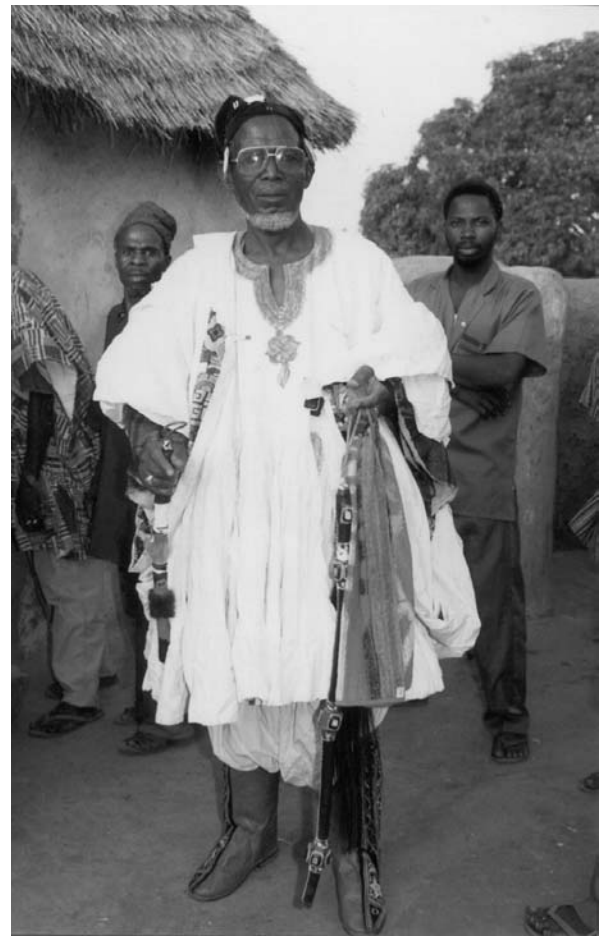


*The Chief with his Elders behind him. They sit in-state with him to deal with Executive and Judgement issues, and formulate rules and regulations. They do not have spiritual functions or absolute control over land. The Chief is the highest authority in the community.*



Traditional authorities and institutions have always existed in Ghanaian societies. They have sustained these societies despite the years of external control in the form of national state institutions. The authors of this article discuss the possibility of working with the traditional institutions as the entry point for endogenous development. They have implemented programmes aimed at strengthening local organisations for development, in which Community Institutional Mapping was used as one of the tools in community diagnosis.

## Traditional institutions: entry point for endogenous development

Samuel Bonye and Dr David Millar

In engaging with traditional authorities and institutions - the structures and units of organisation in a community - one has to be aware of the historical struggle in Ghana. The colonial nation state sought to use the traditional authorities to govern at the lowest level, in the communities, and to serve the interests of the colonial powers. Later on, the post-colonial state thus perceived the traditional authorities as collaborating with the colonial oppressor and, for that and other reasons, not to be given any major role in the new nation state. This has given rise to the

relegation of traditional authorities to the status of mere custodians of the traditions and customs of their subjects. Their role in the socio-economic development of their communities is minimal, since the nation state has taken this role upon itself.

Traditional authorities have also been marginalised politically. The 1992 Constitution categorically bars them from engaging in party politics. Between 1982 and 1992 the powers and space available to traditional institutions eroded further, with the creation of People's Defence Committees under

the government's decentralisation programme.

### Community institutional mapping

Since July 2003, Compas partner in southern Ghana CIKOD (Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development) has been implementing a programme aimed at strengthening local organisations for development, based on their own worldviews and institutions. The purpose of this programme is to develop methodologies for working with tradi-

#### **Box 1 Guidelines for Community Institutional Mapping: steps for participatory data collection**

- Step 1: Open discussion with whole community about their institutions - structures - organisations
- Step 2: Community walk to these institutions - structures - organisations, to see their areas of operation
- Step 3: Mapping of institutions and organisations, showing their various locations and niches
- Step 4: Analysis of the 'flow relationships' between organisations and institutions
- Step 5: Family unit studies - stratified group / focus group discussion: conduct a gender sensitive 'three generational analysis' (grandfather, father, son and grandmother, mother, daughter) through interview
- Step 6: Structured interview with key informants in the community: chief, medicine man, women's leader, tindana, youth leader, soothsayer, war leader, magazia, pugnaa

tional authorities and institutions towards sustainable local development.

To make a start with this programme CIKOD, together with the services of the Center for Development Studies of the University of Cape Coast, designed guidelines for Community Institutional Mapping of indigenous institutions and traditional authority systems (see Box 1). These guidelines were used in the Community Institutional Mapping exercises conducted in 11 communities throughout Ghana. One of these pilot studies was in Kalbeo in northern Ghana, where the local chief invited another Compass partner CECIK (Center for Cosmivision and Indigenous Knowledge) to support the community during the exercise. Though CECIK has worked extensively with local communities in the area, Kalbeo was a new community with which to start working towards endogenous development.

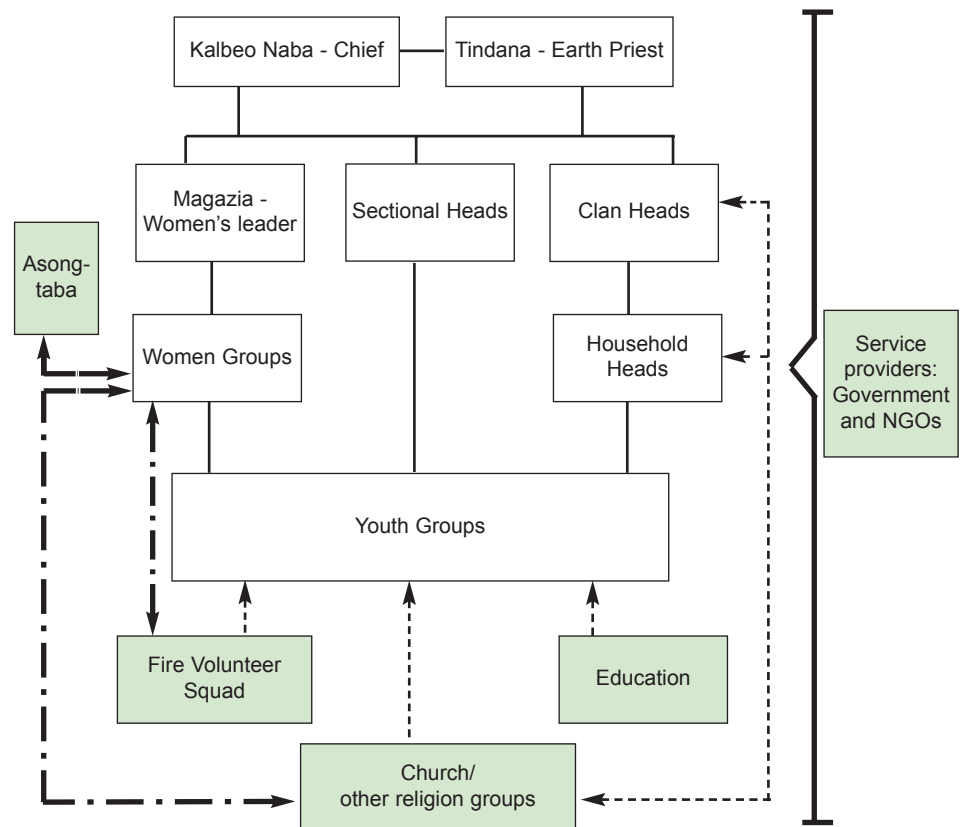
### Kalbeo: place of action

The Kalbeo community is located about five kilometres South West of Bolgatanga, the regional capital of Upper East Region. A third class road, branching off from the main road between Bolgatanga and Tamale, leads to the community. With about 350 households with an average of eight members, the population totals about 3,800 people. The community is patrilineal, with males owning and controlling most of the resources, especially land. The main occupation of the people is farming, both food crops and live-stock production. The vegetation of the area is savannah wood and grassland. The landscape is generally flat but interspersed with hilly areas. There are a number of streams, though most carry water only during the rainy season.

Facilitation of the endogenous development efforts in Kalbeo started with a community diagnosis. The community and staff of CECIK and CIKOD engaged in a Resource Analysis Survey. The resource analysis, which included spiritual resources of the community involved, first led to the idea of possibilities for action towards endogenous development. But to ensure that the endogenous development efforts are actually owned and managed by the people themselves, there was a need for a community institutional mapping exercise to understand what institutions existed, which would fit best for which activity, and the capacity within the community to manage such activities.

The procedure presented in Box 1 was used to facilitate this process. The community started by making a diagram of the local institutions and provided

Figure 1 Outcome of Community Institutional Mapping: indigenous institutions (white) and structural institutions (green) of Kalbeo community.



information on important developments and the functioning of the various authorities, groups and structures. A community forum, group discussions, and interviews created further understanding of the functioning of the local authorities and other community institutions.

### Different community institutions

The indigenous institutions stand at the centre of the structural institutions of the community (see Figure 1). Within the indigenous institutions the chief, or *kalbeo naba*, and the earth priest, or *tindana* are placed at the highest level of authority. The section heads (representatives of geographical sections of the community) and clan heads (family representatives) were ranked at the second level of authority. The women's leaders, also called *magazia*, stand at the same level of authority. Household heads, various women's groups and youth groups with their leadership follow.

Other structural institutions, such as the *asongtaba*, or village support groups, the squad of fire volunteers, and the Catholic and other religious groups, include people from various community groups. Especially the women are quite involved in various groups. Service providers, both from

NGO and governmental level, can work with any one of these groups, but stand outside of the community organisation. There are also various other functional institutions, like for example the hunter groups, musical groups and many more. These groups are active depending the occasion.

Finally, there are ritual institutions, which imply certain ritual functions at certain occasions. For example, the 'puberty rites' is the performance of certain rituals for a girl between 16 and 18 years of age, in order to enable her to marry. Similarly, the 'adulthood rites' imply certain rituals for a grown-up boy to enable him to live separately from his family.

### Indigenous structural institutions

Amongst the indigenous institutions, the *tindanas*, or land priests, operate as the spiritual leaders of the community, and wield powers in their control over land. Tindanship is based on the first settlers of the land, and is passed on to the first son only after the death of the father. The *tindana* are the protectors and caretakers of sacred groves in the community. They offer sacrifices to lift the ban on burning of fallow land, allocate land for cultivation, and take appropriate action against anti-social behaviour. Other important responsibili-



*A group of women engaged in shea butter production - an income generating activity. Prominent among them is the women's leader (Magazia and her assistant). They operate as a unified, formidable economic group.*

ties of the Tindana include soothsaying and conducting rituals to know what the gods want, to prevent calamities that might befall the community, such as disease and drought. Tindanas are usually male, but also can be female. Problems encountered by the tindanas include: lack of respect for this position, refusal of youth to take up the tindana vocation, and the usurpation of roles of the tindana by the chief.

Secular leadership of the community is with the chief and elders, which include the clan heads, the section heads, the household heads and women heads. The chief is always male and invariably comes from the same family. Chiefs are nominated by senior chiefs and king makers through soothsaying, and following advice from the paramount chief. Leadership in the chieftaincy institution can be changed only through death, or when the chief is incapacitated due to ill-health. The chief can also be disenthroned by the senior chief, clan heads, and tindanas, if he acts contrary to the wishes of the people and gods of the land.

The chief is responsible for peace, unity and development. His roles include settling disputes on land enforcement, making indigenous by-laws, and punishing offenders of custom. He also gives permission to settlers who want to acquire land, though the tindana is the final decision maker on land issues. The chief calls regular meetings to discuss development issues, and supervises community-initiated projects, such as the construction of a

day-care nursery or road repair. Problems of the chieftaincy include the failure of some community members to attend meetings, and the lack of knowledge on where to obtain funds for community projects.

The clan and household heads are also mainly males, though there are a few female household heads. Their responsibilities and activities are to ensure welfare, peace and unity in the households. They settle clan and household disputes, perform sacrifices to ensure welfare of the household, and prevent and punish anti-social behaviour. They also call households to meetings to discuss development issues, collect development levies and allocate land to household members. Inadequate cooperation from some household members was mentioned as a problem for their functioning.

### Female leaders and groups

The *magazia*, or women's leaders are elderly women who have demonstrated leadership qualities. It is their responsibility to call meetings to discuss and advise on women's roles, to access credit, and to organise women in communal, self-help and small-scale economic activity groups. Usually the *magazia* has a younger assistant, who runs most of her errands. *Magazias* are nominated on the basis of their leadership qualities and socio-economic position. Selection is sometimes by popular acclamation during community meetings. Problems encountered by the *magazia* include inadequate cooperation

from husbands, and lack of financial assistance to effectively carry out activities.

Each section of the community has at least one women's group. These groups are engaged in self-help projects and also undertake some economic activities. They are involved in cooperative sowing and harvesting, and plastering of old and new constructions, mostly in the off-season. These groups are also involved in a variety of activities including weaving, and the making and sale of baskets, hats and shea-butter. Often, however, these groups lack the necessary capacity and financial support to expand their businesses.

### Youth groups

Eight clan groups exist in the different sections of the Kalbeo community. These meet on festive occasions like Christmas, New Year and festivals to discuss developments in the sections of the community as well as pertinent family issues. Recently the clan groups have come together to form the 'Kalbeo Youth Association'. This association is involved in various development activities in the community, including protection of water bodies, prevention of bush fires, protection of crops by ensuring that all animals are in quarantine during the onset of rains. The association is also involved in the construction of a day nursery and a feeder road.

Leadership in the groups is by election. Leaders are nominated and voted into leadership positions. A member is eligible to be a leader provided he/she

resides in the community. The association, however, is facing problems. It lacks the necessary logistical and financial support to carry out its activities effectively. Also, the lack of commitment of some members of the group hinders effective execution of activities. Irregular attendance at meetings, and the lack of guideline documents that define responsibilities of group members, are also major problems.

### Other community groups

In Kalbeo there are fifteen cooperative farmers' groups, known as *asongtaba*, which literally means 'help one another'. They are peer groups that have developed into self-help groups with between 5 and 15 members. They function effectively during the onset of the rains (between May and October) and dissolve in the off-season. Besides their role in communal farm work, these groups are important for peace in the community. These groups manifest themselves during festivals, sacrifices, markets and other cultural events.

Hunting is done both in groups and individually. It is carried out not only to obtain meat, but also for prestige and is a symbol of manhood. In the past the hunting groups also protected the community; as institutions for defence they were called upon in times of need. Teachers and the assemblymen - the representatives of the community in the local government - are active in social events. Then there are the fire volunteer squads, who are regarded by the communities as part of the state and therefore entitled to receive salaries for their services. Service providers operating in the area, but not part of the community, are those from the NGOs as well as government officials.

### Formal religions

Though traditional worship is the most common form, for the past 20 years a considerable number of Catholics have been organised in the local Catholic church, while Moslems and Protestants are minority groups. These new religions significantly influence the visions and lives of the people in the area. They are regarded as having introduced a lack of respect for the customary practices relating to sacrifices. The 'power' of the ancestral spirits is weakened as a result of the belief systems that their converts have been introduced to.

Though many people combine traditional and formal beliefs, especially the younger generation has experienced a conflict with traditional customs as a result of these formal religions. As one

tindana indicated: "My children who are supposed to succeed me are not prepared to do so. They do not learn the vocation, they do not follow me to the grove when a sacrifice is to be offered, nor do they eat items used for the sacrifices. I think foreign religion has changed their minds. I foresee that, when I die, there will be no tindana in this community anymore."

The youth, on the other hand, maintain that most customary practices do not conform to modernity. They argue that these practices limit their rights and privileges, and therefore choose to follow their own ways. However, they still see a role for the traditional institutions, if only they were responsive to their perceived needs.

### Conclusions

During the process of community diagnosis, community institutional mapping proved to be a useful tool for getting a clearer picture of the internal communication, revealing controversies, and starting discussions within the community. In conducting this exercise we realised that some of the traditional institutions, especially some of the ritual institutions, had become moribund. For example the puberty rites, the adulthood rites, and the institutions responsible for the punishment of spiritual crimes. Other institutions need complete reconstruction and can be revived for development purposes. Examples here are the functional institutions for environmental management, the self-support systems for indigenous livelihoods, and the institutions for defence. Other institutions, especially the structural institutions such as the youth groups, the women's groups, and the clan support systems, are quite vibrant and could be the central entry point for endogenous development.

The institutions in the community experience interference from modernity, religion and the state. The youth believe that the institutions have outgrown their usefulness, formal churches often equate traditional spiritual leaders with superstition, while the government is introducing new functionaries who have usurped the roles of traditional community leadership. These elements have created a lot of controversies which have weakened the strength and effectiveness of the traditional institutions. As far as CIKOD and CECIK are concerned, these findings mean that there are a lot of challenges involved in getting traditional institutions to re-assert themselves. The challenges include (re)construction, opening them up to the demands of modern



*This is a typical Ghanaian youth institution, and is used in 'active and passive defence' of the village.*

times, and incorporation of genuine concerns such as gender sensitivity. There is still an important task ahead.

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