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**THE PHILOSOPHY, CULTURE, CHANGING  
LIFESTYLE AND RURAL POVERTY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY GHANA**

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## THE PHILOSOPHY, CULTURE, CHANGING LIFESTYLE AND RURAL POVERTY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY GHANA

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** A cursory look at the lives of most people living in the rural areas of Ghana suggests that they are poor as compared to their counterparts living in the urban areas. The study aimed at investigating into the culture, philosophy, lifestyles and factors that have impacted negatively on the socio-economic situation that make the people living in the rural areas poor.

**Methodology:** In order to obtain data on the causes of poverty among the rural people, the qualitative research approach was used for the study in which the observation method was employed to collect information from the elderly, youth, farmers, women, men, workers, illegal miners, traders, market women, etc. in some villages on their social lifestyles and economic activities. For effective and reliable outcome, unstructured interviews, surveys and investigations were used as tools to gather data. The use of unstructured interviews and conversations enabled majority of the sampled population who could not read nor write offer useful information.

**Findings:** The study revealed that rural poverty is on the ascendency because most of the youth who serve as the work force migrate to the urban areas in search of jobs and better living conditions while a fraction of those who remained engage in illegal mining. The effect of this illegal activities has led to the degradation of arable lands, destruction of millions of acreages of cash/food crops and river bodies making agriculture, which is the backbone of the economy, very unsustainable. The attitude of majority of Ghanaians to time and work, especially in the public sector, leaves much to be desired. As a result, a lot of man-hours is rendered unproductive due to unpunctuality, religious and cultural activities.

**Unique contribution to theory and Practice and Policy:** The outcome re-echoes the need for a policy direction on education that focuses on skill development and hands on experience to enable school leavers enter into entrepreneurship and be self-reliant so they will not be dependent on the limited government work. It will also make people come to the realization that only few people benefit from illegal mining but the harmful effects are universal and back government effort in fighting/curbing it. Government, Municipal/District Assemblies will see the need to provide amenities that rural communities lack, initiate intervention programmes for youth employment especially, in the rural areas to curtail rural-urban migration.

**Keywords:** *Extended family, lifestyle, matrilineal, migration, patrilineal, poverty.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The culture of a particular society is a reflection of the totality of the way that group of people live. It underpins their aspirations, wellbeing, health and prosperity. Societies thrive vehemently on the values and the desires that identify its members in the broader sense as Africans, Europeans, Americans, etc. In Ghana for instance, culture subdivides people into ethnic groups such as Akan, Ga, Dagomba, Nzema, Ewe, Krobo, Dangme, Ahanta, Nanumba and many others.

The ecosystems and the natural resources that a particular area is endowed with, and their ways of exploiting them to the benefit and survival of society, becomes the source of livelihood for the people who identify themselves as a common people bonded together by blood ties, lineage, or religion. Ghana as a country, is endowed with a wide range of natural resources such as gold, manganese, bauxite, diamond and crude oil; forest resources which is made up of vast arable land suitable for both cash and food crop production. The forest does not only provide land for the cultivation of crops but also serves as a source for timber and lumber. The sea and the rivers provide aquatic source for the people which is harnessed through fishing for food and cash as well. The physical presence of the resources does not bring development to the people and so, various activities or means are employed to reap the benefits of these resources to bring development to the people, the community and the nation as a whole.

As Schultz and Lavanda (1995) put it, “the resources themselves do not determine how they must be used. Rather, our cultures suggest a range of options for making a living as well as furnishing the tools to pursue the options.” The outcomes of the activities are used in the provision of food, clothing, and shelter to fulfill the peoples’ basic needs in life. Although the economic activities are geared towards meeting the basic needs, it is also to ensure that there are surpluses to provide for the wants of the people to sustain their lives. Typical Ghanaians, by nature, are adaptable to conditions that they think will make them meet their lives expectations and would do everything within their capability to achieve their target. This makes them develop the desire to take up challenges to meet their aspiration and satisfaction either as entrepreneurs, self-employed or employed by others. The livelihood of the individual therefore, becomes dependent on what is accrued from the effort that is made to earn a living and the survival of the people is dependent on the collective ability to sustain the well-being and maintenance of the things bequeathed to them by their forebears. Those who are able to pay for their needs, livelihood, and fend for others by extension, are classified affluent while the direct opposite is regarded as poor. There are even those whose living conditions can be described as abject or extreme poverty.

Poverty consists of more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. This can be measured by the level of hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making” (United Nations, 2021). There is no gainsaying in the fact that majority of the rural population in Ghana fit in the definition provided by the United Nations. Even though Ghana has made significant progress in poverty reduction over time, with deprivations of Ghanaians from the perspectives of health, education, and living standards reducing by nine percent (9%) from fifty-five percent (55%) in 2011 to about forty-six percent (46%) in 2017, with the current population of thirty-one (31) million, an estimated fourteen (14) million Ghanaians are described to be multi-dimensionally poor (UNDP-GHANA, 2020). This translates to 46.6% of the population being poor. This situation is not very encouraging as the people in the rural areas are

the most affected. This is supported by Opportunity International (2021) which states that 43% of the total Ghanaian population of 30.4 million lives in the rural areas while 29% of the work force work in the agricultural sector and it must be of interest to note that 13.3% of the people live on less than 1.9 USD (United State Dollars) which is equal to 11.52 GHC (Ghana Cedis) a day. As such, an estimated forty-two percent (42%) of the people do not have an account at any financial institution. Even though there is a slight disparity in the quotation of the population, the deviation is insignificant and that the two international agencies assertion points to the same fact about the state of poverty in the rural areas which is undisputable.

The Ghanaian way of life is characterized by certain attitudes, and norms that distinguishes him from others from the African continent in general and the sub-Saharan region in particular. Their unique expression of affection for their own people and others in the sub-region put them on a higher pedestal. Although Ghana is made up of various ethnic groups and has about sixty-six different dialects, the people have for time immemorial displayed a deeper sense of coexistence irrespective of the part of the country one comes from. This stems from the fact that the cultures of the various ethnic groups emphasize on the need to co-exist. This system of co-existence was re-echoed and re-enforced by the leadership of the Ghanaian government on attaining independence as they opted for unitary system other than federal system of government which they anticipated could break down the unity inherited from the forebears (Morton, 2016).

For the reason stated above by Morton (2016), the Ghanaian society has since independence in 1957 enjoyed a higher degree of tranquility devoid of tribal and inter-ethnic wars that could disintegrate the hitherto peaceful society that enjoins the people together as one. Foreigners who visited Ghana have enjoyed and continue to enjoy cordiality of the people for which they tagged as “Ghanaian hospitality”. It is this accolade that makes visitors want to stage a comeback and new ones craving to come and experience. The tranquility that exists in Ghana makes it a preferred destination for investors and tourists. Besides this social excellence, the country is boastful of the numerous natural resources as well as human resources which presumably can make the people lead wealthy lives.

Despite of the fact that the Ghanaian are endowed with natural resources and human resources, the human resource component lacks the expertise to harness the abundant resources to the benefit of the society. Skill development levels are on the low side thereby leaving a lot of the citizenry unemployed and unable to live happily.

### **Objective of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate into the way of life and the standard of living among the people in the rural areas of Ghana, outline the causes of poverty in the rural areas, examine the effects of the changing lifestyles of the rural communities on their socio-economic situation and development in Ghana and suggest ways to eradicate poverty among the rural dwellers.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The Ghanaian especially, the Akan philosophy and concept of life hinges on three aspects of the human being namely, sunsum (spirit), okra/kra (soul) and mmogya/honam (blood). The *sumsum* (spirit) is responsible for one's personality, ego, looks, and individuality. It is an intangible element believed to have the power to leave a person's body during sleep, and may or may not return to the owner. The *okra* (soul) is considered as that which constitutes the very inner self of the individual.

Because of this it is the principle of life and the transmitter of the destiny (nkrabea) of the individual. The *sunsum* (spirit) also has an ambivalent nature like the *kra* (soul), the inner head or personality which derives from God or the Supreme Being. This inner head is largely responsible for human destiny and the body (blood). The Akan people believe that a person is made up of the physical body *honam* or blood *mmogya* with all the biological organs playing certain interconnected roles to ensure the survival of the human being. The physical person is called Onipa among the Akans (Gyekye, 1984; Oyeshie, 2002). Reference is constantly made to any of these in connection with one's standard of living as far as the wealth of a person is concerned. This is manifested in the Akan adages, "sika ye mogya" (money is the blood a person); "sika ye sunsum" (money is the spirit of a person); "sika ye nipa ne kra" (money is the soul of a human being). Whereas poverty (Ohia) is likened to madness or wretched life hence the saying, "ohia ye dam bo" which literally means *poverty is madness*. In view of these philosophies of life, the individual strives as possible to circumvent the latter (poverty) in order not to be referred to as worthless or non-entity. Just as the Akans liken money to the spirit, so as they hold the view that one's riches can desert and fly away from him if one does not manage his or her wealth/finances well.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research approach was used for the study in which the observation method was employed to enable the researcher reach out to people who could otherwise not be covered for the collection of data if other methods had been used. The qualitative research method was used because Denzin and Lincoln (2000) claim it seeks answers to questions that stress on how social experience is created and given meaning." It also was considered most appropriate as the study aimed at producing a narrative or textual descriptions of the phenomena under study. This also afforded the researcher the opportunity to analyze data as and when they became available. For effective and reliable outcome, personal interviews were conducted with the elderly, youth, farmers, women, men, illegal miners, traders, fish mongers, etc. The study also employed surveys as well as investigations as the main tools to gather data. Besides the personal interviews, conversations were used as an indirect way of soliciting information which yielded positive results. The nature of the research implied the use of unstructured interviews as majority of the sampled population were illiterates who could not read nor write also to give useful and important information needed to accomplish the task.

## 3. DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS ON CULTURE, LIFESTYLE AND POVERTY

### Discussion on Culture

Edward Burnett Tylor in O'Neil (2006), described culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Schaefer and Lamm (1995) echoed Tylor's definition by saying culture is "the totality of learned socially transmitted behaviour which include the ideas, values, and customs of groups of people." Culture lends significance to human experience by selecting from and organizing it. It refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives, rather than more narrowly to the opera or art of museum (Rosaldo, 1989). On his part, Harris (1983) describes culture as learned socially acquired traditions and lifestyles of the members of a society including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting. Kendall (2007) also shares similar views with Schaefer and Lamm as they describe culture as the knowledge,

values, customs, material objects that are passed from person to person and from one generation to the next in a human group or society.

According to Moran, Harris, and Moran (2007), culture is a distinctly human means of adapting to circumstances and transmitting coping skill and knowledge to subsequent generations. Culture offers people a sense of who they are, of belonging, of how they should behave, and of what they should be doing. It influences behaviour patterns, morale, and productivity at work as well as values and patterns that influence company attitudes and actions. The authors continued by saying that cultures change but slowly in the sense that a change in culture, however, does not only come from external influences but may also come from within as a result of the increasing multicultural nature of a particular society.

Supporting the multiplicity of cultures, Browaeys and Roger (2015) maintains that the fundamental aspect of culture is that it is something all humans learn in one way or another. 'It is not something people inherit, but rather a code of attitudes, norms and values, a way of thinking that is learnt within a social environment.' The family, school, work, friends, social environment help in forming the code and determine how people see themselves and the world. The national culture and that of a particular region in which people live, also help to shape a person's cultural profile. Although culture is reflected in the individual's behaviour, it is the way of thinking that is shared by the individuals in a particular society that makes culture what it is. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) add that 'culture is man-made, confirmed by others, conventionalized and passed on for younger people or newcomers to learn'. It provides people with the meaningful context in which they meet, think about themselves and face the outer world.

## **Cultural Perspective of the People in Rural Ghana**

### **1. The extended family system**

In the Ghanaian cultural systems, the lineage for inheritance is either matrilineal (inheritance from the mother's side) or patrilineal (inheritance from the father's side). However, for centuries, the Ghanaian family system whether matrilineal or patrilineal, has thrived on the extended family system which serves as a unifier and makes the people within a particular descent share common aspirations. Mostly, their communism emanates from the bond that anchors their existence. This stems from the fact that all the eight families namely, Agona/ Anona, Biretuo, Aduana, Asakyiri, Ekuona, Ahwenee, Asona and Oyoko of the Akans ethnic group that dominate the Ghanaian population, believe they are bonded by blood and trace their root to a common ancestry (great, great grandmother) and represented by a particular totem. For this reason, wherever a clan member finds him or herself, either by migration, relocation, or transit, he is welcomed and embraced by his compatriots without discrimination and treated as one of their own. The principle of the extended family hinges on collectivism rather than individualism and therefore, as a family, the well-being of the group is one that is considered paramount instead of an individual's values. This is emphasized by Feldman (1994) who points out that collectivistic culture accentuates "the joint welfare of all the members of the society and particularly of those who belong to groups of which they are a member." Feldman continues by saying that at times, "the well-being of the group is considered important than personal happiness and success"

## **2. The breakdown of the extended family system and its ramifications**

The extended family system that prevailed over centuries has now been jeopardized by modernity. People of today, feel the hitherto extended family practice puts so much pressure on them as they have to render and share responsibility especially, in the system where the upkeep of nephews and nieces are the duties of their uncle instead of their father. Their success or failure in life is attributed greatly on the uncle and not the father. The realization that family responsibilities is the sole responsibility of the father and mother (couples) has made the nuclear family system which is tagged “Western family system” make significant in-roads into the culture of the Ghanaians making the social responsibilities of the individual members of the community very weak.

## **3. The communal spirit**

People in the rural areas share common sentiments and have fellow feeling. They practice subsistence farming and produce common foodstuffs to feed their households and extend supplies to others in times of need. In view of that it becomes difficult in the rural areas to sell produce for money to be saved for future use. This kind gesture is reciprocal and is reminiscent of the rural dwellers as they feel they are interdependent. They do communal labour/work to ensure proper sanitation for their communities. Most of them team up in clearing farms, till land, plant crops and sow seeds during the farming season in a rotation order until each get a turn. Members of the rural communities considered the upkeep and upbringing of the young as a social responsibility where every child in the neighborhood was considered as every parent’s child; treated the same way as one’s own child and punished for wrong doing without incurring the bluff or wrath of the child’s own parents.

## **Discussions on poverty in rural Ghana**

Ghana is a developing African country situated in West Africa which is steeped in various cultures and traditions that dates far back in history. Ghana faces many of the problems that are persistent in developing countries including lack of natural resources and a majority of the its population lives in poverty (Ngowera, Borgen Project, 2018). Even though Ghana faces a lot of problems, for Ngowera to assert that Ghana’s problems include lack of natural resources is a fallacy because Ghana is endowed with many/ plenty natural resources that include gold, diamond, manganese, bauxite and vast arable forest land. Perhaps, it is Ghana’s inability to harness these resources to the fullest to the benefit of her people, and poor management of the resources that can be used as a setback in any discussion that has to do with development and poverty.

In Ghana, poverty is increasingly concentrated in rural regions where low-income families rely on cocoa farming for their livelihoods. Cocoa is the largest export crop in Ghana, and given its growing global demand, it holds a significant potential for lifting any families out of extreme poverty. Ghana has made significant strides over the last few decades in its economic development, serving as an important example of the progress in West Africa. Yet many families still live at or just above the poverty lines, where one small setback like an unexpected health care costs of poor weather during the planting season can drive the back into poverty. Strengthening the agricultural sector, and ensuring their children have a good local school to attend, are essential for building upon the country’s progress (Opportunity International, 2021).

### **Perception on subsistence farming**

Many people, especially the youth in Ghana, consider farming, which has been an age long profession of the indigenous people, to be nothing to write home about in this current economic dispensation because it is not lucrative. The farmers themselves despise it as only a few of them encourage their offspring to follow their footsteps. Most of them consider the proceeds from the farm as “hand-to-mouth income” which make it impossible to fend for themselves all the year. In the lean season, for instance, the farmers suffer harsh economic conditions and live at the mercy of God. Their predicament stems from the fact that, an estimated majority who form over ninety percent (90%) of the farmers in Ghana practice subsistence farming and not commercial. The issue of industrialized and mechanized farming is just a mirage to them. As a result, the proceeds accrued throughout the year becomes so scanty that the average farmer’s condition becomes unavoidably poor and unattractive. The budget for feeding clothing, paying of children’s school fees, other social responsibilities and miscellaneous expenses depends on this meagre income. The average Ghanaian farmer depends on the weather and when the weather condition is not favourable, especially, with erratic rainfall pattern, their whole life is in jeopardy.

One funny thing that begrudges the rural Ghanaian farmer is the marketing of the farm produce. The farmer does not have full control over the pricing of the produce sent to the market. Often, it is the middlemen and women who determine pricing and benefit from the toil of the farmer who goes home dissatisfied. Even the cocoa farmers whose produce serve as a major foreign exchange for the government, it is the government that comes out with the producer price of cocoa for a ton and a bag each and every year. Indeed, the farmer has no place in the determination of the pricing for the product he produces. The youth perceive farming as punishment because in their school days, those who contravened rules and regulations and other offences were punished to weed a portion of the compound; a practice that is predominant with farming in Ghana. They also see farmers as poor, unhealthy, and the farming occupation as hopeless based on the circumstances of those who have lived all their lives farming. Life as a farmer is being described as "hot, difficult, involving, and exhausting". The farmers in Ghana in general, are perceived to be the people who work the hardest and also credited as the ones who feed the nation yet, they get the least amount of money. Because of this the youth who form the core of the labour force are reluctant to take to farming as occupation as they project that there ‘will be no light at the tunnel’.

As young people flee the farms, the cultural values and knowledge of cocoa and other cash crop farming in the countryside are fading out. These include the tradition of communal labour that their parent held on to developed their farms as well as the assistance from neighbors in clearing the land, planting, and harvesting of crops. These communal assistances have been relegated to the background such that every bit of work requires the hiring of labour at a fee or charge. The values of being kind, merciful, helpful to each other, and being grateful is becoming a thing of the past.

### **Post-harvest losses**

There is no contradiction to say that a good majority of Ghanaian farmers practice subsistence farming for which their farms are not large enough. For the reason, the farm produce is not meant for higher economic returns. A proportion of the farmers who secure loans through their banks for maintenance and upkeep of their farms, are unable to pay back at the end of the farming season. As stated earlier on, there is overreliance on the weather for the success of farming especially, in the major season which is characterized by rains. In the event when the rainfall pattern becomes



favourable, the farmers reap bountiful harvests. The result therefore, is abundant food and other stuffs making prices of food go down. In situations like this, the farmer has no avenue to store the excess produce yet the road network in the hinterland is so deplorable that they not able to cart the food to urban cities for sale. In seasons of torrential rains, the road and bridges become over-flooded making the road impassable. A lot of the farm produce at this stage get rotten in the bush. They are therefore left at the mercy of middle men and women who go to the bush to purchase the produce. They in turn, capitalize on the vulnerability of the farmers and their situation and offer very poor (low) prices. The rural areas are often described as the food basket of Ghana and the farmer who is taunted as the one who feeds the nation, has nowhere to keep his reserve for future sales and profit in the lean season.

Similarly, when the country experience drought and unfavorable weather conditions in the year, the nation as a whole is hit with shortage of food and thus the farmer is always at the receiving end income down turn. If the situation becomes volatile, it also has ripple effects on poultry farmers as well as those who run piggeries as shortage of maize has adverse effect on their production as well.

### **The search for greener pastures in urban communities**

Push and pull factors are the major reasons that account for many people in developing countries especially, the youth to migrate from the rural areas to the urban centres. The push factors constitute all the variables that force migrants out from their rural communities. These include descent accommodation, portable water, unemployment, underdevelopment, low productivity in agriculture, as well as poor economic conditions. The factors that attract migrants to move to the urban areas consist of better working conditions, attractive amenities, availability of jobs, higher wages and facilities are the pull factors. These determinants that serve as a driving force for are either economic or non-economic.

Mention has to be made of the fact that rural-urban migration also can have a positive effect on the rural areas. Many migrants who settled in the city send remittances including money that could help in the upkeep of the family and also contribute for further development in the village of origin. In spite of this, the quest for moving out from the rural areas leads to depopulation which usually means that a large number of the working age people migrate from the rural area in order to earn more money in the city. However, young people leave the very old and the very young behind, which causes further problems in rural development as the youth and skilled adults are missing.

A pull factor is seen by the migrants as very impressive when they relate to the place they want migrates to as compare to their current situation. It therefore becomes a good thing and an ultimate dream that desire to come into reality. The expectation of high possibility of access to employment, enhanced way of life, adequate provisions of social services such as medication, education, electricity, piped water delivery and places for recreation activities offers the youth the assurance of feeling safe. The migrants envisage that those cities are the centres of advanced soft and hard infrastructure coupled with facilities and services that guarantee enhanced city cultural expression and way of life. In some instances, the decision to migrate is associated with important life transitions such as pursuing higher education, securing employment or getting married. It is obvious that these developments always show their two sides: one side or the area of destination gains population whereas the other side respectively the area of origin loses people. One always

has to keep that in mind because interaction, networking and communication between both sides are absolutely necessary in trying to achieve a balanced development of both rural and urban areas.

There is a disorientation of people's feelings about their encounter with cultures that are different from their own culture which makes them believe there is much dependable hope out there as compared to their own cultural setting as highlighted by (Kendall, *Sociology in Our Times*, 2007). This augments the desire of people to move from the town or village to seek fortunes that may be non-existing. Sometimes, the conditions they left behind would be comparatively better and promising which debunks the assumption of the life they yearned for leading to a shock in culture.

The quest for getting comfortable living conditions forces the youth to migrate from their rural communities to urban areas. Currently, a lot of the village folks who do not have access to clean water, at home, and can also not make ends meet suffer from hunger and water insecurity, find it as good reasons to struggle to escape the extreme poverty by migrating to the urban centres where social amenities abound. Likewise, those who do not have a job think and have the hope that they could secure some in the urban cities. Their assumptions become grim making it a very disappointing venture to have gone to realize that they have hoped against hope. A few lucky ones are able to secure jobs in the end. Due to the non-commensurate population growth in the urban centres with the urbanization process itself (i.e., extension of social services, increased job creation, growth of infrastructure, etc.), migrants face a lot of challenges that contributes to poverty especially in low-income communities (Songsore, 2009). This action by the youth rather turn to provide manpower to industries in the urban areas, which facilitates production and economic growth to the detriment of the home industries left behind.

One major reason many why the rural dwellers crave to migrate to urban towns is attributed to the presumed benefits that will culminate in remittances and the money that relatives in urban centers send home taking for granted that they are assumptions about life. Some migrants end up taking up menial works which they would not do in their own backyard or even become jobless completely (Reference, 2017). The situation of rural-urban migration in Ghana is a reflection of cultural systems in most developing countries. Thus the same reasons are assigned for endorsement by the families in the rural communities such as in South-Eastern Nigeria where the peoples' desire to migrate from the rural areas has remained relevant. The migration acts as a catalyst in the transformation process of not the destiny of individual migrants alone, but also, change the conditions of the family members they left behind and the local communities. Ajaero and Onokala (2013) confirm this by stating that one significant source of development for the rural populace as a result of this increasing drift towards the cities is remittances. In recent times, remittances made by migrants have become a reliable source of income and a major resource base for the sustenance for their families. These remittances however contribute indirectly to regional and national development. These remittances that are received by the households are used to cater for their basic needs such as food and clothing and also for their health care as well as children's education. It is also used for their security, water and sanitation. Unfortunately, no matter the quantum, the remittances are not able to compensate the shortage of labour in rural areas is still a function of the amounts and value of remittances received by migrants' households at home, especially in the developing countries". Another study in Anambra State by (Ajaero et al., 2013) found that many Igbo families encouraged their family members to migrate because of the belief that they will not achieve any financial success if they remained in the village.

Incessant rural to urban migration, tends to reduce the population in the rural areas and as a result, decreases farming activities leading to food insecurity. Migration to the urban areas does not involve only the youth but children too. When many young males leave for the cities in search for employment, most of the activities they end up engaged in to do include truck pushing, selling of dog chains, second-hand shoes and clothing, shoe shinning etc. girls who migrate practice as head porters (carrying baggage and luggage), house help, while young girls sell iced water among other things which are clear manifestation of child labour.

### **The paradigm shifts in occupation**

Agriculture that has been the backbone of the Ghanaian economy, is now seen to be the occupation that belong to the old people. The youth who form the active labour force and possess the energy and capacity to complement their ageing parents in their farming occupation/activities now find solace in what is termed “galamsey”. This is an illegal mining activity which involves digging and washing the soil for gold. The process of getting the gold is very laborious as compared to farming. Yet a good majority of the youth both men and women find it to be more lucrative than going into farming. The justification is that the proceeds, in terms of pricing, far outweighs that of farming. Payment for work done is instant as compared to returns from farm proceeds which is not guaranteed. These illegal mine workers are mostly employed at times by people who call themselves “Small Scale Miners” who use excavators in digging while the workers do the washing manually. At times it is done by individuals or group of people who use mattock, shovels pick axes and make-shift washing platforms in exploiting the gold.

The activities of these “galamseyers” are uncontrolled and thus cause a severe danger to the arable lands bequeathed to us by our great grandfathers. Forests are being destroyed in search for gold. Rivers which served as good source of drinking water for the farmers and the village/rural folks have now been polluted with cyanide, mercury and other chemicals used in extracting gold and other minerals making them unsafe for drinking. With the coming in of the Chinese who employ higher technology in mining the gold, the rate of depletion of the forest and pollution of the water bodies is very alarming. Cocoa farms are being damaged as a result of these illegal mining even though the parcel of land is paid for. Most of the farmers in the areas where galamsey is practiced, out of excitement, sell out their cocoa farms for a bulk of money they may not have seen before.

The consequence is that after some short time, they exhaust the money. However, the lands on which the mining activities takes place are not reclaimed and are therefore not being used again resulting in shortage of food making life unbearable. Boys and girls (the youth) who engage in this “galamsey” activities are improvident and spend lavishly because they get income on daily basis. What is more devastating is that they do not save, neither do they contribute towards their pension and thus squander everything that come to them. In this view, if any misfortune or accident befall them, they are unable to withstand it.

### **Poor education**

According to Cargan and Ballantine (1994), “all societies are concerned with socializing their young to develop skills for knowledge deemed necessary as well as with inculcating loyalty to the social system.” This is the reason for which “much of our time up to the age of eighteen (18), and often well beyond, is spent learning the roles necessary for the survival in society.” Education is the act of transferring knowledge in the form of experiences, ideas, skills, customs, and values, from one person to another or from one generation to the other. Education is widely acknowledged

as the foundation of civilization and development (Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh, & Addo, 2016). If this definition of education is anything to go by, then, it can be said that the existing education system in Ghana is dysfunctional in the sense that formal education still provides what can be termed as “bookish knowledge” and not providing the necessary skills for the people to be self-reliant and independent of the limited government work.

Current statistics, according to Ngowera (2018) indicates that, of the 30.4 million total population, Ghana has ninety-four percent (94%) of children completing primary education. This is very remarkable and credit has to be given to the free, Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE), School Feeding Programme and the government flagship programme dubbed “Free Senior High School” that enables more than three-quarters of these primary school graduates to enter government high schools freely. This laudable initiative is meant to alleviate the suffering of people who fall within the lower income bracket whose children, irrespective of their academic performance, would not be able to further their education to the secondary school level get access.

The content of the senior high school curriculum supposed to offer the students skills that graduates who will terminate after this level, could make them venture into entrepreneurship or be their own masters in self-employment, is missing in the curriculum completely. This in effect, makes those who are unable to further their education to the tertiary level become a burden on the society. This accounts for the numerous education reforms embarked upon by successive governments from Ghana’s first president up-to-date.

### **The lifestyle of the Rural Ghanaian**

Life in Ghana for both the urban and rural areas is not easy. However, it is comparatively better in the urban areas than the rural communities. The low level of development means that most people do not have access to many things that will make them lead lives that is worthy of living. Politicians over the years to date promise heaven on earth for improvement and development of the lifestyle of the citizen when voted to power (office) but to the dismay of the people, the promises end up unfulfilled; they are therefore, taken for granted after winning their votes. The crave for amenities such as electricity, pipe borne water, health care, and education continue to be the plight of the people especially, those in the rural areas. Many, especially, women, children and girls in the rural areas have to go to the riverside every morning to fetch water for their daily chores before going to farm or school. Women and girls collectively spend precious time every day walking long distances to fetch water. Not only could the time wasted in fetching water be used to do other works, but could also make the girls attend school punctually and regularly, the effect of which would have been helpful for them to bridge the gap between the them and their male counterparts in getting equal chances of securing job later in life.

Among some ethnic groups in Ghana such as Denkyira, Asante, Akyem, Nzema, Dagomba, Frafra, etc., by their culture, a woman is not allowed to become the head of the family and cannot inherit family property and own land. Males are ascribed leadership positions and even the youngest male will inherit the chief or king. There are alternative positions for the females that come second to that of the males. These ascribed statuses are assigned to persons by society without regard for the person’s unique talents or characteristics and there is little that people can do to change an ascribed status (Schaefer & Lamm, 1995). Typical example of these includes the position of the queen mother that juxtaposes the position of the chief; the position of “Obaapanin” (female head of the family) compares with that of the “Abusuapanin” (male head of the family).

It is worth noting that in the hierarchy of these ethnic groups, even though the woman is not allowed to head the society, they wield power in decision making. For instance, in event of the death of a chief, it is the sole responsibility of the queen mother to nominate the successor to the throne but has no authority to become the chief herself. In case of a stalemate in arriving at a decision in the chief's court or family arbitration, the counsel of the queen mother and the Obaapanin respectively, reign supreme hence the Akan adage: *yerekɔ bisa abrewa* meaning we are going to consult the old lady or grandmother.

Oral history has it that many families have lost their stools, thrones, lands, precious jewelry and other properties to other families. The simple reason is that there were no males to succeed their leaders and had to look outside the family or clan especially from the patrilineal side of the family to find someone to inherit the position and its accompanying properties. So, if there is no male member capable to hold the position at the time of finding a successor, this arrangement was made for the male counterpart from the patrilineal family to hold the position in-trust for the family who are the bona fide owners but most of them never returned to their rightful owners after a prolonged reign.

Indeed, women and girls the problem of inequality in the rural areas but in the words of (Concerns World wide US, 2021), "achieving gender equality is key to ending extreme poverty. When women and girls have equal education, access to health care, sustainable livelihoods, and a seat at the decision-making table, economies shift. The evidence is clear: communities escape poverty permanently. There are many forms of gender inequality that perpetuate the cycle of poverty going, and they all must be eliminated in order to make true progress" it further posits that "In order to fight poverty, we have to begin by investing in women. Tackling gender inequalities does not just affect women, but can end global poverty – for everyone." The inequalities are sometimes obvious, but in other situations, it can be subtle, the voices of women groups are certainly not heard in most community meetings which implies that they do not have a say in important decisions. Regardless, these inequalities mean the women so affected, become disillusioned, frustrated and desperate as they do not get the necessary push to move ahead. The consequence is increased vulnerability leading to living in extreme poverty.

Irrespective of the social inequality, women suffer both in the rural and urban communities, women have long been playing significant roles in the agricultural sector in the Ghanaian especially, in the rural areas. They follow their husbands to the farms every day where they engage in the planting of various food crops such as maize, millet, rice, sorghum, plantain, cassava, yams, cocoyam, etc. Rural village women not only plant crops but also have to ensure that they clear the crops from weeds. Across the country, the rural women actively participate in large- or small-scale farming. The economic activities performed by most of the women cannot be overemphasized. They form the core of the "middlemen" who move to the fields to purchase foodstuffs and send them to the cities to sell. They spend so much time and energy travelling to the hinterland in rickety vehicles and tricycles often referred to as *aboboyaa* disregarding all the risks involved.

The Ghanaian society is a polygamous society that allows men to marry more than one wife. The benefit of this type of marriage among the rural folks is that, wives add to the labour force on the farms but are not paid for the works and services they render. Another aspect of polygamous marriage is the increase in rural population. In the rural communities, the higher the number of children that a couple has, is a prestige for them; the couple who is able to produce ten children is

celebrated in a rite in which the husband is rewarded with a Ram. The negative consequences of these numbers on the family and society at large, is over-looked. As a result of this, there is uncontrolled birth rate in the villages in Ghana. The ramification is that families with higher population are unable to cater for their children's education as their income does not commensurate the responsibilities associated with the reproduction of many children. In effect, most of the school-going children drop out of school and some of these drop outs are forced into early marriages and others, forced to do menial works to support the family thereby contributing to high rate of child labour in the rural areas.

People living in the rural areas do not have the tenacity to weather the storms of life when there is little money saved or assets on hand to help. In the Northern part of Ghana for example, where repeated cycles of drought have caused harvest after harvest to fail, there is widespread of hunger crisis. To cope with this, families have to pull their children from school, and sell off belongings they own to eat. This only helps a family make it through one bad season and not the other. For communities constantly facing climate extremes, the repeated shocks send a family reeling into extreme poverty and prevents them from ever recovering. In such situations where resources are scarce, the alternative way to get some of the children educated is to send the boys to school to the detriment of the girls' future development. The girl is therefore, discriminated upon in this circumstance in the sense that the perceived position for the girl is considered to be in the kitchen as a house wife, the path the mother trod. This in turn, surmounts the poverty rate of the women in the village (rural areas).

### **ATTITUDES OF THE GHANAIAN**

The average Ghanaian employed outside Ghana, by nature, is a very industrious, diligent, skillful and hardworking to the extent that is able to work under any condition and achieve result yet these qualities that the Ghanaian possess do not manifest or translate into positive outcomes in every sector of the economy, especially in government work places. People who gain employment in the public sector do not endear themselves to work to merit the salaries that they are paid on monthly basis. They do not approach work with the zeal that leads to positive outputs/outcomes yet they continue to clamour for salary increment. The attitude of the public sector worker is characterized by lateness to work, lackadaisical attitude to work, irresponsibility, insensibility to the progress, development and sustenance of the work. Productivity suffers because people are not punctual to work. It is a known fact that the soul of business is punctuality. However, in the Ghanaian community, people's attitude to time is very appalling. This negative attitude transcends political leaders, managers, administrators to the ordinary citizens. Political leaders who supposed to lead by example keep people including chiefs, priests, opinion leaders, their followers and other prominent figures waiting at durbars and not keep to time schedules with impunity – all in the name of 'African Time' a cliché, everybody understands and obey. Lateness has woven into the social fabric of the Ghanaian to the extent that people do not mind what the implication is to their development.

A lot of the people who hitherto lamented for non-existence of job, upon getting one, do not exhibit a sense of responsibility and use working hours for their parochial interest. Their commitment to work is always questionable as they do not dedicate more time, interest, attention, dedication to work. They forget that being committed is not just a matter of achieving good results in one performance only but to the work at large. Lack of commitment does not make them work faster

at pace than would normally be required to increase productivity. In view of that, employers also feel reluctant to reward them by way of promotion as the confidence and trust levels for entrusting them with responsibilities are on the low side. On the job, a lot of the workers do not practice the obedience of rule, regulations, and codes that lead to achieving positive results. People tend to be lazy on the work place and do not demonstrate diligence as needed to drive the work to a pleasant outcome though diligence is a significant attitude toward the achievement of success. Many are those who use office hours to engage in needless conversation, calculation of lotto, gossiping, and watching movies just to mention but a few.

Some people are never prepared to share ideas with others and also not willing to listen to others leading people to 'sit on the fence' without contributing to the attainment of a set goal. This result to what is referred to as the 'pull him down' syndrome where the downfall and nonperformance of the leader becomes the expectation of those who feel side lined and underrated. Others who get opportunity to lead and get to responsible positions at time do not make their intentions clear to the subordinates forgetting transparency leads to understanding thereby eliminating the possibility of receiving ambiguous messages such that the receiver knows the direction without any difficulty.

Much of the problems leading to rural poverty in Ghana stem from the fact that some of the people do not display strong moral principles and honesty when they are entrusted with some work. There are those use the power and position of their job to downplay workers' freedoms and rights. Some also influence things for their personal benefit and not put into consideration that they must stay true to who they are and the stand for what is right to maintain good moral values and integrity. Others forge and underwrite invoices and receipts of items they procure or sell and pocket the excess for their personal gains to the detriment of their employer. In so doing the business owners lose a lot of return on daily basis and eventually make their businesses collapse. They forget to 'own' and do whatever they can do within their power and might to ensure the business thrive so as to enable them continue to be in employment and end their living all the time. Because of experience of these unpatriotic behaviors and attitude that led to the collapse of other people's businesses, the rich and worthy people do not take delight in setting up businesses in the communities which could employ some of the people especially, the youth.

### **Implications of funeral rites in the socio-cultural lifestyle of the rural Ghanaian**

It is the belief of the Ghanaian that death is a journey that an individual embarks on to continue life in another world. For this reason, they organize a ceremony to take stock of his life, give praises and subsequently bid the departing member farewell. This act of praise-giving is what the Akans of Ghana refer to as "aye yie" and shortened as "Ayie" and there is no gainsaying that the Ghanaians attach greater importance to this particular event which heralds the transition of the soul of the dead person into the new world. Based on this belief and its accompanying importance, every Ghanaian expects to live an upright life, live long, and die a natural death worthy to be celebrated because the form of funeral celebrations/ceremonies organized for people vary from individual to individual depending on how the person carried him or herself while living and the nature of his or her death.

On the announcement of the death of an individual, mourners and sympathizers go in to share their sympathy and condolences with the bereaved family. However, a day is set aside for the commemoration of one week of the death. Beside celebrating the one week of the death, some ethnic groups set days aside to celebrate the fortieth day, eightieth day and or one hundred and

twentieth day. The date for the final funeral rites in normal circumstances is determined on the eighth day which marks the one week and announce to the public. All these celebrations are accompanied with the performance of rites and rituals with public attendance.

The final funeral rites for the dead person takes four days spanning from Friday to Monday. Friday is used for the preparation and arrangements for the climax of the funeral which is often slated for Saturday and Sunday while Monday is used to take stock of the income derived from donations made by well-wishers and sympathizers and all expenditures incurred from the day of the death to the end of the final funeral rites and pay all debts. This day also offers the opportunity for outstanding issues within the family to be resolved. From the beginning of the week of the funeral date, very close family members begin to arrive to put various preparations in order. Previously, days of the funeral rites were marked with mourning and fasting but now, only close relatives fast. Therefore, on the eve of the funeral, well-wishers and sympathizers come to assist in preparing food to feed visitors who may come from outside the village. In some few instances involving the affluent, the food is ordered from a restaurant service provider or caterer.

With the exception of the Muslim communities, Ghanaians particularly, the Akan dominated areas are noted for exorbitant, lavish and impressive funeral celebrations. Many are families who contract loans from the bank and rich people to perform funeral rite for their dead relatives. They go to the extent of prescribing dress codes for funerals; one for the one-week celebration; the code for Saturday (funeral day) is mostly black cloth for the funeral of a youth, middle aged men and women; black and white for the funeral of the very elderly people. The dress code for Sunday's thanksgiving service and the funeral is exclusively white. This becomes an obligation for members of the family to comply. They ought to do everything possible to buy and fit into the dress code. The title and colour of the prescribed cloth are often announced publicly, so other people in the community would also buy. Despite the fact that impressive funerals serve as a rite of passage and a gate way to usher the dead to the ancestral world as an eminent person, many rural families end up in debts and have to dispose of family properties that could be used for the well-being of some needy members in the family.

### **Effect of religion on the lifestyle of people living in the rural areas in Ghana**

The Countrymeters (2022) indicates that of the thirty-two million, four hundred and nine thousand, three hundred and eighty-seven (32,409,387) people who constitute the population of Ghana at the time of this study, twenty-four million, two hundred and seventy three thousand, seven hundred and eighty-one (24,273,781) constituting seventy-four point nine percent (74.9%), are Christians while the remaining twenty-five point one percent (25.1%) comprise Islam, Traditional/folk religion, unaffiliated and others. In support of this, Dokua Sasu (2022), declares that "The 2021 population and housing census in Ghana revealed that Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians were the largest religious group in Ghana, reaching a share of 31.6 percent. This translated into over 9.7 million of the country's population, an increase compared to the 2010 census year".

A good majority of these Pentecostal and charismatic Christians especially those in the rural areas in Ghana, have been indoctrinated by their pastors who have put psychological fear in them to believe that the only way to prosperity is to pray and follow their prophetic proclamations. In view of this, the church members spend so much time in the church house praying with the hope that they will receive what the pastor refers to as 'breakthrough' for their problems to be solved. Majority of these Christians already live under the poverty line yet they continue to bank their



hopes on the dictates of their priests, pastors and prophets who exploit them out of their ignorance. They are mentally enslaved such that they do not object to anything even though some of the problems require just the least amount of critical thinking. These Christians spend lengthy hours worshipping on Sundays in the normal Church services and within the week, most of them set aside one or two or three days to worship in crusades, deliverances, devotions, all nights and others without engaging in any form of economic activity in the day or days rendering them unproductive.

Some of the followers of the charismatic churches repose so much confidence and hope in their pastors, prophets and evangelists that they believe everything they (priests, evangelists, and prophets) prescribe or say to be the gospel truth and obey them religiously. Some of the priests, evangelists, and prophets take multiple offerings from the very needy they supposed to assist, make them pay huge sums of money before seeing them for what they term as ‘counselling’ and consultation’ sessions. In the end, they enrich themselves at the expense of the church members to acquire wealth, build mansions, buy expensive and lavish cars, and live affluent lifestyle while the contributors (church members) continue to wallow and languish in poverty.

## **CONCLUSION**

1. The cause of poverty in the rural areas is based on the fact that their economic activities are over-reliant on farming as the major occupation. Though farming is the major source of income for majority of the people, their farm proceeds are not able to sustain them throughout the year. This is because their farms are small in size and also rely on the weather for the success of their farming. Farming is mostly done through manual practices devoid of mechanization.
2. The decline of agricultural productivity, joblessness and high lode of farming activities drifts rural population from their residences to cities in the search of better living standard and living condition.
3. What was considered as a social responsibility, the values of being kind, helping each other, showing love for the other in the neighborhood, showing mercy, gratefulness and above all, being each other’s keeper is becoming a thing of the past.
4. Lack of proper education, illiteracy, over-population, single parenting, and epidemics of diseases coupled with environmental problems such as erratic rainfall pattern culminates into the culture of poverty among the rural folks.
5. Over-reliance on the properties and legacies of relatives is inherent in the Ghanaian family systems as a result of the extended family and the system of inheritance leading to laziness, rancour, ill-feeling, and animosity.
6. At the end of the lavish funeral performances, most of the families incur debt which as a result lead to the sale of properties of the deceased to defray the debt leading to increased poverty.
7. A lot of man-hours is wasted on the observation of certain rites and religious activities.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The central government should create safety net for the vulnerable especially, in the rural areas so they can access the facility in times of sickness (poor health), through the social welfare departments in the various Metropolitan, Municipal, and district Assemblies.

2. In order to stop or curtail vulnerable families from poverty, the social intervention policies should be strengthened and a national fund be set up for the purpose of given start-up capital or equipment to young graduates and other people who would want to set up small scale businesses to reduce the rate of reliance on government work (white collar jobs) that is nonexistent in today's economy.
3. The provision of infrastructure should be extended to the rural areas especially, the cocoa and food producing area which have been taunted as the back bone of the nation's economy and the food basket respectively. This will forestall the drifting of the youth who form the core of the labour force to the urban towns where they consider as the only haven for their success in life.
4. Educational authorities and stakeholders should incorporate subjects or projects that provide curricular links between students and their local communities which can assist them develop social responsibilities and learn the necessary skills for their active participation in society especially the rural areas. Such a curriculum should include social, aesthetics, critical thinking, and technological literacy right from the basic school. The student must also be exposed to beauty and form, aesthetics and poetry, dance and the visual arts which constitute the ways of creating personal meanings.
5. People in the rural areas must as a matter of importance consider to celebrate their dead moderately to save themselves from funeral debts and the sale of properties that could be used to cater for the education of one of their own children for which the future returns will be very rewarding.

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