

Sustaining livelihoods Interventions in Ghana through the use of Endogenous Development Frameworks: A Review of Basket Weaving in the Bolgatanga Municipality of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The sustainability of rural livelihoods has become a significant concern to small producers and development organizations. This study examined basket weaving, a major livelihood activity in the Bolgatanga Municipality of Ghana, with support from NGOs, private and state organizations. However, there are concerns about the sustainability of this livelihood activity due to the approaches used by the development organizations. The researcher employed a qualitative research methodology, including focus group discussions and key informant interviews to investigate this problem. A total of 80 basket weavers and 12 development organizations were sampled for the study. The results showed incongruity in the expectations of the basket weavers and that of the development organizations supporting basket weaving in the study area. While the basket weavers sought to meet their economic, social, and spiritual needs, the interest of the development organizations was the economic empowerment of the basket weavers. The conservation of the vetiver grass, water, and fuel resources, the use of community resources, particularly the spiritual beliefs, practices, and values of the

basket weavers, and the institutionalization of an annual festival for basket weaving where recommendations tabled for boosting and sustaining the basket weaving industry in the study area.

KEYWORDS

Spiritual capital, holistic well-being, livelihoods, basket weaving, Bolgatanga, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Many development organizations have committed to supporting rural communities to develop their livelihoods on sustainable basis using their available resources. Some of these organizations including NGOs, private businesses and state institutions are convinced sustainable livelihoods development in communities will provide jobs, income, reduce poverty and prevent rural-urban migration. Basket weaving is one livelihood activity in the Upper East Region (UER) of Ghana that development organizations have shown keen interest in promoting. Among the public, private and NGOs currently supporting basket weavers in the Bolgatanga Municipality are: The Ghana Export Promotion Agency (GEPA), National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI), National Commission on Culture (NCC), Ghana Tourist Agency (GTA), Bolgatanga Municipal Assembly (BMA), Craft Pro Ltd, Getrade Ltd, Dasua Ltd, Blessing Baskets, Aid to Artisans, Trade AID Integrated, Widow and Orphans Ministry, and Single Mothers Association. These institutions play critical roles in the Bolga basket value chain ranging from capacity building activities for basket weavers to inputs and market linkages.

According to the Bolgatanga Municipality (2018), basket weaving is the most important single source of cash earnings for settlements near Bolgatanga such as Zaare, Dulugu, Sumbrungu, Zorbisi, Zuarungu, Kalbeo and Nyariga. The Bolgatanga Municipal Assembly estimates that, productivity in straw and leather works appears to be higher than in compound farming in these areas.

Millar (2011) further stressed the importance of basket weaving to the people of this region when he noted that in the UER, basketry is an important income generating activity. He observed that though basketry was equally practiced in the Upper West and Northern regions, it was certainly not on the same large scale as in the Bolgatanga area of the UER. According to JICA (2001) the skill in weaving the hand-woven straw basket popularly known as the Bolga basket is inherent in both women and men. Still, it is largely a women dominated economic enterprise, involving 10,000 basket weavers dotted in nineteen villages in the Bolgatanga Municipality.

The importance of the Bolga basket also lies in the fact that it is an important national cultural heritage to the Gurene people and Ghanaians. The need to preserve

this cultural heritage for unborn generations cannot be overemphasized. The National Commission of Culture (2004) observed that in the era of globalization and contemporary technological challenges, the people of Ghana must recognize that their culture is the basis of, and the most important factor in the nation's human and material development. Thus, our history, cultural values and institutions must continue to exercise a deep influence on the nation's destiny and play a key role in governance and national life.

Therefore, it is essential for development organizations interested in supporting the Bolga basket weavers to base their interventions on the culture and cosmivision of the people to ensure the sustainable development of this traditional handicraft. According to Achibongam (2015), cosmivision or world view refers to how a certain population conceives and perceives the world (or cosmos) and its existence. It includes assumed relationships between the social world, the material world, and the spiritual world. It describes the perceived role of supernatural powers, the relationship between humans and nature, and how natural processes occur. Therefore, the focus of this study is to establish whether the existing development approaches used in supporting basket weavers in the Bolgatanga Municipality are sustainable or otherwise.

FRAMEWORK

Endogenous Development Theory

Endogenous development theory largely posits that the starting point for the development of a local area or region is its resources in the form of economic, human, institutional and most importantly its culture (Vazquez-Barquero, 2002). This view pointed is supported by Brugger (1986) who noted that endogenous development refers to a number of names given the increasing concerns for indigenization and regionalism such as 'development from within', 'development from below', 'local area development', 'regional-regional policy' and 'regional identity'. Haverkort, Katrien and Wim (2003) provided more clarity to the concept of endogenous development as a development based mainly, but not exclusively on locally available resources, such as land, water, vegetation, local knowledge, and values and preferences of local people.... Endogenous development is an approach that takes place complementary to the ongoing global processes and can thus be seen to bring together global and local knowledge.

Therefore, it should be noted that endogenous development does not preclude the use of external resources but emphasizes the selected use of relevant external resources to complement existing community assets for development. Millar, Apusigah and Boonzaaijer (2012) emphasized the centrality of community ownership when they opined that, endogenous development should be based on local peoples' criteria of development, and should consider the material, social and spiritual wellbeing of the people. This study examines the extent to which development organizations supporting basket

weavers in the Bolgatanga Municipality of Ghana are amenable to endogenous development principles or otherwise.

Spiritual capital and sustainable livelihoods development

The place of spirituality and spiritual capital as an important resource for facilitating sustainable livelihood development has been a contested one. According to Ver Beek (2000) spirituality is seen as a relationship with the supernatural or spiritual realm that provides meaning and a basis for personal and communal reflection, decisions, and action. While religion is generally considered an institutionalized set of beliefs and practices regarding the spiritual realm, spirituality describes the personal and relational side of those beliefs, which shape daily life. So, while one could be spiritual without being religious or vice versa, in practice the two are commonly intertwined as people experience and describe their spirituality through a religious perspective.

However, spirituality is often viewed as a taboo in development and seldom championed by exogenous development organizations. Ver Beek (2000) expressed his frustration at this development misnomer in the following words Given the integral link between spirituality and issues central to development, it would seem reasonable that spirituality would occupy a relatively prominent place in development theory and practice. However, the subject is conspicuously under-represented in development literature and the policies and programs of development organizations.

Despite the biases and contestations against spirituality in development, proponents liken it to other forms of capital, including material capital, intellectual capital, and social capital. Spiritual capital involves quantifying the value of spiritual inspiration and practice to individuals, groups, and societies. The management consultant and philosopher Zohar & Marshall (2004) defined it broadly as the value of personal, social, or cultural beliefs and meanings that stimulate creativity, encourage moral behaviour, and motivate individuals. Spiritual capital according to him reflects what an individual or an organization exists for, believes in, aspires to, and takes responsibility for.

DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

Sustainable livelihood frameworks are commonly used in facilitating the development of rural livelihoods. Among the Sustainable Livelihood Frameworks (SLF) chief proponents are Chambers in the mid-1980s, Conway and UK Department for International Development (DFID) in the 1990s, and Ellis in the 2000s. Though there are several representations of the SLF, this study has chosen to review the DFID SLF. According to DFID (1999) the framework does not attempt to provide an exact representation of reality. It does, however, endeavor to provide a way of thinking about the livelihoods of poor people that will stimulate debate and reflection, thereby improving performance in poverty reduction. In its simplest form, the framework views people as operating in a context of vulnerability. Within this context, they have access

to certain assets or poverty reducing factors. The ability of poor people or communities to increase their stock of assets depends on the prevailing social, institutional, and organizational environment. This environment also influences the livelihood strategies-ways of combining and using assets- that are available to people to pursue beneficial livelihood outcomes that meet their livelihood objectives.

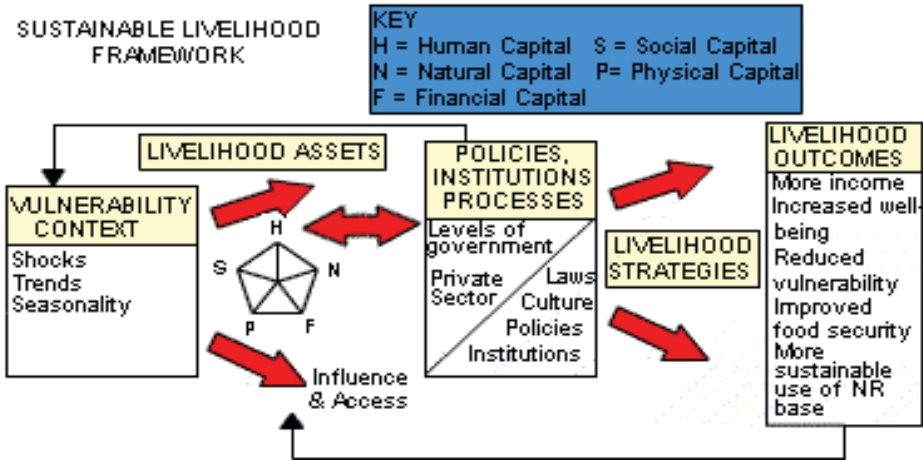


Figure 1: Sustainable Livelihood Framework
 Source: DFID, 1999

The SLF has five major components. These are: 1. Vulnerability Context; 2. Livelihood Assets; 3. Policies, Institutions and Processes; 4. Livelihood Strategies and 5. Livelihood Outcomes.

The reasoning behind the SLF as a tool for poverty reduction is that poor people are vulnerable to external factors which include shocks, trends, and seasonality. These exogenous factors are often beyond the control of poor individuals, households or communities and subsequently affect their access to and control over livelihood assets such as human, social, natural, physical, and financial capitals. Furthermore, policies, institutions and processes may either positively or negatively affect poor people’s access to capital and promote or constrain the livelihood strategies they pursue which could include productive, investment or reproductive strategies.

According to this SLF, people who pursue livelihood strategies ultimately aim to maximize certain outcomes, including increased income, increased well-being, reduced vulnerability, improved food security, and more sustainable use of natural resource base.

Proponents of the SLF credit it for being people centered, participatory and a vehicle for bridging existing gaps at micro and macro levels of spatial systems. However, my first criticism of this development framework is its pessimistic orientation to community development. The SLF assumes that poor people are by compulsion

vulnerable to shocks, trends, and seasonality. While this is plausible, as a proponent of the ‘development from within’ school of thought, I am certainly in support of a more optimistic and endogenous stance which says that poor people have a rich reservoir of cultural and spiritual knowledge, values, beliefs systems and skills which can be harnessed to improve their access to livelihood assets and subsequently achieve their desired livelihood outcomes.

Second, included in the SLF are various types of capitals purported to be critical for reducing poverty. These include human, social, physical, natural, and financial. Ver Beek (2000) argued that the proponents of this framework as typical of all exogenously driven frameworks and projects do not see any value in spiritual capital or choose to subsume it under social capital as is often the case with some academics in the field of development studies. Yet spiritual capital constitutes a critical livelihood asset which should be the foundation for developing the other categories of capitals identified in the SLF. Third, the SLF mentions increased wellbeing as one of the livelihood outcomes but what constitutes “wellbeing” in this framework is nebulous. Does this include social and spiritual wellbeing or as typical of blueprint models of development refers to only material or economic well-being?

It is these biases and idiosyncrasies that have saturated development literature and practice that this study seeks to re-examine with the view to investigating other alternative options for ensuring sustainable livelihood development among poor communities, which may not be well endowed with physical and financial capital but certainly with a wealth in the form of their cultural-spiritual, social, and natural capital.

Perhaps it is in acknowledgment of this livelihood development framework’s inherent imperfections that DFID itself a principal advocate of the SLF magnanimously conceded that this set of guidance sheets attempts to summarize and share emerging thinking on the sustainable livelihoods approach. It does not offer definitive answers and guidelines. Instead, it is intended to stimulate readers to reflect on the approach and contribute to its further development.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study examined basket weaving, a major livelihood activity in the Bolgatanga Municipality of Ghana, with support from NGOs, private and state organizations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative research methodology was employed in this study using a case study design approach. A single case study design was used because the basket weaving communities were homogenous with respect to their livelihood aspirations. The case study method allowed the researcher to critically study the units of analysis in detail,

depth, and context. Osuala (2005) noted that a case study is used to gain in-depth understanding replete with meaning for the subject, focusing on process rather than outcome, on discovery rather than confirmation and must involve collecting extensive data to produce understanding of the entity being studied. Kreuger and Nenman (2006) observed that in a case study the researcher may intensively investigate one or two cases or compare a limited set of cases, focusing on several factors. Good case study design, at a minimum, involves defining your case, justifying your choice of a single-or multiple-case study, and deliberately adopting or minimizing theoretical perspectives (Yin, 2004).

Research Locale

The Bolgatanga Municipality is found in the UER of Ghana and is the study area for this research. Bolgatanga is also the capital of the UER. It has a total land area of 729 sq. km. The population of the Municipality based on the 2010 Population and Housing Census data was 131,550 people, with females constituting 52.3% and males 47.7%. Annual growth rate in the Municipality is 1.2%, which is lower than the national annual growth rate of 2.5 % (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The estimated population density is 118 persons per sq.km above the national figure of 103 persons per sq.km. The Municipality has 213 communities with about 95% of the settlements being rural, with dispersed buildings, which render service provision extremely difficult. The dominant language spoken in the Municipality is Gurene. Majority of the people, about 80% are peasant farmers with an average land holding of between 1.0 hectare to 3.0 hectares. Some trees and grasses support the livelihood activities of the people. These are the shea (*vitellaria paradoxa*), dawadawa (*parkia biglobosa*), baobab (*adansonia digitata*) and the vetiver grass which is used for the weaving of the popular Bolga baskets.

Sampling and Sample Size.

A simple random sampling technique was used to select the basket weaving communities included in the study. The other categories of respondents were development organizations and government institutions supporting basket weaving in the selected communities.

Table 1: Categories of respondents

Sample frame	Number	Sample	Number of respondents
Basket weaving communities in Bolgatanga Municipality	19	10	80
Major NGOs and companies supporting basket weavers in Bolgatanga Municipality	6	2	6
Key government institutions supporting basket weavers in Bolgatanga Municipality	6	2	6

Research Instrument

The instruments used for collecting the primary data were focus group discussions, key informant interviews and observation of basket weavers' activities, while secondary data was gleaned from relevant literature. The data were analyzed based on the guidance of Bryan (2008) that in the early stages of the analysis of qualitative data, the key focus should include the following: Clustering: putting respondents/cases/observations into homogenous groups, classes, categories; Counting: establishing frequencies of similar responses/findings Pattern-matching: comparing an empirically based pattern with a predicted pattern and comparing and contrasting: establishing points of convergence and divergence in data variables. In the final stages he opined that data analysis should shift to the presentation and interpretation of data using diagrams, tables, role-ordered matrices; comparative matrices, and charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study found that there was no harmony in the expectations of basket weavers and development organizations supporting basket weaving in the study area. The study established that the basket weavers had seven different constellations of well-being. The most preferred is holistic well-being, a situation where basket weaving as a livelihood activity meets their economic, social, and spiritual well-being needs. This finding is corroborated by Simpson (2000) when he noted that the African worldview is holistic, cyclic, and dependent upon relationships and connections to living and non-living beings and entities.

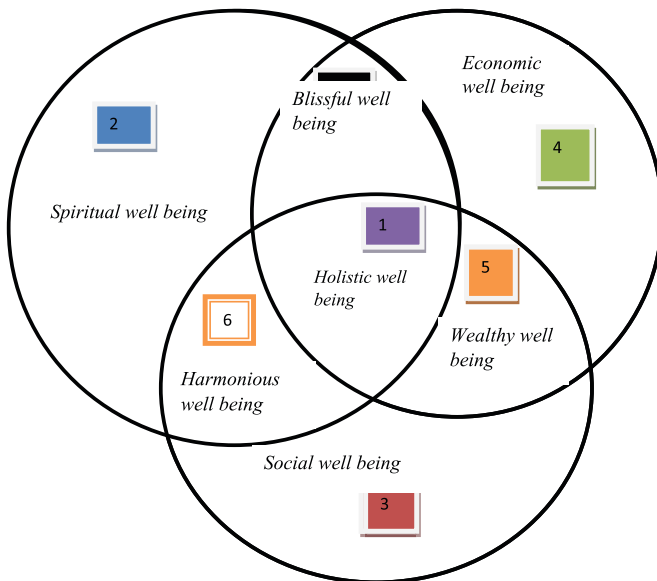


Figure 2: Different constellations of well-being for basket weavers Source

Table 2: Domains of well-being from the perspective of basket weavers

Domains of Well being	Description of development approach
Holistic	Perfect state of well-being drawing on economic, social and spiritual resources.
Economic	Base on the power of market exchange, trade relations, technology and consumer tastes.
Social	Base on the power of institutions, organisations, networks, groups, family and community relations.
Spiritual	Base on the power of different spirits, ancestors, mediums, morals, ethics, spiritual beliefs, values and practices.
Harmonious	Base on the power of both spiritual and social resources.
Blissful	Base on the power of spiritual and economic resources.
Wealthy	Base on the power of economic and social resources.

However, majority of the development organizations representing 83% indicated economic reasons such as access to an income source and reduction of poverty as the reasons for their support to the basket weavers. However, these organizations appreciate the importance of social capital in the development of the basket value chain as indicated by 17% of the development organizations respondents. It is thus obvious that development organizations involved in the Bolga basket value chain do not base the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their interventions on the spiritual nor holistic worldviews of the basket weavers.,

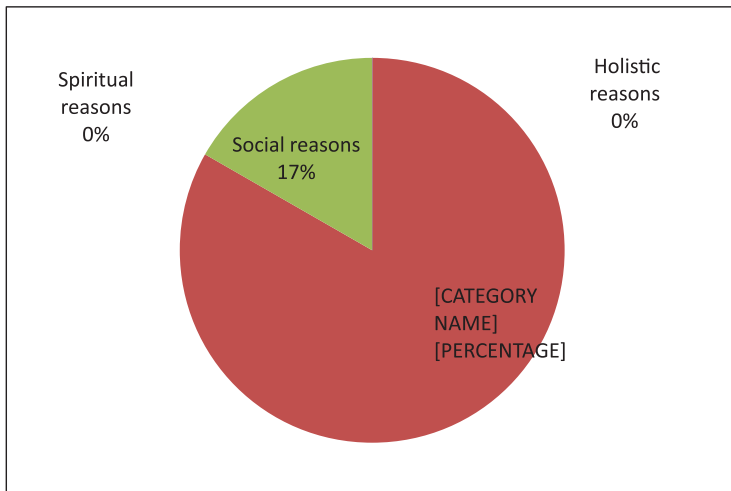


Figure 3: Reasons why development organizations support Bolga basket weaving

The development organisations argued that they do not support spiritual capital development in their interventions because it is not measurable, makes accountability difficult and the fact that their policies were against supporting religious activities. This is corroborated by Ver Beek (2000) when he noted that ‘the lack of precedence and of models for addressing spirituality may be one reason why the topic is ignored in development literature and practice’.

The study showed that spirituality and therefore spiritual capital was an important resource in basket weaving from the perspective of the basket weavers and not the development organisations. The basket weavers’ value spiritual beliefs, values and practices such as respect for the environment, communal living, fairness, sacrifices, spiritual agencies, rites and rituals and festivals. The study established six key spiritual agencies used by the basket weavers in the study areas. These are: Nayine (Almighty God), Teḡa yine (earth god) , Kolkā-arisi (wild spirits) Yaab-doma (clan or ancestral spirits), Sɛɛɛ (personal spirits/guardian spirits) and Bakolko daana (soothsayer).

Table 3: Bolgatanga basket weavers’ spiritual agencies

Spirit agency	Core responsibilities
Nayine (Almighty father)	Creator of all things. Has dominion over all things below and above the skies
Teḡa yine (Earth god)	Responsible for the temporary lives of humans, flora and fauna
Saa yine (Rain god)	Responsible for and control of rain
Yaaba yine (Clan god)	Responsible for the spiritual and material well-being of people within a given clan
Sɛɛɛ (Personal god)	Responsible for the spiritual, emotional and material well-being of an individual
Bakolko Daana (Soothsayer)	A seer who links up people to their ancestral gods
Bagre (Shine)	This is a dwelling place of a spirit of a person who is dead. Sacrifices are made to the shines for assistance in various situations

Table 3 provides further clarification on the role of the various key spiritual agencies acknowledged and revered by the basket weavers as part of the livelihood activities.

These spiritual agencies play a role in conserving the environment to ensure water, straw, and fuel wood for the basket industry in the study area. These spiritual agencies cater to the basket weavers’ health and spiritual needs to enable them to engage in basket weaving. These agencies also serve as mediums for conflict resolution in their basket weaving activities.

The study also showed that part of the proceeds from basket weaving were directed to addressing spiritual outcomes including the performance of funerals to enable their dead relations commune with their ancestors, performance of sacrifices for good health and fortune, performance traditional marriage rites to ensure the continuity of family

lineages and participation in annual festivals to preserve their cultural heritage, promote unity and peaceful co-existence.

These companies and NGOs want us to work every day. All they need are baskets from us. When we stop weaving to perform our funerals and celebrate our festivals, we don't weave. They ignorantly say we are wasting time and losing money. I always say, what is money, if you cannot sleep well because your ancestors are angry because you have not given them water. For me, weaving baskets include having money to perform my funerals and offer sacrifices to my ancestors. Testimony of Amizure women basket weavers' cooperative in Zaaire, June 2019.

These companies and NGOs want us to work every day. All they need are baskets from us. When we stop weaving to perform our funerals and celebrate our festivals they are not happy because we don't weave. They ignorantly say we are wasting time and losing money. I always say, what is money, if you cannot sleep well because your ancestors are angry because you have not given them water. For me the reason for weaving baskets include having money to perform my funerals and offer sacrifices to my ancestors.

Testimony of Amizure women basket weavers' cooperative in Zaaire, June, 2019.

Figure 4: Basket weavers' cooperative leader's views on spiritual mediation

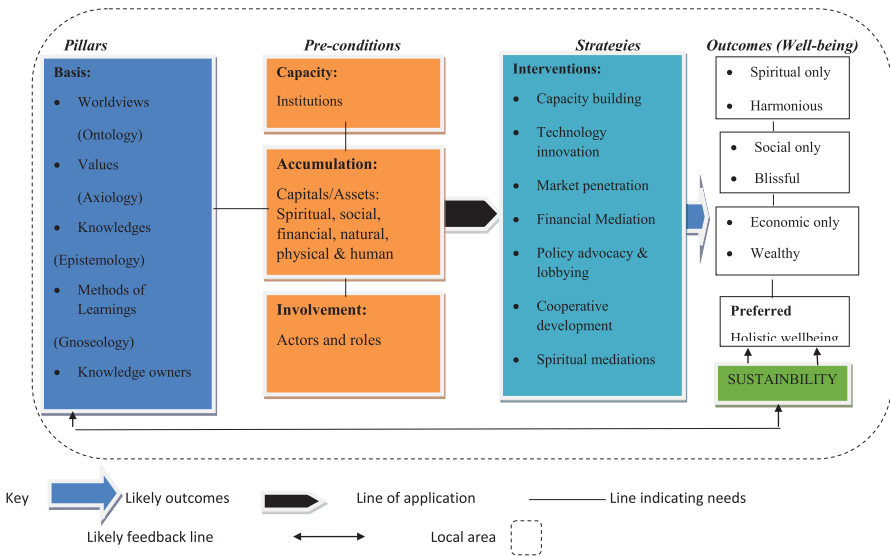


Figure 5: Holistic Livelihood Development Framework

The HLDF opines that developing interventions to promote sustainable indigenous livelihoods should be based on certain development pillars. The components of the pillars include: the worldviews (ontology), values (axiology), ways of knowing (epistemology) and ways of learning (gnoseology) by the indigenous knowledge community. Arguably, indigenous knowledge communities have their world views, ways of knowing, ways of learning and values systems which inform their actions and inactions. Understanding and situating livelihoods interventions on these pillars will ensure sustainability.

This Awedoba (2005) agrees with this basis of the HLDF when he noted that it is a truism that development is a crucial need for most African countries. Nevertheless, Africa needs any development and a particular kind that is tailored to suit African requirements and circumstances and meets people's aspirations. This is where the culture-development conjunction comes in, in more than one way. Increasingly, meaningful development should also be culture-specific; consideration must be taken of the people's experiences, social and physical, spiritual environments, and generally their ways of life.p.12.

The second component of the HLDF is referred to as the pre-conditions. These include institutions, capitals, actors, and their roles. The framework reasons that, once these pre-conditions are in place and are adequate and functional, the needed livelihood interventions could be initiated and implemented successfully. The institutions and actors include both formal and informal institutions and actors. The use and accumulation of various types of capitals or assets including spiritual, social, financial, natural, physical, and human. THEREFORE, the HLDF has a Capital Hexagon with the inclusion of spiritual capital and no longer a Capital Pentagon as is the case with the DFID Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF).

The third component of the HLDF are the strategies. The framework defines a range of strategies that development organizations could deploy in supporting livelihood interventions. These include capacity building, technology innovation, market access facilitation, financial mediation, policy advocacy and lobbying, cooperative development, and spiritual mediation.

The final component of the HLDF is the development outcomes. The framework shows the seven possible well-being outcomes from basket weaving as a livelihood activity presented in Figure 2 with the holistic well-being outcome as the preferred one.

CONCLUSION

Basket weaving is a significant livelihood activity in the Bolgatanga Municipality of Ghana. The Bolga basket is a source of income to households and a source of cultural pride, security, and identity. The Bolga basket equally symbolizes the values, beliefs, morals, and spirituality of the Gurene people as a knowledge community in Ghana. The basket weavers seek to achieve economic, social, and spiritual benefits from the weaving of their baskets. The study concluded that endogenous approaches adopted

by the development organizations supporting basket weaving are amenable to the attainment of holistic well-being outcome and the sustainability of this indigenous livelihood activity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Gleaning from the study, the following recommendations will contribute to the sustainability of basket weaving as a livelihood activity in the study area:

1. Given that basket weaving as a livelihood activity in the study area is central to the people's well-being. It is also recommended that an annual basket weaver's festival be institutionalized. This festival will be used to honor and appreciate individuals and organizations which have contributed immensely to the promotion of the Bolga basket. It will also be used for advocacy to improve the needed infrastructure at the community level to create the enabling environment for the basket industry to thrive. The basket weavers could also use this platform to offer thanksgiving, prayers, and sacrifices to the spirit mediums of the communities. This will make it possible to incorporate the peoples' spirituality, beliefs and culture into the basket weaving activities. This recommendation requires the commitment of the Bolgatanga Municipal Assembly, community members, and paramount chiefs and their elders in the basket weaving communities in the Bolgatanga Municipality to make it possible.
2. A critical resource for basket weaving is the vetiver grass. This natural resource is under threat due to over exploitation, bush fires, and climate change's adverse effects. It is therefore recommended that, tree and grass growing be encouraged in the basket weaving communities. Other conservation practices, including energy saving stoves and anti-bush fire campaigns, could help ameliorate this challenge. To implement this recommendation will equally require the collaboration of several institutions including the Bolgatanga Municipal Assembly, the Northern Development Authority, the community members, research institutions and development partners.
3. To ensure the intergenerational transfer of the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for basket weaving in the study area, it is recommended that basket weaving be introduced to the basic schools within the Bolgatanga Municipality of Ghana. This recommendation is seeking approval for the teaching of basketry in the schools and adopting a hands-on teaching methodology that makes it possible for master crafts men and women to go to the community schools to periodically teach basketry. This requires a policy decision from the Bolgatanga Municipal Assembly and the Ghana Education Service to make this happen. Additionally, it is recommended that development organizations support basket weaving communities to set up basket weaving craft centers to promote the concept of 'youth in basket weaving'. These centers it is envisaged will become

training hubs where young people could go and negotiate with the master crafts men and women to learn the skills of basket weaving. Once again, this initiative needs funding support from development organizations and the mobilization of the communities' own resources.

4. The study showed that the basket weavers are guided by many values, including fairness, tolerance, and benefit sharing. It is recommended that development organizations supporting basket weavers in the study area take advantage of these cherished values. Areas these values can be utilized in promoting this livelihood activity include the formation of village savings and loan associations, cooperatives and formation of water and other natural resources conservation groups to sustain basket weaving as a livelihood activity.
5. From a poverty reduction and environmental conservation perspective, it is recommended that the Government of Ghana promote the Bolga basket as waste bins in all government offices. The advocacy should include using the Bolga basket for shopping purposes instead of the non-degradable plastics that are wreaking havoc to our environment and biodiversity.

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