



DOI: 10.24412/1561-7785-2026-2-163-174
EDN: AAAPPW

ГЕНДЕРНЫЙ АСПЕКТ В СЕЛЬСКИХ РАЙОНАХ ГАНЫ: ВЫЗОВЫ ДЛЯ РАЗВИТИЯ ЖЕНЩИН

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Финансирование:

Статья подготовлена в результате проведения исследования в рамках «Программы фундаментальных исследований НИУ ВШЭ».

Для цитирования:

Энчилл Г.Л. Гендерный аспект в сельских районах Ганы: вызовы для развития женщин // Народонаселение. — 2026. — Т. 29. — № 2. — С. 163-174. DOI: 10.24412 / 1561-7785-2026-2-163-174; EDN: AAAPPW

Аннотация. За последние несколько десятилетий правительства многих африканских стран и международные организации инициировали множество реформ, направленных на достижение гендерного равенства в странах Африки во всех аспектах социального, экономического и культурного развития. Несмотря на значительные усилия в Республике Гана, гендерные неравенства продолжают сохраняться на уровне местных общин, особенно в сельских районах страны. Это качественное исследование использует тематический анализ в соответствии с теоретическими измерениями гендерного режима по Коннеллу, основываясь на данных, собранных от 40 женщин из сельских общин Босоре и Абирем в районе Восточный Квабре Республики Гана в Западной Африке. В ходе анализа выявлено, что динамика власти в этих общинах определяется доминирующей формой маскулинности, которая формирует гендерные отношения и способствует исключению женщин с рынка труда. Социальные структуры власти, включая культурные нормы, признанные кланами и этническими группами, воспроизводят гендерный дискурс через существующие гендерные договорённости. Эти факторы негативно влияют на социальное и экономическое положение женщин, определяя отношения в домохозяйствах и взаимодействие моделей катексиса (переноса психической энергии) с ожидаемыми гендерными ролями, что ограничивает социальное и экономическое развитие женщин, их участие в общественной и культурной жизни. Исследование подчёркивает многомерность гендерного аспекта — власть, культура, экономическая аккумуляция и катексис — и предлагает рекомендации для преодоления основных гендерных барьеров в контексте устойчивого социального и экономического развития Республики Гана и, возможно, других африканских стран.

Ключевые слова: гендерное устройство, развитие женщин, социальная политика, устойчивое развитие, женщины Республики Гана.

DOI: 10.24412 / 1561-7785-2026-2-163-174

GENDER REGIME IN RURAL GHANA: DIMENSIONS FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT

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Acknowledgement:

This study was prepared as part of the Basic Research Program at HSE University.

For citation:

Enchill G.L. Gender regime in rural Ghana: dimensions for women's development. *Narodonaselenie [Population]*. 2026. Vol. 29. No. 2. P. 163-174. DOI: 10.24412 / 1561-7785-2026-2-163-174

Abstract. *Over the past few decades, African governments and international organizations have initiated numerous reforms aimed at achieving gender equality. Despite these efforts being made in Ghana, gender inequalities persist at the community level. This qualitative study applies thematic analysis per the theoretical dimensions of Connell's gender regime, based on the analysis of data collected from a group of Ghanaian women (40 participants) within the rural communities of Bosore and Abirem in the Kwabre East district. It emerged that, power dynamics in the communities occur based on the dominant form of masculinity, which shape gender relations. This is where by the dynamics of social power structure, including cultural plays a role in the exclusion of the Kwabre women from the labour market. Such gender discourse are reproduced per existing gender arrangements, which within the communities' cultural contexts, these are recognized by clans and ethnic groups. This tend to affect the social and economic realities of the women, in regards to household dynamics, and how the patterns of cathexis interact with gender role expectations.*

Keywords: *gender arrangement, women's development, social policy, sustainable development, Ghanaian women.*

Introduction

The historical emergence of women's empowerment by recognizing their capabilities to develop [1], began from re-thinking and re-consideration of gender embodiments and gender dynamics [2]. These were later examined through social experiences of women caused by gender arrangement among certain regimes, due to the misrepresentation of women in developing countries [3]. However, the dimensions of gender regime are multifaceted, as they consist of social strategies, economic opportunities, and policy interventions that influence gender arrangements, in achieving gender equality [4]. As theorized by Pfau-Effinger, the concept of gender arrangement, describes the structured ways in which

societies organize gender relations within social systems such as work, family, and welfare [5]. According to Connell, these systems are embedded with gender hierarchies rooted in pre-existing social structures, which gender regimes tend to sustain [6].

During periods of rapid transformations in contemporary societies, nations experience global variations in gender regimes, arrangements, and structures. These variations are shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional factors, which interact with individual and collective agency to either challenge or reinforce existing norms [7]. This creates dynamic landscapes of gender relations, shaped by gender regimes. In developing countries, gender dynamics reflect the tension between long-standing structural

inequalities and progress driven by grassroots agency. Sub-Saharan Africa lags globally (68% parity closed) per the 2025 global gender gap [8], with rural women across countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya bearing economic exclusion through gendered labor divisions and limited agency. Ghana exemplifies the norm rather than outlier, unlike North Africa's wider gaps, Southern Africa's higher parity in some metrics, East Africa's mixed progress and land barriers, and West Africa's high informal work and wage gaps [8].

While progress varies, in African nations such as Ghana (high informal employment, cultural exclusion from labor), Rwanda (strong legal reforms, but rural women face undervalued care work), and Nigeria (rural women's economic exclusion, high gender gaps in agency that is similar to Ghana), gender regimes are shaped by persistent inequalities, entrenched traditions. This is where evolving agency dynamics are seen in Morocco, Tunisia, and Kenya (progress in labor policies, but cultural norms limit rural women's market access) as Namibia leads with better economic participation of rural women, and less rural-urban disparity [7; 8].

Ghana is a country in West Africa, with a population of 34.1 million (49,9% represents males, 50,1% represent females), and with 43,3% of rural population [9]. Bosore and Abirem rural areas, being the study area, are among the Kwabre East District's 86 settlements in the Ashanti Region of Ghana [10]. Ghana mirrors common patterns in West and East Africa, such as women compromising nearly half the agrifood workforce yet facing pervasive inequalities [7; 8]. In rural Ghana, these arrangements are more enforced through customary practices and community expectations compared to urban Ghana. While cultural norms continue to shape gender roles in urban areas, there is greater exposure to progressive ideas and policies that promote gender equality [11].

The Government of Ghana has been implementing policies that reflect social development goals, in that number, those tackling achievement of gender equality (SDG 5) [12]. Several profitable and non-profitable

organizations also focus on increasing Ghanaian women's access to relevant resources such as Rural Enterprise Programmes, conducted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Government of Ghana [13], as well as Agricultural Development Programmes [14], and credit services in Ghana. These include Sinapi Aba Trust, WiLDAF-Ghana, and ActionAid International Ghana [15]. These programmes highlight the relevance for women's empowerment, especially when it comes to the recognition of their crucial role in both household sustenance and broader developmental goals in their social settings. Such as Mama's Helping Hand community-based group (emanated from ASA International's credit assistance to women) being the first local NGO empowering the rural women. Many obstacles remain, which are rooted in the system of gendered power relations, and institutional practices that structure the rural communities. These span from the rural women's underrepresentation in the rural organizations, decision-making entities, and their high risk of exposure to abuse, and unpaid labour.

This paper aimed to analyze the dimensions of gender regime for addressing women's issues in Ghana, by integrating theoretical underpinnings of Connell's gender regime [6]. Our study shows the extent of how existing cultural symbols shape power dynamics, how gender disparities affect the women's access to productive economic resources, and the influence of gender roles on the women's experience of cathexis. The structure of this paper moves from broad context pertaining to the introduction, and using a qualitative approach for reviewing materials, and methods employed, which the findings present a theoretical analysis of the empirical data on the dimensions shaping gender regime within rural Ghana.

Literature Review

In Ghana, gender regimes operate at multiple systemic levels (home, school, work, religious institutions, and media), which perpetuate gender inequalities within the societies [16].

Among the local people, many rural women who are eager to work and develop themselves tend to migrate to urban areas in search of better opportunities, significantly influencing the patterns of internal migration in Ghana. Even in the urban areas, gendered power dynamics are prevalent to the extent where the women are often confined in low-skilled and informal sector jobs [11]. Such conditions illustrate the persistence of gendered labour divisions within the Ghanaian social structure.

Globally, in 2024, Ghana was positioned at 88th out of 146 countries on the gender equality ranking, with a 70,1% closed gap compared to 2023 [17]. Ghana seems to be making progress in tackling inequalities, but women are overrepresented in informal and temporal jobs with limited opportunities [11], which has worsened since COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 [18]. Among African countries, Ghana is positioned as one of the worst countries when it comes to income inequality by gender, only second to Mali [19]. On average, Ghanaian women earn about 29,2% to 34,2% of what Ghanaian men earn. This is where the wage gap differs per the women's level of education and the sector they work. For instance, women with tertiary education earn 12.7% less than men with the same level of education, which is even worse among women with basic education (earn 60.1% less than men), and no education (earn 54,0% less than men)¹.

The occurrence of gender inequality is fuelled by cultural beliefs, traditions, values, and social practices that shape the challenges women face [20]. Here, Pfau-Effinger emphasizes on cultural models [5], which aligns with the dimension of Connell's gender regime. Pfau-Effinger argues that social actors such as families, and policy makers reinterpret cultural models, leading to divergent gender arrangements across societies [5]. Pfau-Effinger focused on the interplay between cultural family models (such as beliefs about caregiving roles), structural policies (such

as parental leave laws), and social actors' negotiations, determined among European countries like Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands.

The intersectionality of gender regime and gender arrangement, provided the context for understanding the gender knowledge behind people's action and social structures. It is in this context that Pfau-Effinger, and Connell integrated each other's theoretical perspectives in their works. Connell clarified that, «the four dimensions just discussed are tools for thinking...Birgit Pfau-Effinger's (1998) very sophisticated cross-national analysis of gender arrangements...different cultural models of gender underpin different divisions of labour...» [6, p. 85]. According to Connell, «gender arrangements are reproduced socially (not biologically) by the power of structures to shape individual action, so they often appear unchanging...» [6, p. 11]. On the other hand, Pfau-Effinger's perspective on gender arrangement incorporates insights from Connell's gender structure theory, which is reflected in Connell's analysis of gender and power [21].

Understanding the importance of diversity, and the influence of social, economic, cultural, and political arrangements is crucial in fostering women's empowerment, to regulate the gender order and gender underpinnings in our societies. The advancement of the theories of gender regime and arrangement span to Walby's perspective on analyzing gender relations beyond Western contexts. Walby's gender regime framework focused on the analysis of how gender relations are structured across four domains in social institutions of public spheres (economy, polity, civil society, and violence) [22]. Walby's theory also addresses the spatial variations in gender regimes, which Wisdanti continued with a study on the interplay of culture, gender, and spatial arrangement. Wisdanti analyzed how cultural norms and gender expectations shape the layout of living environments, and the use of space in houses. For example, women are expected to occupy the kitchens and back rooms of most houses, while men are expected to occupy the living rooms and front

¹ Twum M.A. A., Dome M.Z. Amid persistent gender inequalities, Ghanaians call for government action to bridge the gaps. Afrobarometer Publication. 2022. Available at: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad573-amid-persistent-gender-inequalities-ghanaians-call-for-government-action-to-bridge-the-gaps/> (accessed: 08.06.2025).

terraces [23]. Wisdanti discovered how such spatial arrangements are shaped by existing gender arrangements, which are caused by deeply rooted cultural systems and family patterns [23]. With transformative approaches to gender regimes, Tamunomiegbam and Arinze explore how gender norms as a form of arrangement, are evolving in contemporary Africa. Tamunomiegbam and Arinze findings illustrated the evolution of African gender norms from rigid traditional frameworks toward more inclusive arrangements and understandings. Tamunomiegbam and Arinze's study highlight how progress is being made toward gender equality in Africa, but persistent biases remain [7].

On this note, to acquire relevant understanding when it comes to the dynamics of gender inequality in contemporary Ghana, led to an empirical analysis of gender regime. As pointed out by Walby, it is important to analyze the domains of economy, polity, civil society, and violence rather than tackling gender issues with models that only center on family [23]. This paper's analysis is centered on Connell's classical four dimensions of gender regime. This is because all structures of either formal or informal institutions become gendered over time, determining the significance of examining structural views on gender inequality, from the contexts of culture, economic, and power, to psychological well-being.

Materials and Methods

This study used a qualitative approach, with the adoption of participatory tools for a collaborative and deep knowledge generation about the social issue at hand was the core foundation, as data was collected through focus group discussion (10 participants per 4 groups). Small number of participants were purposely sampled to explore complex social phenomena such as gender regimes, where depth and contextual richness outweigh numerical scale [24]. The selection of 40 rural women from Bosore and Abirem communities in Ghana's Kwabre East District that is drawn exclusively from the Mama's Helping Hand CBO project, provides robust justification through theoretical saturation,

contextual relevance, and alignment with established methodological precedents to address potential critiques on sample size. While not generalizable to all Ghanaian women (43% rural population), the sample's homogeneity strengthens internal validity for theory-building, with triangulation via multiple groups mitigating bias.

This mirrors Corbin and Strauss's [25] quality trumps quantity when building context-specific models applicable beyond the site, as evidenced by alignment with Sub-Saharan Africa gender gaps [7; 8]. Data was collected within 19th January, 2022 to 25th November, 2023. Participants' consent to be sampled for the study were received, as they were also assured of confidentiality, which pseudonyms were used. A codebook for each focus group was developed [24], in which an emphasis on the relationships between categories and sub-categories to their sub-components was done via open, axial, and selective coding [25]. The data were then analyzed per existing social relations, in order to give meanings to the dimensions. Thus, to identify the experiences of the participants, understand the relation or variation of the dimensions of gender regime to their experiences, and discover the dynamics of their challenges and roles.

Gender Regime: The Four Dimensions

This study identified several key themes based on the theoretical frameworks of gender regime [6]. It aims to illustrate how gender regime functions at the community level in Ghana, and how it impacts Ghanaian women's empowerment, reflecting the views and circumstances of the participants in two rural Ghanaian communities of Bosore and Abirem.

Employing Connell's theoretical framework of gender regime, this analysis emphasizes the social relations and structures that organize differences. Gender regime is defined as «...a regular set of arrangements about gender: who was recruited to do what work...what social divisions were recognized...how emotional relations were conducted...and how these institutions were related to others...» [6, p. 72]. The analysis is done across four interconnected dimensions, viewing gender as a complex and

dynamic system embedded in every sphere of society.

This dimension concerns the distribution and exercise of power and authority based on gender. It encompasses how power is institutionalized and enforced to compliance, within the concept of gender roles and social positions. Connell determined, «Power, as a dimension of gender, was central to the Women's Liberation concept of 'patriarchy': the idea of men as a dominant 'sex class'... The power of husbands over wives...is still an accepted idea in much of the world, even in modified forms such as the idea of the father as 'head of the household'...» [6, p. 76].

In the cultural context of Ghana, changes in gender roles are complex [14], as the values of interdependence and community are conflicted with individual autonomy. These systemic issues rather condition the women to prioritize marital harmony over their personal safety and well-being, leading to their psychological distress of feeling trapped in abusive situations with limited means of escape. Sikweyiya et al., in their research on intimate partner violence, found that the Ghanaian men they studied used physical violence against their partners as a form of discipline. These men involve their wives in decision-making only on the condition that the wives remain obedient to them as the head of the family [26].

At the expense of some of the women facing crises in their homes, they still freely conform to the roles of a wife, which is to be submissive and obedient to their husbands. This is best narrated by Antie Aku (60 years): «*Women might have their rights, I understand. But when we marry, we shouldn't have such freedom to do anything without consulting our husbands. I will do nothing and follow what my husband is saying. We agreed to marry each other. We should know that there are certain things that we shouldn't do if our husbands tell us not to do*». The informant admits the existence of women's right with the idea that «women might have their rights», but her views show that the husband holds authority in decision-making, and the wife's freedom is limited by this dynamic. This raises important questions about how rights and responsibilities are balanced among males and

females, and whether limiting one relationship partner's freedom is healthy or fair.

Gender roles can vary depending on cultural, personal, and religious beliefs, which our research discovered that even among the young generation, some of them do not see male roles and their dominance to be an issue. This indicates the stability of beliefs from the old era that some aspect of traditional gender role beliefs remain stable within the young generation of this present era. Thus, the persistence of traditional gender norms across age groups, which young people are nurtured by such traditional arrangements, as they tend to also internalize gender roles observed in their family and communal environments. This is best said by Efua (24 years): «*I see no wrong with such preaching (women should be men's subordinates) because it is needful for men to be our heads*». Such gendered beliefs challenge the women because their childhood experiences are shaped by societal roles that define gendered behaviors and expectations, which is instilled in them via socialization. These power dynamics are driven by what Connell terms 'hegemonic masculinity' [27], in regards to the dominant forms of masculinity that tend to shape gender relations, such as cultural narratives that tend to symbolize domination.

Decoding Culture

Decoding culture is for addressing the cultural meanings, symbols, and discourses that construct and reinforce gender identities and roles. This is explained by Connell as, «...Whenever we speak of 'a woman' or 'a man', we call into play a tremendous system of understandings...and allusions that have accumulated through our cultural history. The 'meanings' of these words are enormously greater than the biological categories of male and female» [6, p. 83]. This involves how gender is represented and understood through culture, language, and social norms, thereby shaping the symbolic framework within which gender is lived. Over time, these have been institutionalized in the Ghanaian social settings, due to the ongoing transmission of

gender discourses from one generation to the next [28].

In our study, such gender discourses were identified within the context of local traditions that create gendered separate spheres, and misconceptions about women's roles and capabilities rendering them disempowered. The gender socialization of the local people, which occurs through their cultural practices, appears to be a significant barrier preventing women from participating in preferred community activities. Nkwa (64 years) asserted: *«Our upbringing and everything we do is centered on the values and attributes of the clan, and also the roles of each member. The men are our heads, and the women are like the 2nd in command, if no man is available but if the men are there, we, the women are the subordinates»*. This determines the influence of early childhood upbringing and family dynamics in shaping the rural women's social roles and beliefs, illustrating how dominant forms of masculinity shape and sustain gender relations, which society uses to legitimize men's power over women.

As a female reaches a certain age, there is a higher degree of social pressure and expectation for that female to get marriage, which shows a tension between individual life choices and collective cultural norms. This is coined by Ekuwa (42 years): *«The way people were telling me to marry whenever they see me in this community gave me that rush. Just because I was getting old»*. Per this phrase of Ekuwa, «gave me that rush» implies how the pressure is intense, which can lead physical or emotional response being mixed with the feeling of urgency. Sikapa (46 years) then added: *«I think the pressure from friends is one of them»*. All these pressure seems to be triggered by age, linking to the idea of «getting old». This reveals how females being unmarried beyond a certain age is seen as undesirable by the local people, representing how the power of community and social environments is being framed.

Social environments tend to set norms about what is considered «desirable» or «undesirable», for being unmarried beyond a certain age is negative. This reflects what the rural communities value, as such expectations about age and marriage are reinforced through

shared traditions, creating a collective understanding that pressure the women. These pressure are enforced through social sanctions such as gossips, pity, or exclusion, which are the product of collective beliefs. Such cultural symbols shape the identity of the rural communities, and the dynamics of social power structures, by playing a crucial role in shaping the exclusion of women from the labour market. This where by gender norms, social expectations, and power dynamics are reinforced, limiting the women's economic participation.

Gendered Accumulation and Economic Implications

The focus is on how production, labour, and economic rewards are organized along gender lines. As determined by Connell, «In the economy, work is done for pay, labour is bought and sold, and the products of labour are placed on a market where profit prevails. In the home, work is done for love or mutual obligation, the products of labour are a gift, and the logic of gift-exchange prevails» [6, p. 80]. This includes the sexual division of labour, gendered occupations, and the distribution of wealth and resources, determining how economic roles and benefits are often shaped by gender in society. The rural women experience inequality particularly in their pursuit of material conditions that enable freedom, as barriers limit their access to certain jobs and perpetuate wage gaps [29]. For instance, the period of COVID-19 led to high unemployment rate, which enabled a challenging job market in Ghana, and the entire world [30].

Most of the rural women lack the working skills, but are still embarking on ways to engage in paid jobs. This extract of Afra (26 years) narrates the issue best: *«I quite remember in 2020, when coronavirus broke out and there were lockdowns, and other restrictions, all our daily activities were stopped. I had the opportunity to apply for an online job but my mom was so serious that I should let my older brother apply for that job instead of me. Just because he is a man and has a family to take care of»*. Some women support the motion that men should have

more right to jobs than women, when there is scarcity. In agreement with Afra's mother, Efua (24 years) added: *«I agree with your mother because men have a huge responsibility to play when it comes to providing for their families, and jobs were nowhere to be found during that time»*. Both Afra and Efua's responses capture how in some families, women are expected to defer economic opportunities to the males. «He is a man and has a family to take care of» from Afra's response reveals how traditional gender roles are still practiced. This raises questions about how societal or familial expectations can restrict the choices of the women, especially for young females as Afra, and even Efua, who depicts how such mindset still prevail.

The ways how labour and caregiving responsibilities are divided between men and women, thereby influencing women's employment patterns and family roles. These practices are learned, reproduced, and institutionalized due to prevailing societal expectations surrounding masculinity and femininity. As backed by Connell based on 'the science of masculinities', «like sex role research, this is concerned with public conventions about masculinity. But rather than treat these as preexisting norms which are passively internalized and enacted...» [27, p. 35].

According to the response of Adowa (56 years): *«...compared to the old days. Girls were not supposed to even go to school or sit in front of any gathering. Front seats were for men, and back seats were for women»*. This reflects how men were given priority and visibility in public spaces («front seats»), while women were relegated to less prominent positions («back seats»), as it is still practiced in this modern times. Women who oppose such traditional practices may face consequences that can eventually lead to their stigmatization. This highlights how gender is shaped through social practices, with local people actively negotiating, contextualizing, and reshaping gender norms that are primarily rooted in power relations.

On this note, people leading fulfilling lives depend on good health; however, some of the participants suffer from domestic violence

within their matrimonial homes. This is due to the practice of gender norms, in which the behavior of some husbands is deemed unacceptable by the women, yet they feel unable to voice complaints because of the fear of potential consequences (such as intimate partner violence). Kesewaa (37 years) shared: *«... upon asking for my money (for her marriage ceremony) back, he (her husband) became aggressive towards me one day»*. Kesewaa's experience reveals a significant fear associated with the women asserting their right or demanding fairness (autonomy) caused by domestic aggression of men. This shows how the women's experiences of maltreatment are often silenced, reflecting power dynamics in their marital relationships, which can cause a shift in cathexis.

Cathexis: The Dimensions of Emotional and Sexual Attachment

The cathexis dimension of Connell draws on Caplan's perspective [28], exploring the interpersonal interactions, attachments, and antagonisms shaped by gender. As quoted by Connell, «A major arena of emotional attachment is sexuality...sexual relations involve culturally formed bodily relationships, not a simple biological reflex (Caplan, 1987). They have a definable social structure» [6, p. 81]. This dimension encompasses emotional bonds, sexual attraction and solidarity, illustrating how gender influences both personal and social relationships. Historically, African communities practiced a form of 'communal individualism', where individuals shared a primary bond of understanding. In contrast, contemporary African societies increasingly prioritize individualism [29], a shift that may challenge the formation and maintenance of attachments essential for healthy emotional connections.

During the aftermath of a divorce, there are also some consequences associated with the women. Sikapa (46 years) posited: *«Even if care is not taken (if the women are not protected by their family), no man will marry you in the community. Men will only approach you in this community when they just want to have their way*

with you (*just for sex*)». This determines how the lack of meaningful relationships and minimal social connections of the women can lead to their depression, negatively affecting their mental and physical health. This extract from Kukua (57 years) specifies: *«I was later on called as a witch by his family that I had bewitched him (her husband)»*. Being called a witch is a heavy social stigma, which in the case of Kukua, the family of her husband found it weird that their son is emotionally attached to her, so far as he allowed Kukua to make decisions for their family. The family rather expects their son being the male, to be the sole decision-maker, and Kukua's actions to reflect traditional femininity, by internalizing emotional and sexual attachments. This indicates how gendered patterns are manifested in cathexis.

Discussions

Given the significance of these arrangements, especially regarding cathexis, power relations, as well as economic and cultural conditions, it is essential to advocate for interventions that focus on empowering marginalized groups. However, Ghana is a multi-ethnic country, which her societies are composed of rich tapestry of ethnic groups, such as Akan, Mole-Dagbon, Ewe, Guarma, Guan, and others [30]. Within these ethnic groups, there are various clans, including Agona, Aduana, Efutu, and Bretuo, contribute significantly to the nation's development, conforming to cultural, social, and historical identities [30].

As confirmed, Ghana is a predominantly collectivist society, where collectivistic values positively correlate with the subjective well-being of its people [31]. In both communities, traditional and informal education, such as gender socialization rooted in cultural traditions, forms the foundation of the Kwabre people's way of life. I discovered that the subjective well-being of the participants is influenced by socio-economic, cultural and personal factors (table 1). These factors can either enhance or undermine the rural women's physical, and emotional well-being, which in turn affects their cathexis, as well as their overall happiness and life satisfaction.

Evidently, despite Ghana's constitutional provisions and active involvement of stakeholders / NGOs advocating for gender equality, shortcomings still persist. Dzorgbo and Gyan argue that the actual rights and welfare of women, in relation to ongoing gender issues, appear to be disconnected from these legal frameworks [32]. The practices of Kwabre people seem to be deeply rooted in traditional gender ideologies and religious beliefs. We also discovered that citizens of Ghana enjoy civil liberties regardless of their gender. Through our discussions with the participants, it emerged that the women prefer men as political leaders over women. The Kwabre women acknowledged the existing civil rights for women in Ghana, recognizing their rights to hold political office, participate in political representation, and vote.

Although this shows the participation of women in Ghana's political sphere, rural women such as the Kwabre women must be given opportunities to learn about the importance of their voices within their local communities. Empowering rural women helps establish a systematic agency that ensures marginalized groups are represented, while also addressing any methodological challenges involved in studying such populations [33].

Conclusion: Unlocking the Full Potential of Rural Ghanaian Women

This study has shed light on the entrenched gender regime in rural Ghana, specifically within Bosore and Abirem communities of Kwabre East District in the Ashanti Region. Drawing on qualitative data from 40 participants across four focus groups, the analysis reveals how dominant masculinity, cultural symbols rooted in Akan clan traditions, gendered economic exclusion, and emotionally constraining attachments systematically disempower the rural women. By applying Connell's gender regime alongside Pfau-Effinger's arrangements and Walby's institutional domains, this study bridges global theory with localized African feminist perspectives. This highlights how pre-colonial collectivist structures interact with modern policies to sustain hierarchies.

Table 1

Excerpts from Participant Responses Aligned with Connell's Gender Regime

Participants (Pseudonym, Age)	Key Quotes	Key Findings/Factors
Power Dimension: Male Authority and Household Dynamics		
Aku (60)	"Women might have their rights, I understand. But when we marry, we shouldn't have such freedom to do anything without consulting our husbands"	Spousal obedience as norm
Efua (24)	"I see no wrong with such preaching (women should be men's subordinates) because it is needful for men to be our heads"	Intergenerational acceptance of male headship
Culture Dimension: Clan Symbols and Social Pressures		
Nkwa (64)	"Our upbringing and everything we do is centered on the values and attributes of the clan...The men are our heads, and the women are like the second in command"	Clan-based subordination
Ekuwa (42)	"The way people were telling me to marry whenever they see me in this community gave me that rush. Just because I was getting old"	Age-triggered marriage pressure and decisions
Sikapa (46)	"I think the pressure from friends is one of them"	Peer enforcement of norms
Labor Dimension: Economic Exclusion and Job Prioritization		
Afra (26)	"I had the opportunity to apply for an online job but my mom was so serious that I should let my older brother apply... Just because he is a man and has a family to take care of"	Familial deferral to males (COVID-19 context)
Efua (24)	"I agree with your mother because men have a huge responsibility... jobs were nowhere to be found during that time"	Endorsement of male priority in scarcity
Adowa (56)	"Girls were not supposed to even go to school or sit in front of any gathering. Front seats were for men, and back seats were for women"	Historical gendered spatial exclusion
Cathexis Dimension: Emotional Attachment and Stigma		
Sikapa (46)	"Even if care is not taken if the women are not protected by their family, no man will marry you... Men will only approach you... just for sex"	Post-divorce isolation
Kukua (57)	"I was later on called as a witch by his family that I had bewitched him (her husband)"	Stigma against assertive women
Kesewaa (37)	"Upon asking for my money... he became aggressive towards me one day"	Violence linked to financial autonomy

Source: results of author's survey.

Per the study's key findings (see table 1), the power dimension underscores male authority as the household head, where women often internalize subservience to preserve marital harmony, even amid intimate partner violence. This pattern echoed in participant narratives like Aku's endorsement of spousal obedience.

Culturally, clan-based socialization enforces rural women's subordination through gendered spatial norms (e.g., back seating for women) and marriage pressures, limiting labor market entry, as voiced by Nkwa and Ekuwa. In labor dynamics, rural Ghanaian women confront a 29–34% wage gap, prioritization of men for scarce jobs during crises like COVID-19, and relegation to unpaid care work, exemplified by Afra's deferred opportunity. However, cathexis manifests in stigmatized post-divorce

isolation, with labels like «witch» for assertive women (Kukua), which erodes emotional well-being and social bonds. These interconnected dimensions form a self-reinforcing gender arrangement, where Ghana's 88th global gender parity ranking (70.1% gap closed) masks rural realities. This includes overrepresentation in vulnerable informal employment and persistent cultural barriers despite national policy efforts, positioning Ghana second only to Mali in gender income inequality among Africa nations.

Notably, longitudinal studies could track policy impacts, while comparative analyses across ethnic groups (Akan vs. Ewe) or regions (urban vs. rural) would refine generalizability. Quantitative integration such as econometric modeling of wage gaps, alongside decolonial

feminist epistemologies, promises deeper insights into agency amid structural constraints. Ultimately, transforming Ghana's rural gender regime demands transcending legal facades toward holistic empowerment, recognizing women as co-producers of development. By fostering equitable arrangements, Ghana can not only advance SDG 5, but catalyze sustainable progress across Africa's diverse yet interconnected rural landscapes.

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Статья поступила в редакцию 15.06.2025, утверждена 15.05.2026, опубликована 30.06.2026.