



Research Article

Rural Men's Views on Women's Roles in Traditional Leadership and Community Development in Ghana's Talensi Area

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Abstract

Until recent times, the traditional authority structure of the Talensi traditional area in Ghana had no formal role for the queen mother, unlike some other parts of the country. Through adjustments and modifications, the position of queen mother has been incorporated into the traditional authority framework of the area, creating space for women in traditional leadership. This research explored men's perspectives on women in traditional leadership and community development within the area. The study adopted a qualitative research paradigm with a descriptive design, involving 12 purposively selected men from the traditional area. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and analysed thematically. The findings revealed that men highly recognised women's significant contributions to traditional leadership, cultural preservation, and socio-economic development. Additionally, the study found that men believed women possess certain attributes that enable them to lead more successfully than men. It was concluded that, although there are no prescriptive roles for queen mothers in the Talensi traditional area, they are largely involved in duties related to the welfare and interests of women and children, as well as supporting their male counterparts in promoting cultural development. It was recommended that women with influence and stature capable of promoting development should always be a key consideration by the Talensi traditional authorities when selecting individuals to be enskinned as queen mothers.

Keywords

Queen-Mother, Men, Chief, Role, Traditional Area, Community Development, Leadership

1. Introduction

Target 5.5 of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 aims to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in politics, economics, and the public sphere. A key

development has been the gradual introduction of queen mothers in communities within the Talensi traditional area of northern Ghana over the past ten years. This study explored rural men's perspectives on women in traditional leadership and

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Received: 1 January 2026; Accepted: 13 January 2026; Published: 26 February 2026



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community development in the Talensi area since the integration of queen mothers into the traditional chieftaincy structure. The work was based on role theory, which argues that behaviour is context-specific and influenced by social position, situation, and other factors. According to role theory, individuals behave differently and predictably depending on their social identity and context. Consequently, people hold certain expectations of those in positions such as queen mothers.

The institutionalization of queen mothers in traditional governance system in the Talensi traditional area is basically a process of acculturation largely traced to the people and culture of the Akans of southern Ghana. In spite of the inclusion and existence of these queen mothers in the traditional governance structure and system in the Talensi traditional area for about ten years now, there has not been defined roles and responsibilities for these queen mothers. Their line of authority and power remains unknown to members of their communities and the traditional area as a whole. This work, therefore, explored what these queen mothers have done relative to traditional leadership and community development through the lens of men. As a patriarchal society, it is important to understand men's perspectives on women traditional leadership and community development.

For the purpose of clarity, it is worth stating here that the personification of a chief has been defined to include the queen mother in the [12] and the [44]. Section 57 (1) of the [12], for example, defines a chief as "a person, who, hailing from the appropriate family and lineage, has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or installed as a *chief or queen mother* in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage". It is, therefore, not surprising that queen mothers are becoming increasingly respected and powerful in communities where they reign. Some of them are well educated, connected and better placed to function effectively in traditional leadership and probably even modernize the chieftaincy institution that provides a vehicle for community development. They are also custodians of the cultural traditions and are mostly responsible for looking after or protecting women and children welfare in their communities. Undoubtedly, queen mothers in communities in northern Ghana have become ambassadors for girls' education and crusaders against female genital mutilation, early marriage, poverty, and child malnutrition (source). In practice, however, chiefs dominate queen mothers in the exercise of ultimate traditional authority in all parts of Ghana [28]. Hence, it is of no doubt that queen mothers play significant roles in their societies and their involvement in the governance process of their communities are well known by many.

In the southern part of Ghana, especially within the Akan society where the concept, reign, and practice of the queen mother are prominent, specific duties are assigned to them. Steegstra [39] suggests that queen mothers hold significant positions in the Asante matrilineal tradition. Queen mothers play roles in traditional political governance; they select candidates from the royal family to become chiefs for vacant

stools, hold authority in kinship matters, and perform rites to initiate adolescent girls into adulthood. Queen mothers also serve as principal advisers to chiefs and arbitrate conflicts where women are involved. These duties arguably elevate her power alongside the chief. Among the Asante of the Akan society, it is believed that the powers and functions of the queen mother may even surpass those of the chief [6, 26]. The queen mother alone has the right to publicly reprimand the chief, the linguist, and the elders [28]. According to [10] another vital responsibility of the queen mother is to be in daily attendance at the chief's palace and at all court sessions, except during her menstrual periods. These responsibilities clearly highlight the central role of queen mothers in traditional governance and their importance within the society.

The clamour for women in traditional leadership could be attributable to recent studies that suggest women exhibit sterling transformational leadership abilities. A study conducted by [18] on women and leadership suggests that women leaders are more communal, democratic, and participative, and to some extent socio-emotional in their orientation to group roles. Beyond female leaders showing some good leadership qualities as alluded to above, women are capable of bringing to bear some unique and important perspectives to governance in terms of values and priorities. In relation to men, women have the tendency to demonstrate cooperation and subscribe to social values that promote the welfare of others and are more likely to support ethical decisions [7, 15, 16, 37]. Similarly, [15] concluded that women have overall leadership advantage. These researches among others, serve as motivation for the call for women in certain positions including chieftaincy in societies, which were hitherto male dominated.

According to [3], women in traditional leadership in the Akuapem North District of Ghana, contribute significantly to the promotion of girl child education, environmental cleanliness, and agricultural development. In Kaleo of the Upper West Region, women in traditional leadership serve as counsel to chiefs and elders of societies, mediate and participate in negotiations on issues important to the people in general, and are directly responsible for overseeing family matters in particular issues around women and children. They also mobilize other women for communal labour, income generating activities, civic education/information dissemination, sensitizing to fight for their rights, access credit facility and education on child and maternal health [43]. These perspectives of what women in traditional leadership do in other parts of Ghana, present a great demand for the examination of women in traditional leadership and community development in the Talensi area; a patriarchal society where only men played roles in traditional leadership for a very long time.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Underpinning

The study is grounded on *the Role Theory*. This theory is

based on the premise that human beings behave predictably and that an individual's behaviour is context-specific, based on the social position, situation and other factors. The role theory explains that persons are members of social positions who hold expectations for their own behaviours and those of others [5]. Hence, the thrust of the theory is that individuals behave differently and predictably depending on their social identity and context. The theory holds that each role is a set of rights, duties, norms, behaviours and expectations that a person must face and fulfill. The role theory fits into this study in a sense that the research sought examine what queen mothers do in the Talensi traditional area due to the social positions they occupy.

Although roles are ubiquitous, they generally vary among individuals especially when the contexts are different. It is exactly the reason why the roles queen mothers play in southern Ghana is not exactly the same as their counterparts in northern Ghana. Roles provide people with a sense of who they are or who they will become in an organizational set up. It is important to underscore that roles played by individuals determine the welfare of the organisations or society they belong. In line with this view, [38] assert that individuals as well as organisations cannot function without roles.

The Role Theory is explained from functional, structural and organizational perspectives. However, the functional perspective applies in this work. The structural perspective to role theory on one hand focuses on social structures, which are conceived as stable organisations of sets of persons who share the same patterned behaviours [5]. This perspective of the role theory looks at the structural and functional aspects of status and role. This perspective tends to focus more on the social environment and less on individuals and as a result, the emphasis is on social networks, role sets, and social systems. The organizational perspective to role theory on the other hand provides insight into the processes that affect the physical and emotional state of an individual in the workplace that affects their workplace behavior [23]. Biddle [5] is of the opinion organizational role theory focuses on social systems that are pre-planned, task-oriented, and hierarchical. He believes roles in organisations are assumed to be associated with identified social position and form a vital function in the achievement of organizational goals.

For the functional perspectives to the Role Theory, [33] assert that it focuses on the characteristic behaviours of persons who occupy social positions within a stable social system. This assertion relates directly to this research since queen mothers occupy key positions within the social strata of Talensi. The adoption of this theory in the work offered the researchers the opportunity to gather information from participants on the contributions of queen mothers to traditional leadership and community development in the Talensi traditional. The theory also assumes that actors in the social system are taught to have knowledge of the values, norms and beliefs of the group and with which they rely upon for their own conduct and direct others to conformity. This is also imperative

and integral to this work because, queen mothers by virtue of their social positions are expected to uphold societal norms and sanction their subjects for non-conformity. Kendie & Guri (as cited in [4]) assert throughout the world, the institution of tradition and culture is one of the institutions that enforce rules, norms and values of the people primarily because it is clearly defined. The chieftaincy institution indeed has demonstrated significant legitimacy and ability in influencing their subjects to behave in manners and ways that are in conformity with the norms and values of the society. Even though this perspective to the role theory may be very popular, critics of the functionalist stance hold the view that roles are not always associated with identified social positions and that norms whether shared within the social system or not does not automatically lead to conformity of sanctioning. Additionally, changed conditions can render a social role outdated or illegitimate, in which case social pressures may bring about change in role.

2.2. Roles of Queen Mothers in Traditional Governance

The role queen mothers play in traditional political governance in Ghana where they exist is generally the same except in few cases. For instance, in Akan tradition of southern Ghana, it is the queen mother who installs the chief but in northern Ghana the reverse is the case. This should not be surprising because the Akans trace descent through female lines. As a result, the queen mother derives her position from that matrilineal set up. Aidoo [2] asserts that the *mogya* (blood) of the Asante woman which she transmits to her children determines their citizenship and right of succession to office and inheritance to property. In essence, what Aidoo is implying is that although traditional political offices within the Akan society may be held by men, their political status is conferred by women. It is probably for this reason the Akans have a popular saying "*obaa na owoo ohene*". This statement which literally means it's a woman who gives birth to a chief speaks volumes of the central role women play in Akan tradition. The woman is generally given preferential treatment and has a unique place in Akan tradition and custom.

The situation where in northern Ghana chiefs rather enskin queen mothers is informed by culture and tradition. In the first place, all communities in northern Ghana practice the patrilineal descent as opposed to the matrilineal system in southern Ghana, and as a result, the communities are generally patriarchal in nature. Secondly, the office of the queen mother never existed in many communities of northern Ghana until the last decade. As a result, it would have been unimaginable for that which pertains in the Akan society to be exactly replicated in northern Ghana. In any case, culture is dynamic and cultural traits may be borrowed but whether those traits are assimilated wholly or not is the preserve of the borrower.

As noted earlier, the queen mother in Akan tradition has power to discipline the chief and his elders. She has the duty to address the chief's court whenever there are serious issues

of concern and also sits and takes part in council meetings. In some instances, queen mothers preside over courts to hear cases brought mainly by women. In the northern sector of the country, queen mothers roles and powers are limited. There are mainly responsible for protecting the welfare of women and children. This does not mean welfare issues about men are precluded from the domain of their activities. The queen mother actually keeps an eye on the social conditions of the society. They also settle disputes that are conjugal in nature and ensure the maintenance of peace within the community especially among the women [28].

Queen mothers actually serve as wise counsels to chiefs in addition to the councils of elders [32]. Women by their nature are privy to some issues or information which the chiefs may not know and as a result, they are able to give good counsel to chiefs in administering and managing the traditional areas. In Akan tradition, queen mothers are regarded the spiritual leaders and they are repository of genealogical knowledge. They also act role models to other women in their areas of jurisdiction.

2.3. Contributions of Queen Mothers to Socio-economic Development of Communities

The contribution of queen mothers to the development strides of their communities is widely known and recognised by many people in Ghana. One of the areas where queen mothers are visibly seen in is the initiation of community projects. Although chiefs are equally fronting for such projects, queen mothers are often at the forefront because they are generally close to communities members and understand their needs much better than chiefs. Another area where queen mothers' contribution is significant is community sensitization on child labour, Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS), sex education/ teenage pregnancy and lately Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic [30]. These issues affect people especially the youth's lives on daily basis. They often lack information or are misinformed about some of these contemporary challenges. Another closely related area where queen mothers are visibly seen in is the education of women and girls on outmoded cultural practices and gender equity. As [30] puts it, many queen mothers and other traditional leaders are making efforts to eliminate outmoded customs that harm women such as female genital mutilation, *trokosi* and widowhood rites. This she believes will help address some emerging challenges of globalization, urbanization and westernization. Queen mothers, hence, take it upon themselves to ensure that the right information is given to women, girls and the youth to stand up for their rights.

One other area where queen mothers contribution is significant is the promotion of income generating activities among women [25]. Queen mothers take it upon themselves to facilitate training of women and girls on entrepreneurial skills within their jurisdictions so as to ensure they are economically

emancipated. For instance, queen mothers have mobilized and continue to mobilise women to embark on some income generating activities such as soap making, beads making, shea butter processing, *pito* brewing, and farming among others [39]. Their efforts have also led to accessing of credit facilities from micro finance institutions by women to start or expand their businesses.

3. Methodology

The methods deployed in the conduct of this study is summarized as follows:

3.1. Research Approach and Design

This work drew on qualitative research methodologies. This was considered appropriate because, according to ([14], p. 4), qualitative studies are a “means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”. Similarly, [35] is of the opinion that qualitative researches study persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions and feelings as well as organizational functioning. From the perspectives of both Creswell and Rahman, and with the focus of this work on exploring the views of men on women in traditional leadership and community development the in Talensi traditional area, the researchers were left with no option than to rely on the qualitative approach. Additionally, the choice of this research approach was done with the aim of providing readers of this work with factual, first-hand information and better understanding of the issues since the institutionalization of queen mothers in Talensi traditional area was relatively new.

The case study design was applied in this study. Creswell [14] says case studies is a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Case studies was chose as a design for this work because it had to inquire into the traditional leadership and community development of women in the Talensi. An inquiry into an issue of this nature therefore requires the employment of the case study design.

3.2. Study Participants

A study sample of twenty five (25) men was selected from five (5) communities in the Talensi area. This consisted of the elected assembly member, two elders from the Council of Elders to the chief, and two male youth leader from each of the communities. In accordance with a qualitative study, these individuals were identified as persons with relevant knowledge on women in traditional leadership and community development in the area. The purposive sampling technique was used to constitute the sample for the study because, in the primary

consideration of the researchers, these men were in good position to provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study [24].

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent granted before taking part in the interviews [9, 21]. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, participants' identities were protected, allowing them to respond without fear of being identified [40]. Additionally, participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without difficulties [14, 42]. These measures ensured that the study was conducted with integrity and respect for the rights and privacy of participants, fostering a sense of trust and openness in their responses [22, 36].

3.3. Data Collection Instrument

The researchers relied on semi-structured interview to gather data for this work. The researchers were of the firm conviction that this instrument was very appropriate for the study considering its purpose. In-depth interview sessions were held with all the selected twenty five (25) men at separate locations and times. The interview sessions allowed the researchers to have direct contact with the men for in-depth information on the specific issues under study. The semi-structured interview sessions were carried out on a one-to-one and face-to-face basis [41], and as a result, the researchers had the opportunity to read facial expressions and gestures which are good and rich sources of information. With this type of interview, opportunities existed for the researchers to ask further questions for clarifications.

The interview sessions were booked ahead of schedule. On the day of interview, the respondents were given a brief introduction on the research, and a highlight of the purpose of the research. After the initial and introductory engagement, the questions were asked and responses recorded. Respondents were communicated to clearly on the need to use the audio tape recorder and for their consent. Probing questions were used during interviews to elicit deeper insights and reduce superficial responses.

In order to capture information accurately, audio recordings of the interview sessions were taken whilst notes taking served as a backup. After the interview sessions were done, the responses were transcribed verbatim within the day. Once the transcription was over, the original interview audio tapes were listened to again in an attempt to get the researchers acquainted with the data for the purpose of analysis. In order to ensure credibility of the data generated from the study, the verbatim transcribed interview responses were sent back to all the respondents for their verification and approval or otherwise. This provided the participants the opportunity to review and validate their interview transcripts to ensure that their views were accurately captured. In all, twenty three (23) respondents confirmed the transcribed interview responses.

3.4. Data Analysis

A six-phase thematic analysis framework outlined by [8] was adapted to analyse the data. First, the researchers engaged in familiarisation with the data by reading and re-reading and listening to all interview transcripts and recordings to gain a deep understanding of participants' views. Notes were made on initial impressions and recurring ideas that appeared significant to the research questions. Secondly, initial codes were generated manually from the data. The coding process basically took into consideration wording, consistency, frequency, and specificity of respondents' comments. In the third phase, the codes were reviewed and grouped into potential themes. Similar codes were clustered together, and emerging themes were named based on the underlying ideas they represented. At this stage, themes were provisional and subject to revision.

The fourth phase involved reviewing the themes in relation to the coded data and the full data set to ensure coherence, relevance, and clarity. Some themes were merged or refined to avoid overlapping and to better represent the meanings embedded in the data. In the fifth phase, each theme was defined and clearly named. The researchers wrote analytical summaries that captured the essence of each theme and carefully connected the findings to the research questions. This process involved writing analytical summaries that captured the essence of each theme while relating it back to the research questions. The themes were refined until they offered a comprehensive explanation of the patterns observed. Finally, in the sixth phase, the themes were reported and illustrated with direct quotations from participants.

4. Results

In this section, the findings of men's views on women in traditional leadership and community development in Talensi are presented. The views of the men revealed that women in traditional leadership offered various services towards community development. Some were in support to chiefs to promote cultural development while others were geared towards promoting social and economic development in their communities.

From the interview sessions, one significant duty of women in traditional leadership (queen mothers) was *the protection of women and children's interest and welfare*. Although, the role was stated differently by different participants, it emerged clearly that the core course or line of leadership of women traditional leaders in the Talensi traditional area was the protection of women and children's welfare, interests, and rights. One of the elder participants submitted that:

Whenever there are cases involving women at the Chief's palace, the queen mothers are usually called to lead the process of resolution together with the council of elders. This has always been the case since the introduction of queen mothers in our area.

He added that, chiefs had always ensured the queen mothers

led in such matters because women understood themselves and appreciated issues affecting them better than men. Another elder remarked:

Queen mothers do not sit in meetings of the Chief's Council but when issues relating to women are discussed, they are called upon to attend. Just recently, the queen mother in our area presided over a case where two women accused each other of theft.

From the perspectives of the men, the interests and welfare of women received the attention of women in traditional leadership in the Talensi area. A significant part of the queen mothers' leadership role in women's interest was the settlement of marital disputes. It emerged strongly that the queen mothers played critical roles in the settlement of marital conflicts and the chiefs settled disputes of wider scope such as land and security. This highlights the point that, the traditional authority recognizes women's role, capabilities, and capacity to deal with life threatening issues especially those involving women welfare. It must be emphasized here that the queen mothers in Talensi traditional area have no courts or councils of their own. As a result, all cases desiring the attention of traditional leaders are taken to the chiefs' places. Again, the opinions expressed by the men also indicate that there is a clearer understanding and appreciation of division of labour in the traditional area where women leaders concentrate on handling issues concerning women and men leaders handle others. This point resonates with the view of [45], who concluded that a predominant role of queen mothers in Akuapem North District of Ghana was the protection of the welfare of women.

Another role of women in traditional leadership in Talensi that emerged from the study was the provision of supportive role in maintenance of culture and tradition. The men contended that during festive occasions, queen mothers assisted chiefs in the performance of some rituals and maintenance of culture and tradition. Talensi traditional area is a place for tradition and culture with several festivals. These festivals come with lot of pomp and pageantry and some youths are often found misconducting themselves in ways that go contrary to the traditional norms, values and taboos of the area as well as the law. A male Youth Leader intimated:

During festivals, the queen mothers together with the chiefs ensure the values, norms and taboos are strictly adhered to and that no person falls foul of the traditional regulations binding the area. The queen mothers also ensure that during festivals, women and children are brought together for the purpose of socialization.

The men also disclosed the leadership of queen mothers in installing *Magajias* (leaders of women groups). One of the Elders expressed this in the following words:

Since the coming of queen mothers in Talensi traditional area, they have played significant roles in the installation of women leaders known as *Magajias* in various communities. Queen mothers ensure *Magajias* are properly installed and function effectively to promote the women welfare and general community advancement in Talensi traditional area.

The duty of installation of *Magajias* by queen mothers is a very significant leadership function as that further establishes concrete grounds for leadership functions and community development. *Magajias* are women leaders who organise women due to their own leadership attributes but not based on the structure of the traditional authority [43]. Hitherto, *Magajias* installation had no defined form, process or procedure. Women used to initiate the process themselves with wise counsel from the elderly among them and installed someone who majority subscribed to, not by voting but by consensus. Today, that responsibility has been ceded to the queen mothers in most of the sub-divisional areas. This has curtailed bitterness and rancour among the women as witnessed in the previous way of installation. The installation processes are now very much like what pertains in the installation of chiefs in Talensi traditional area. This function of queen mothers as traditional leaders in the Talensi area sets them apart as other queen mothers in the country do not to perform such or a similar function.

Other contributions women in traditional leadership in the Talensi traditional area made to their communities were in the form of socio-economic development. It emerged from the study that they contributed to the socio-economic development of their communities. One of such contributions that came up during the interview sessions with respondents was fund raising. Most queen mothers were into mobilizing funds for community development projects. Due to the influence attached to the position they held, they were able to use that advantage to lobby benevolent people and philanthropists to assist in community projects initiated by them. This has brought development to some of the sub-divisional areas. In some instances, the queen mothers mobilised women to contribute monies and initiate their own projects. An Assemblyman from one of the communities had this to say:

I can tell you on certainty that this position of queen mother since its introduction has contributed significantly to socio-economic development of our areas. For instance, she organised women in our community to contribute monies for their welfare activities which they used as seed capital to start their own petty trading ventures. Through the organization of the women into groups, they were able to secure loans from the National Investment Bank with which they undertook economic activities. Proceeds from these ventures have boosted the social statuses of women in the community.

The men also revealed women in traditional leadership (queen mothers) were engaged in organizing community members especially the women folk to undertake communal labour. Some government and donor funded projects usually required counterpart funding (community support) in order to be fully executed. This community support comes mostly in the form of labour and the women leaders in the communities were usually at the forefront in mobilizing women to undertake these activities. For instance, in the construction of dams and schools, the women leaders mostly undertook communal

labour by carrying stones and concrete to support the construction works. All these activities significantly lead to improvement in socio-economic status of the traditional area. One of the Youth Leaders indicated:

They effectively mobilise the women in their community for various communal activities. For example, when we were putting up the structure to start a school in our community, the queen mother led the women to fetch water on daily basis for the men to use in building. She even organized some of the women to prepare food for the community members who came out to work. The women came out in great numbers due to the respect they had for her. This provided free labour.

Data gathered from the study also show that women leaders in the communities sensitized and educated their communities' members on a wide range of topical and contemporary issues. One queen mother was reported to have undertaken various education and sensitization programmes and activities in her divisional area mainly for the women, girls and young children on critical issues as adolescent and reproductive health, teenage pregnancy, COVID-19 and school dropout menace. Another community elder also recounted the role of the queen mother in social development in his area in the following words:

She organised a sensitization programme for the youth and women of my community on social deviancy and outmoded cultural practices particularly widowhood rites. On another instance, she organised mentorship and coaching programme where some role models were brought to sensitize particularly women and youth some leadership skills. My brothers, you will agree with me the knowledge gained from such programmes will certainly impact positively on the lives of the people.

The last major contribution of queen mothers in advancing the socio-economic development of their communities in the opinion of the men had to do with support for agriculture, education, sanitation and water and other related matters. Different respondents brought to bear their different experiences and observations on what queen mothers had done and continued to do regarding support to agriculture, education, sanitation and water. It was reported that one of the queen mothers of a sub-divisional area in the Talensi had initiated and successfully executed two (2) bore holes (hand fitted pumps) for her community which has ameliorated the suffering women went through in their quest to get potable water for their households use. Another man indicated that:

Last year around March, it was difficult to get water in a section of our community because one out of the only two bore holes got spoilt. As a result, she organised other women and they visited the Member of Parliament for Talensi Constituency and lobbied for a bore hole which was drilled for us two weeks after our request.

It came to light queen mothers were able to achieve support for agricultural, educational, sanitation, and water improve-

ment in their communities due to their service as liaison officers between governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations on one side and community members on the other side. The queen mothers along with chiefs and assembly members as principal officers who served as links in different capacities between community members and other external bodies.

5. Discussion

The qualitative findings from this study illuminate the pivotal yet nuanced roles of queen mothers (women in traditional leadership) in the Talensi traditional area of Ghana, highlighting their contributions to social justice, cultural preservation, and socio-economic development. This work underscores how these women leaders navigate patriarchal structures to advocate for women's welfare, mediate disputes, and foster community advancement. Queen mothers embody a hybrid model of leadership that bridges indigenous norms with modern developmental imperatives, challenging binary views of gender roles while reinforcing community cohesion. Women leaders play crucial roles in the protection of the welfare of other women and children. A core emergent theme is the queen mothers' duty to protect women's interests, welfare, and rights, particularly in resolving disputes. This aligns with role theory, which posits that social positions entail normative expectations shaped by cultural systems [5]. The findings reveal a gendered division of labor, where queen mothers handle "women's issues" due to perceived empathy and understanding, while chiefs address broader matters like land and security.

Men's perspectives affirm this specialization, emphasizing queen mothers' capacity to deal with life-threatening issues affecting women. This resonates with the findings by [45] from a study in Ghana's Akuapem North District, which similarly concludes that queen mothers prioritize women's welfare through dispute resolution, reinforcing their role as custodians of gender equity within traditional hierarchies. Extending this, recent scholarship underscores the adaptive nature of such roles in postcolonial contexts. For instance, [31] in her analysis of Ghanaian queen mothers argues that these leaders subvert patriarchal norms by institutionalizing women's voices in decision-making, thereby mitigating gender-based violence and promoting social justice. The Talensi case exemplifies this, as queen mothers' involvement in marital disputes counters historical marginalization, aligning with global feminist critiques of traditional institutions [26]. However, the absence of independent courts for queen mothers highlights structural constraints, suggesting that their influence remains contingent on male-dominated councils. This is a point echoed in broader African studies [29].

Furthermore, queen mothers also provide essential support in the maintenance of cultures and traditions of their communities. In the Talensi area, festivals like Tenglegre and Daa

involve queen mothers in rituals and youth discipline, preventing misconduct during periods of heightened communal activity. This role underscores their function as cultural gatekeepers, mobilizing community members to uphold traditions amid modernization pressures. Literature supports this as a hallmark of women's leadership in West Africa. Zuure [43] notes that queen mothers in Ghanaian contexts often facilitate cultural continuity, particularly in festival settings, where they reinforce social cohesion and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Building on this, recent works like those by [19] highlight how such roles empower women in male-centric societies, enabling them to influence public morality and youth behavior. In the Talensi context, this extends to broader community development, as queen mothers' involvement in festivals fosters social capital, reducing deviance and promoting collective identities [17]. Yet, the findings reveal a supportive rather than autonomous role, suggesting queen mothers operate within patriarchal frameworks, a dynamic critiqued by postcolonial feminists for perpetuating gender hierarchies [27].

Queen mothers also play a significant role in formalising women's leadership structures in traditional communities in the Talensi area. A distinctive contribution is the queen mothers' role in installing Magajias; leaders of women's groups through formalized processes akin to chief installations. This shifts from informal, consensus-based selections to structured ceremonies, reducing conflict and enhancing women's organizational capacity. Participants view this as a leadership milestone, promoting welfare and community advancement. This finding aligns with evolving discourses on women's leadership in Ghana. Zuure [43] describes Magajias as emergent leaders driven by personal attributes rather than traditional structures, but the Talensi study shows queen mothers institutionalizing this role, creating pathways for grassroots empowerment. Contemporary literature, such as [1] work on Ghanaian women's groups, emphasizes how such formalizations democratize access to leadership, countering historical exclusions. In a global context, this echoes intersectional feminist theories [13], where traditional institutions adapt to amplify marginalized voices. The Talensi case is unique, as it differentiates these queen mothers from others in Ghana, potentially setting a precedent for nationwide reforms in women's leadership.

Finally, queen mothers' active roles in socio-economic development, including fundraising, communal labor mobilization, sensitization on health and social issues, and advocacy for agriculture, education, sanitation, and water infrastructure have been amplified in this study. Examples include organizing women's groups for petty trading, securing loans, and lobbying for boreholes, demonstrating their liaison function between communities and external agencies. This aligns with literature on women's leadership in community development. Gyan & Mfoafo-M'Carthy [45] highlight queen mothers' economic mobilization in Ghana, while recent studies expand this to health and education. For instance, [29] examined how Ghanaian women leaders drive rural development through

sensitization on reproductive health and COVID-19, mirroring the Talensi findings. Similarly, analysis by [20] of World Development data underscores the role of traditional leaders in bridging governmental and community efforts, particularly in water and sanitation projects. The Talensi queen mothers' success in mobilizing free labor and funds illustrates "social capital" theories [34], where leadership fosters collective action for public goods. However, this also raises questions of sustainability, as reliance on voluntary labor may perpetuate gender inequities, a critique in gender and development studies [11].

Overall, the findings portray queen mothers as transformative agents within Talensi's traditional system, blending protective, cultural, and developmental roles to advance gender equity and community resilience. They challenge essentialist views of African women as passive by demonstrating strategic agency within patriarchal constraints, yet highlight ongoing dependencies on male structures. This hybrid leadership model contributes to sustainable development goals, such as gender equality (SDG 5) and good health (SDG 3), by integrating indigenous knowledge with modern advocacy. The roles of queen mothers in Talensi area reflect broader trends in Ghana and Africa, where traditional women leaders adapt to globalization [31, 26]. The Talensi queen mothers exemplify how traditional leadership can catalyze inclusive development, urging policymakers to recognize and empower such roles for equitable progress.

6. Conclusions

It is hereby concluded from the findings from the study that there were no specified or prescriptive roles for queen mothers in Talensi traditional area. This is because the position of a queen mother was seen as alien as it was only introduced to the traditional authority structure of the area in about a decade. They only performed roles tasked or assigned to them by chiefs or self-initiated activities. Hence, queen mothers in the Talensi traditional area performed complementary or assistive roles to that of chiefs or self-initiated projects. Their roles revolved around activities, and programmes that directly addressed the needs, interests and welfare of women, children, and the minority in society which mainly involved organization of support services.

On contributions of queen mothers to socio-economic development of their communities, it is concluded that the queen mothers were facilitators of socio-economic development in their areas. The degree to which this was achieved depended on the personal clout of the specific queen mothers. Hence, the contributions to socio-economic development by a queen mother in Talensi Traditional area were voluntary endeavours and their effectiveness in carrying out this responsibility depended on their individual stature or clout.

7. Recommendations

The following were recommendations from the study:

- 1) Since the position of queen mothers has been recognised in the Talensi traditional area, their roles should be clearly defined and communicated so that their work as queen mothers can be properly assessed and evaluated.
- 2) The Talensi traditional authority in selecting qualified persons to be enskinned as queen mothers must put premium on those with clout and stature to promote socio-economic development in their areas.

Abbreviations

SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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