dimensions, namely the ‘human dimension’ of poverty and the ‘economic dimension’ of poverty. As the poverty-pentagon (see page 14) demonstrates; ‘health’, ‘education’ and ‘nutrition’ are part of the human dimension of poverty. In addition, the ‘economic dimension’ is about ‘consumption’, ‘income’ and ‘assets’. The stories of the women underlined how their lack of schooling influenced the problems in the economic dimension of poverty. At the same time, the problems in the economic dimension influenced the access to food and health care. Moreover, this also suggests that even within the dimensions of poverty, the different facets influence each other. Simultaneously, the poverty situation of the women becomes a vicious circle, as their lack of education, influences their economic situation, which influences the access to education of their children. This circle relates the ‘protective dimension’ to the economic and human dimension, as it is difficult for the women to protect their children against their vulnerability to become poor. However, also the ‘socio-cultural dimension’ has showed its relevance during this research. The social contacts of the women gives them more opportunities to deal with their poverty and to take proper care of their children. Family members are an especially important facet in dealing with the poverty. . This application of the poverty pentagon to reality on the ground demonstrates that the poverty pentagon is a simplified view of reality.

The fact that the women are facing the consequences of their lack of education daily can be described as one of the stresses to which a human being is vulnerable, which is also in line with the Sustainable Livelihood Approach. As Chambers & Conway (1991:10) explained: “stresses are pressures which are typically continuous and cumulative, predictable

and distressing.” The consequences of the lack of education are continuous and predictable, which makes it a real stress for women. Shocks, like the loss of a child or husband, are often unexpected and make women more vulnerable to poverty. The research demonstrated that the women are more concerned with dealing with their stresses, than with preventing possible shocks. Moreover, the women do not have the ability to avoid those shocks. In fact, the women have no real solutions for their poverty, which makes their dealing with poverty reactive. In addition, the women demonstrated that they are using their creativity and agency to deal with their poverty, and to ensure that their children are better off than the women themselves. This last aspect shows the proactive dimension of how the women deal with their poverty and the vulnerability of their children.

The women perform particular activities to deal with their poverty, but also to attempt to transform the world around them. Although the women are not able to solve their poverty, they are capable of improving their personal situation. As demonstrated, the most important activity executed by the women is the weaving of baskets. This activity allows the women to stay at home. Working at home enables the women to look after their children, while simultaneously earning some money. All the benefits of weaving baskets are in line with the practical gender needs of the women, since they focus on the concrete conditions of them. Likewise, the weaving of baskets makes the women less dependent on their husbands, since they are earning some money by themselves. This specific point is in line with the strategic gender needs of the women, since it challenges the subordinate position of women. However, it does not challenge the gender division in labor, wherefore Moser (1989) is plying. The same can be argued for the other income-generating activities performed by the women in Nyariga, such as selling food and sewing clothes. Although all these activities maintain the gender division in the labor, the women are still strengthened by them. The crucial strengthening point is that with these activities, the women are able to take care of themselves and they are less dependent on their husbands. Based on this, I am convinced that the gendered labor division is not necessarily wrong. Besides this, the ‘triple role’ of women makes it also difficult to overcome the gender division in labor (Moser 1989).

The different organizations who support the income-generating activities for the women took the triple role of women into account. Firstly, with the organizations focused on basket weaving, the market for baskets increased, which gave the women the opportunity to earn money. This first aspect focuses on the productive role of women. Secondly, the weaving of baskets enables the women to stay at home, which focuses on their reproductive role. Thirdly, the different organizations have created an association between the women which is

in line with the community work of women. Besides this recognition of the triple role of women, these organizations also gave the women access to loans from particular NGOs. The same can be argued about the market women associations, since it gave the women the chance to deal with their poverty.

All these possibilities and opportunities are in line with the empowerment approach. As Vijayamohan et. al. (2009) argued, women can only be empowered inside, when they have the possibilities and opportunities to do so and influence their lives. With the different organizations in Nyariga, the women have these possibilities and opportunities. For instance, based on these possibilities and opportunities, the women decided to work hard to earn some money and to become self-reliant, which is a valuable result of empowerment.

A different strategy of the women for dealing with their poverty, but also related to the triple role of women, is having children. By having children, the women feel secure that they have someone to look after them when they grow old. Although it is difficult for the women to take care of their children, the women are motivated to do so, to ensure that their children will be able to take care of them. The positive expectation of the future makes it easier to deal with the contemporary difficulties. The difficulties in having children become less severe with the use of family planning, which is promoted by the medical staff from the clinic. Some scientists, like Moser (1989), have criticized this way of dealing with poverty, since it focuses solely on the reproductive role of women. However, this thesis demonstrated how the reproductive role of women influences their productive role. By limiting the reproductive role of women, the productive role can increase as the women have more time to invest in their income-generating activity.

Lastly, it has been demonstrated that the women in Nyariga are facing many problems in their daily lives. In front of this, the women of Nyariga can be perceived as a homogenous group. The roots of their poverty are roughly the same, and the problems they are facing are highly comparable. However, all women have their own particular story, and their personal ways of dealing with their poverty. Moreover, the women also have their own creativity and agency to make their own decisions and to become active agents. This highlights the heterogeneity of the women. Depending on the aims of the research, either the heterogeneity or the homogeneity needs to be stressed. That is also what the title of this thesis aims to explain. Every woman has her own story, her own strength and her own dreams. However, all women live together in the poverty of Nyariga.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Reflection Report

My fieldwork in Nyariga was an important learning experience. First of all, I learned a lot about my own strengths and weaknesses. Secondly, I also learned and experienced the opportunities and difficulties of ethnographic field work. In short, conducting research in Nyariga was an experience that I would not have wanted to miss. Still, there are some aspects of my ethnographic fieldwork which I would have done differently, if possible.

First of all, I experienced some difficulties in gathering my data, as most of the women I included in my research were not able to speak English. This difficulty made it hard to have informal conversations with my informants. Although this thesis demonstrates that I have gathered enough interesting information, the lack of possibilities to have informal conversations with my informants made me insecure about my fieldwork. Now however, I know that doing fieldwork is a very diverse phenomenon, and that there is more than one way to conduct it. Writing my thesis gave me this insight, which shows that this last aspect of the bachelor-project Cultural Anthropology was a key part of this important learning process.

Another part of my research which I would have done differently, is more personal in nature. For me, it was really difficult to live in a small village as almost the only white person. This experience, as well as the difficulties in communicating with my informants often resulted in a feeling of loneliness and homesickness. These feelings then resulted in insecurity about my fieldwork and research skills. I discovered that insecurity and homesickness are not a good combination. Therefore, I decided that in the future it might be best for me not to go to a small village where I can only communicate with a small number of people.

As I stated before, the fact that I can now see the high amount of interesting data I was able to gather makes me more convinced about my research skills. I feel the most crucial aspect which made my research successful, is that I was very interested in the stories of the women. Besides this, I was personally truly convinced of the power these women possess, and in some cases I felt proud of them. This positive attitude towards my informants assisted in building rapport with them and made the women more willing to tell their stories and their difficulties. I discovered therefore that ethnographic fieldwork is in fact a highly personal way of conducting research. Without trust, rapport and interest, the research will fail.

However, what I found difficult about the fact that my informants were willing to tell me everything was that I subsequently felt obliged to do something back for them, although that was not the aim of my research. I also discovered that my informants expected me to be able to help them in some way. However, as a student-researcher, I knew my research cannot contribute to a significant change for the women in Nyariga, which made me feel guilty. This then brought some limits to the process of writing my thesis, as I felt obliged to write a very convincing thesis in which the stories of the women showed their full value. These high expectations of myself, and the knowledge that my informants had high expectations of me as well, highlighted how unprepared I was for the responsibilities of a researcher. In the preparation of my research, I never wondered how to deal with the expectations of the local people and the fact that my informants would see me as a development worker, instead of as a researcher. During my fieldwork, I discovered that it is therefore very important to explain the purpose of your research. For the next time, I have to make this clear from my first day in the field. However, these expectations of my informants were also related to their background, since their village is often visited by development workers. It would have been better if I had known this before I entered my field.

Because of these expectations, it was sometimes difficult for me to work with my informants. There were times when I became tired of their high expectations, and I felt lonely because my informants did not see me as one of them, but as someone who could assist them in their difficulties. Not only my informants expressed these expectations clearly, but the small children in the village too. On one hand, I understood their requests for financial assistance. On the other hand, however, I perceived myself as a bad researcher, as I was not able to truly become one of them. All the time I was there, I was 'the Other', the '*Solemia*' (white lady), or the girl with money. As a researcher, with a passion for development work, these experiences frustrated me. I am sure that it is also important to take these difficulties into account in the preparation phase of a research.

Despite these difficulties during my fieldwork, I really enjoyed my time in Ghana, as well as the experience of being a researcher. I enjoyed listening to the stories of the women and writing them down. I liked to be able to take part in their lives. I enjoyed living in a totally different world, weaving baskets, eating local food and listening to Ghanaian music. Finally, I liked telling my own personal stories to my informants, through which I was able to show them that I am also a person, just like they are. And although I was not able to become a real Ghanaian, I was able to become 'Akaribo's daughter'. Now I know that I have a Ghanaian family and a Ghanaian home.



Picture: Weaving Baskets with Ayinbota (10 February 2011).