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**An Enquiry into Gender Power Relations  
in Charcoal Production Processes  
in Rural Northern Ghana**

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## List of Acronyms

FGM	Focus Group Discussion
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
MOFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PFJ	Planting for Food and Jobs
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa

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## **Abstract**

Charcoal production is one of the livelihood supplementary activities engaged in by rural farmers in the northern part of Ghana. Most farmers in this area engage in subsistence farming, where output are mostly hardly enough to feed their families. Given this, peasant farmers also engage in charcoal production, in the non-farming seasons, to supplement the produce from subsistence agriculture, with the hope that, this should be enough to live on till the next farming season. Majority of those who engage in charcoal production are women. The land tenure structures in northern Ghana plays a great role in the access of productive resources. Getting access to trees to burn to produce charcoal depends on who owns the land where those trees are grown. Land is under the care and management of customary systems that gives power to men in the access of it in the area. In view of this, this research seeks to understand how men and women workout through this charcoal business, taking into consideration: How both men and women gain access to lands to enable them fell trees to burn charcoal, how the tasks done by men and women affects the intra-household distribution of benefits and also how the process affects households relating to decision-making with charcoal production. The study employed a qualitative research method to look onto these processes relying on gender power relations and theory of access to analyze how they operate in this business. The study focuses in two communities, that is, Chahayili and Kunkundanyili in the Savelugu-Nantong municipal in northern Ghana.

The study finds that, patriarchy and oppressive gender power relations determine resource access which restricts women's involvement in charcoal production. It shows that, even though women are involved in charcoal production than men, it is the men who controls resources and determines the selling and distribution of charcoal which also has direct impacts in their families as men are those who have the final say as to what decision to make regarding the proceeds of the charcoal.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

A lot of studies show that, women form the majority of people engaged in agricultural activities in Sub-Saharan Africa, yet, they have limited access to productive resources, such as lands and tress which are basically enshrined in the customs and traditional norms of the African societies. Men continue to exercise dominance over women in terms of these resource access, which has a great effect on their families. This research brings to light the experiences that women go through in their quest to access landed resources and how it affect their household.

With gender power relations in terms of access of resources like land or trees. The roles of both men and women should be the focal point in an attempt to create equal access. In order to ensure equality between men and women in the access to productive resources, men should be educated on the dangers of inequalities between men and women and also acknowledge the contributions of women in the development of societies. This means that, development partners and the government should train women on activities to be independent from men and also review some of the traditional laws affecting women. These will help create more ways that women will follow to access resources.



## **Keywords**

Agriculture, Charcoal, Livelihoods, Peasant women, Northern Ghana, Savelugu-Nanton, gender power relations.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This research work focuses on the intra-household gender power relations affecting peasant women farmers' involvement in charcoal production as a livelihood activity in the Savelugu-Nanton Municipality in the Northern region of Ghana. People in this area take farming as their main occupation because of the absence of other sustaining livelihood activities. They struggle to survive, as a result of the continuing low yields after harvesting despite the reported overall improvements in the agricultural sector in Ghana in recent times (MOFA 2017 Agricultural Progress Report). Most people in the northern sector are among the poorest in Ghana, where subsistence farmers dominate. These small-scale farmers cannot afford to buy improved seeds and fertilizers and cannot adopt modern methods of farming which require a huge cash outlay, for purpose of increasing their food production and productivity. Due to the fact that the produce often harvested cannot sustain them to the next farming season, they are compelled to engage in other livelihood activities including charcoal production, despite its known adverse effects on the environment.

This research therefore examines the local dynamics and complexity of access to and control over land resources, including trees and forests and its implications for gender relations and women's involvement in charcoal production in selected villages in the Savelugu-Nanton Municipality of the northern region of Ghana. In order to study this issue, gender power relations and theory of access are adopted as the conceptual frameworks for the study which explores, in order to understand the gendered nature of access to and control over land resources, including trees and forests (property relations), intra-household relations of production and reproduction (gender roles) and the hegemonic authority of the male head of household.

### 1.1: Background to the study

The Northern region of Ghana is one of the most strikingly poor regions in the Northern sector of Ghana (Quaye 2008) where, most people living in this area cannot afford the necessary resources to engage in large-scale farming<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, many farmers in the area engage in subsistence peasant farming. They traditionally cultivate produce for use by the household but when the food does not sustain them to the next farming season, they look to alternative livelihoods in order to sustain themselves until the next farming season (Quaye 2008). Quaye points to some of the activities they undertake to survive as: migration to the southern part of Ghana to search for work, selling off their animals to feed the family and partaking in charcoal production, among others (Quaye 2008). Anang et al (2011) suggests environmental degradation, deforestation and loss of soil fertility are some of the major adverse ecological impacts of charcoal production which the farmers have to contend with. On charcoal production, people cut trees to burn but some do not plant them back,

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<sup>1</sup> Agriculture has been one of the main pillars of the Ghanaian economy. It contributes about 56.6% of Ghana's GDP. The sector employs about 80% of the people in the country and serve as a source of raw-materials of the country's industries (Agricultural Sector Annual Progress Report, MoFA 2016). The sector saw a massive improvement when the Government introduced its flagship program dup planting for food and jobs (PFJ) (MOFA 2017 Agricultural Progress Report) but this success do not reflect evenly across the country, notable peasant farmers in Northern region who are noted to be poor, as a result cannot buy farming inputs to increase their farming activities and also depends on modern methods of farming (Dinar et al. 2012).

thereby causing soil erosion and deforestation. In the process of burning charcoal, soil nutrients are destroyed making them lose their fertility to sustain plant growth thereby affecting agricultural sustainability. Desertification and wildlife loss are the other negative effects of charcoal production.

Literature (Anang et al. 2011, Butz 2013; Njenga et al. 2013) suggest that more peasant women are involved in charcoal production than men. For instance, in 2005, over 200 women representing 6% of the Maasai village population in northern Tanzania cut down 4000 trees to produce charcoal in order to provide livelihoods for their families (International Energy Initiative as cited in Butz 2013). Peasant women farmers in northern Ghana are the more likely than men to have access to livelihood activities when the farming season is over.

## **1.2: Problem statement and justification of the study**

The predominant livelihood activity of the people in northern Ghana is small-scale agriculture. (GSS 2012). Agriculture accounts for eighty percent (80%) of the total labour force in Ghana with majority of them in rural areas, specifically the northern sector (Agricultural Sector Progress Report, MoFA, 2016). Due primarily to the seasonal nature of agriculture in the area, coupled with the small and informal nature of the productive economy, most people who are involved in agriculture in the northern sector are also involved with other livelihood activities especially, as emphasized previously, during the long dry season as an activity to support them till the next farming season (Quaye 2008). Some studies (Ellis 1998; Aloba Loison 2015) have highlighted that, most women in the Sub Saharan Africa are engaged in other small scale economic activities which includes petty trading that do not require much capital to start with. Some of them too carry fuelwood around for sale while others too are engaged with carrying water to sell and also processing of food (Kabeer 1994). In rural northern Ghana, sheanuts processing and charcoal production are the two biggest supplementary activities that rural people engage in. Some female youth migrate to the bigger cities like Kumasi and Accra to work as head porters<sup>2</sup> (Kayayei in a Ghanaian context) (Agarwal 1997, Asmah 2011; Quaye 2008) which majority of them “end up living and working under” unfavorable conditions who are exposed to a lot of dangers which have great effects on their health (Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf 2008: no page no:).

Charcoal production is a common livelihood activity in rural areas in Northern Ghana, with both men and women engaged in it, even though women dominate (Anang et al. 2011, Butz 2013, Duku et al. 2011; Njenga et al. 2013). The activity is characterized by unequal access of productive resources including the land from which the trees that are felled for charcoal production are grown. Traditionally, in northern Ghana, men exercise more control over productive resources than women (Apusigah 2009, Kuusana et al. 2013; Yaro 2013). Women access resources based on socio-economic factors such as marriage, gifts from other family members, inheritance and outright purchase (Kameri-Mbote 2005, Kuusana et al. 2013, Yaro 2013), although the latter remains uncommon in rural communities. Women are still heavily involved with charcoal production though differently from their male

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<sup>2</sup> Most female's moves from rural areas of the northern part of Ghana for their inability to get other livelihood activities to engage with to the bigger cities to work as head porters (Ardayfio-Schandorf 2008). They usually go around the open markets and some of them also sit in front of super markets, in case anybody buys something in bigger quantities, they carry them on their heads to their destinations with a fee that has to be agreed before.

counterparts (International Energy Initiative as cited in Butz 2013<sup>2016</sup>, International Energy Initiative, cited in Jones et al. 2016).

It has often been assumed that, the increasing involvement of women in charcoal production in Sub-Saharan Africa is partly attributed to the reason that, unlike farming and other livelihood activities, charcoal production has low entry barriers. These low entry barriers are in terms of, for example, access to arable lands, trees and capital requirements. Access to lands and trees are the key things required for charcoal production. Owning a land where trees are grown automatically allow access to the trees to fell and burn charcoal. These lands are largely managed and controlled by men through the customary land management system, which is largely exercised mostly along patriarchal lines (Kuusana et al. 2013, Ministry of Justice 2000, as cited in Adiaba 2006, Tsikata and Golah 2010). In Ghana, land management is governed by three broad systems which explain how an individual can get access to it. Customary land ownership system of management is the most practiced one with eighty percent (80%) of the total land management, followed by state management of eighteen percent (18%) and two percent (2%) management shared with the state and the customary systems (Ministry of Justice 2000, as cited in Adiaba 2006, Tsikata and Golah 2010; Kuusana et al. 2013). The customary system of land management is widely practiced in rural communities of northern Ghana including in the study area. This system allows chiefs and some selected clan heads to manage lands on behalf of the people and to allow access for family members (Tsikata and Golah 2010; Yaro 2013). Majority of these chiefs and family heads are usually men, thereby giving the men power over women.

As someone who has worked in the study area as a municipal officer in charge of youth in agriculture before, I observed that, most peasant farmers take up charcoal production in order to supplement their farming produce. Access to the trees which are burnt to produce the charcoal is determined by the land tenure systems of the area. Men have greater access and control over the lands than women. The charcoal burning process is also carried out on gender<sup>3</sup>-based lines. These gender differentials impact on the intra-households with regards to decision-making on the distribution and use of income obtained from the sale of charcoal.

The research investigates women's involvement in charcoal production as a livelihood activity in all the phases of charcoal production. It investigates how they access the lands on which the trees that are fell and burnt for charcoal are grown or planted. It also investigates the gender roles/tasks under taken by men and women in the charcoal production cycle as well as the implications for the intra-household distribution of benefits and decision-making. The study further identifies and accounts for the differences between men and women in the charcoal production process and the challenges facing women in their quest to access productive resources in the Savelugu-Nanton Municipality.

### **1.3: Research Objectives**

The main aim of this study is to examine the local dynamics and complexity of access to and control over land resources, including trees and forests and its implications for gender relations and women's involvement in charcoal production in the Savelugu-Nanton Municipality of northern Ghana. To be specific, the paper:

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<sup>3</sup> Agarwal (1997:34) defines gender as "a power relation that is seen between women and men in the community, the family, market and state"

- Examines the local dynamics and relations of resource access and use and its implication for women's involvement in charcoal production.
- Examines the extent of women's involvement in charcoal production as a complementary livelihood activity.
- Identifies the gender roles/tasks done by women and men in charcoal production and its implications for the intra-household distribution of benefits and decision-making.

## **1.4: Research Questions**

Following the research problem above, the main research question that this study addresses is: How and to what extent is women's involvement in charcoal production, as a complementary livelihood activity shaped, and is shaped by, existing patriarchal and gendered power relationships in the Savelugu-Nanton Municipality in northern Ghana?

## **1.5: Sub-questions**

The research explores this question through the following three sub-questions:

- How do gender power relations affect who has access to trees and forests for charcoal production?
- How do differences in the tasks done by men and women in charcoal production affect the intra-household distribution of benefits?
- How do gender relations determine intra-household decision-making associated with charcoal production?

## **1.6: Organizational structure of the research**

The argument of this study is presented in five chapters and divided as follows: following the first chapter which sets out the study by outlining the research problem, and its questions and objectives, and overall justification of the research, chapter two explores the literature on charcoal production in Sub-Saharan Africa where it notes that the existing studies have not examined the subject within the context of the land tenure systems existing in many SSA states and the gender-power relationships inherent in that arrangement. It observed that it is this gap that has subsequently provided the basis for the study. In addition to a review of the literature, the chapter also presents the methodology of the study, where it discusses the study area and the sources from which data was collected and analyzed. Chapter three presents the conceptual framework of the study, where gender-power relations and theory of access are conceptually elaborated and employed as the analytical lenses guiding the research. Chapter four presents, analyses and discusses the research findings where it makes a number of interesting revelations. First, the research finds that gender power relations

structures decisions over the ownership and control over lands, where men have a higher level of control over and access to land than women. This unequal control over and access to land is driven by patriarchal nature of the study area, which converges with the customary system of land ownership practiced in the study area, under which women do not traditionally exercise ownership and control over land. Instead, it is the chiefs, selected clan and family heads that hold lands in trust for their future generations. Second, the charcoal production process is divided into various stages, thereby giving rise to gendered division of labour in the process. The gendered division of labour in charcoal production is one in which men take on what is arguably the most difficult roles involved in the process: tree felling and the organisation of the sales process. These differences in the tasks done by men and women in charcoal production and selling process has effects both in decision-making associated with charcoal production as well as on the intra-household distribution of the proceeds from the charcoal business. Chapter five concludes the study with a summary, conclusion and re-examination of the significance of the main findings made.

## **Chapter 2 : Research Study Area, Literature review and methodological strategies**

### **2.0: Introduction**

This chapter discusses the study area for the research work, reviews the literature related to the study and the methodological strategies used. The research study area is presented first, followed by the literature review and then the Methodological strategies.

### **2.1: Description of the study area**

Savelugu-Nantong Municipality is part of Northern region which emerged from the district council in 1988 under the PNDC Law 207 to replace, then legislative instrument (LI) 1450 under the local Government Act 1993 (Act 462) (GSS 2010). It gained its municipality status in 2012 with a legislative instrument (LI) 2071 with a total population of 155,293. 75,293 men and 80,000 women (Feed the future 2017). It is located in “the northern part of the Northern Region and shares boundaries with West Mamprusi to the north, Karaga to the east, Kumbungu to the west and Tamale Metropolis to the south” (Feed the Future 2017:1). The municipal capital city is Savelugu with a total land size of 2022.6 square kilometre (Feed the Future 2007). The municipal holds more than one tribe and Dagombas are the majority with Frafra, Ewe, Manprusi and Gonjas as the minority which as a result, the tribe (ethnicity) that a person found his/herself in may have a role that affects getting economic resources for a livelihood activity. Islamic religion is the most practiced religion in the area of 95.5% of the municipal population (Feed the Future 2017). The religion or faith that a person holds may also have the influence in determining the access of lands where trees are grown for charcoal production. The municipal has a very low literacy rate with 85% of adults having no formal education and 6% primary school, and 8.8% secondary education (Feed the Future 2017). The inheritance system of the community is patrilineal limiting women’s access to lands and other economic resources. The geographical is mainly agricultural with yam being the highest crop produced (45%) and crops like maize, rice, groundnut, cowpea, cassava and other foodstuffs are from 2% to 13% of the agricultural production in the area (Feed the Future 2017).

Most of the people live in areas where the average annual rain fall is 600mm which is adequate for a single cropping season. The pattern of rain in the northern sector of Ghana is not always regular, so low yields are common (Feed the Future 2017 and GSS 2010).

Savelugu-Nantong Municipality has a number of villages under its jurisdiction. Savelugu-Nantong Municipality was selected because of its well-known role in charcoal production activities. Most villages are not able to enjoy good three square meal a day (GSS 2010). The areas I looked at in-depth are Chahayili and Kunkundaanyili which are geographically cut-off from the municipality and are very socially and economically marginalized. These two communities practice polygamy with an average size of a household of about seven with a husband and two or more wives. There are no schools in the study area and they lack good drinking water. Villagers drink at a dam where their animals also drink. Access to market is a challenge in these areas as the only two markets that are close to





as cited in Schure et al. 2013:95). According to Duku et al. (2011), biomass usage has increased greatly because it has become a substitute for fossil fuel as a source of energy given the rising population. Ghanaians depend on biomass for their energy supply with wood fuel and charcoal as the most used products - 64% as compared to petroleum- 27% and of electricity of 9% (Duku et al. 2011). The demand for charcoal makes it a profitable occupation for rural peasants to take up where there is no other economic or livelihood activity available for them during the dry season. The daily rise in demand of charcoal has led to an informal production of about 590,000 metric tons annually in Ghana and 20% of the total produce are transported without charcoal conveyance certificate (Nketiah and Asante 2018). Charcoal production even though appears to be on the rise might give the impression that those who are engaged in it directly are those who benefit more but literature (Luz et al. 2015) suggest that, on the value chain of charcoal production, those who do not involve directly in the actual burning processes like wholesalers and distributors turn to benefit more. Most charcoal producers adopted it to support other livelihood activities like farming (Zulu and Richardson 2012) even if, as critics note that, the activity undermines the ecosystem and human health.

Women in northern Ghana usually do not have livelihood activities when the farming season is over (Anang et al. 2011). During the dry season, they are dependent on their husbands for their financial needs which leads to unequal power relations between husband and wife. These lead women to engage in charcoal production in order to gain some financial autonomy from their husbands (Anang et al. 2011). In Sub-Saharan Africa, seventy-two percent (72%) of cities and ninety-eight percent (98%) of village households depend on fuelwood and charcoal for energy (Njenga et al. 2013). As stressed by Njenga et al. (2013), women are the main producers and providers of this product. For example, in Kenya, women are the majority of the 500,000 people employed in this area, generating over US\$427 million to the Kenyan's economy (Njenga et al. 2013).

Men also engage in charcoal production in northern Ghana (Butz 2013; Njenga et al. 2013; Anang et al. 2011). In order to produce charcoal, trees are grown on specific lands in order to be cut and burnt for charcoal. Gaining access to these lands where trees can be cut, and burnt is one of the major struggles that charcoal producers experience in northern Ghana. Trees that are grown on land, automatically belong to the landowner especially when the land is a customarily managed one. As a result, most charcoal producers especially women, who are rarely land holders face difficulties to access of trees to cut and burn.

## **2.3: Methodological Strategies**

This section discusses the qualitative methodology employed during the field work for a period of thirty-six days at Chahayili and Kunkundanyili villages in the Savelugu-Nanton Municipality of Northern Ghana. The choice of the methods and procedures used were informed by the establishment of the research questions and objectives that explains the type of method to be used for the data collection and analysis. The research aimed at understanding charcoal producers' views and narrations on how they interact in gaining access to resources and how it impacts their families, hence the need for a qualitative approach in the field work.

## 2.4: Methods and Sources of Data Collection

A qualitative method of data collection was employed in the study. Structured survey questionnaires and interviews (one-on-one interview and semi-structured interviews) were used that enabled me to obtain primary data from the respondents which builds on the desk top research. Structured survey questionnaires in the study area were used to ascertain the respondent's ages, gender, family status, educational status, hours spent on productive work, hour spent on social work and care work. Interviews session which were made up of 1, focus group discussions were organized (first for both genders and later for females charcoal producers only) to obtain respondents' views on the processes of charcoal production and 2, a one-on-one interviews session to obtain information that could not emerge in the focus groups such as issues that cannot be discussed in public in relation to intra-household decision-making associated with charcoal production. Semi-structured interviews were chosen due to its flexibility as it allows a free flow and relaxed form of conversations between the research participants and the researcher (O'leary 2004). Majority of my most useful materials came from the interviews as it was difficult to get the information from the focus groups as explained below.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) allowed me to discuss issues with six respondents in each group which were asked a set of pre-arranged questions (Hennink 2013). The one-on-one interview sessions gave me a more in-depth understanding of respondents' personal views and narratives about gender and social relations in the different processes in charcoal production and were used to discuss sensitive issues that could not be discussed in a group.

I supplemented my interviews and discussions in the focus groups with my observations. For example, how the processes of charcoal burning was done in the villages and also, I followed the process of transport and selling in order to understand how people engaged with the buyers in the villages.

Pict1: Some participants in FGD for women.



Source: field survey, July, 2019

Pic2: semi-structured interview with some men



Source: field survey August, 2019

## 2.5: Sampling techniques

In order to select respondents for the research, a non-random sampling technique, which included purposive and convenient sampling techniques was employed. These techniques were chosen because they create room for flexibility (O'Leary 2017). As Creswell and Creswell argue, purposive sampling technique allows a researcher to select populations that have experience and knowledge in the area of interest (Creswell and Creswell 2017). The target population for the research was female and male peasant farmers who produce charcoal in Chahayili and Kunkundanyili villages in the Savelugu-Nantong Municipality. My emphasis was more on the opinions of the women than men in order to look at gender inequalities from their perspective as the interest of this research is to examine how women who have less rights in the access of productive resources access the resources including lands to produce charcoal. I was interested to understand how women negotiate access to resources and how they benefit from charcoal burning activities. I spoke with thirty-two (32) peasant women and men. Some were landowners and others were landless farmers. The first focus group discussion made up of both men and women charcoal producers involved all the thirty-two farmers from which twenty-three (23) were landowners and nine (9) landless. Eighteen (18) women out of the thirty-two in the first focus group discussion were interviewed further due to their specific experience of charcoal production. From this eighteen women, twelve (12) were landowners and six (6) were landless. They participated in a separate focus group discussions for women only in order to obtain information that could not be discussed in a mixed focus group. In the course of the research, there was the need to reorganize the mixed focus group discussions again to discuss some pop up issues. I could not get all the thirty-two charcoal producers again but was able to get twelve (12) men and women who were all part of the previous focus discussion. This was followed by a one-on-one interview session with these twelve (12) people to obtain information that cannot be discussed public especially sharing information about their families. People from different age groups were involved. In the design, it was thought that, differentiation in religious and ethnic backgrounds would be important but during the data collection process, it emerged that all those living in these two communities belong to the same ethnic group and religion. The table below gives a detailed elaboration of the engagement of the respondents.

Techniques	Respondents			Communities						Land owners	Landless
	Female	Male	Total	Chahayili			Kunkundanyili				
				Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total		
Focus group discussion for Men and Women	21	11	32	7	4	11	14	7	21	23	9
Focus group discussion for Women	18	-	18	6	-	6	12	-	12	12	6
One-on-one Interview	12	6	18	2	5	7	4	7	11	13	5

Source: Field data conducted from June to July 2019

## **2.6: Limitations, Scope and Ethical Risks of the Research**

The data collection process of the research was carried out at a time when the northern parts of Ghana were experiencing rainfall (rainy season), as a result, most of the people were very busy on their various farms. Gathering information from respondents was therefore a challenge. Most of the interviews were done at their farms and it was hard to get out to farms, leading to rescheduling to different dates.

Another challenge was, as a male researcher, it was difficult to approach the women farmers. I found it hard to interview the female farmers until I found a female interlocutor in both communities who could assist me to talk with the female farmers. In addition, most of the wives were not comfortable to speak when their husbands were present, so I had to arrange with the help of my female interlocutor to meet them separately. All these difficulties were noted as they in themselves suggest how gender power differences operate. Most of these women expressed the concern that discussing their family issues with me could endanger their marriages, hence a number of two women refused to take part in the focus group discussion organized for only women and nine again refused to talk when the researcher adopted a one-on-one interview process.

Another limitation was that, I planned to stay in the communities throughout the data collection process, but was hit with a sickness (malaria) after the first visit to the communities. Illness combined with the lack of the access to electricity in these areas as well as good drinking water forced me to change plans and to live in a different community (Nantong) and go to the research area daily for the data collection process.

The literacy rate was very low as anticipated, as a result, all the conversations were done orally and recorded. Some interviews were recorded in writing by me on the spot, especially the interviews session involving decision-making in their families.

On ethical grounds, the participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity. The data will not be shared with anyone else in the region. Based on this assurance given, the research participants gives their total support.

## **2.7: Positionality, Reflexivity**

Positionality and reflexivity are key issues to consider when conducting research in marginalized communities especially when the issues are about gender relations, power and livelihoods. Positionality has to do with the position of the researcher in relation to the research participants. The researcher needs to recognize his or her position as an outsider, or as a privileged person in order to engage carefully and with respect with the respondents. The researcher needs to be mindful of the relations in terms of the acquisition and production of knowledge. “Power operates in the processing of information (Mills 2003). “A researcher’s position in a web of power relations determines how the participants engage with each other and therefore informs all aspects of field research” (Crossa 2012). Malkki Lissa (2012:25) is of the view that, the “historical and cultural situatedness” of the researcher influences how he understands and interprets situations in a knowledge production process. She further argues that, the position of the researcher informs the understanding of the issues under investigation without which the data collected may not be valid as its interpretation might not be accurate.

My position was complex as someone who worked in the area before. Some of the respondents knew me as the municipal officer in charge of youth in agriculture in the municipality as I had worked there from 2014 to 2016. In addition, I belong to the same ethnic group and I was coming for the research with a scholarship and someone studying in Europe, therefore I had status and power which allowed me special access as well as treatment during the data collection. As the communities chosen were known to me, I was able to gain access to the respondents, though I did not take that access for granted. My interaction with all the respondents, were governed by the principles of respect. I did not go straight to the communities, I first went to the assembly member for that electoral area and informed him about my research and my interest in those communities and he then introduced me to the opinion leaders in those communities and it was through them that I could gain access to the respondents without any problem.

## **2.8: Experience in the field**

My journey and time in the field deserves reporting as well because it gives an insight into how I started with the data collection process, the challenges that I encountered. Three days after my arrival to my home town, the capital city of northern region, Tamale, I tried calling my porter (the one who could help to introduce me to the research respondents), who is the local representative to the assembly for the Tampion electoral area. He is also a former co-worker at the municipal office of ministry of agriculture (MOFA). His phone was not working, so I travelled to the Savelugu-Nantong Municipal office to meet him. When I arrived, I was told he is on break and will be back to office in a month time. He is a native of Kunkundanyili which is part of the Tampion electoral area that he represents but lives in Nantong where he carries out his role as the member for the local assembly. Kunkundanyili is well-known for charcoal production activities, which is why I wanted to contact him. I proceeded to his house at Nantong but was told he travelled to Kunkundanyili, so I proceeded on my motor bike to meet him there. Upon my arrival, I saw him sitting with friends by the roadside, so I stopped, greeted him and I ask him why his phone was not working. He told me that he has been in the village for a week now, there is no electricity to charge phones. The only possibility way to charge a phone is on the market day of Tampion where people who will be going to the market are messaged with their phones to charge for them usually with fees.

After chatting, we walk around the village. I observed that, aside lacking electricity, there is no good drinking water, people drink from a dam where animals also drink. They do not have good streets or roads. We went to buy soft drinks and cola as tradition demands and he then sent me to the chief palace to inform the chief of my mission in the community. The chief recognized me as I used to work in the village some years back. The chief gave me permission to do the research. The next morning, we went to the other village and followed the same routine. I could not go to the third village as planned because, there were some chieftaincy disputes there and so, the security did not allow me as a stranger to go in.

I stayed in my informant's house for four days talking with people in order to build rapport with them until my phone also needed charging. We then went back to Nantong where he lives, and I went to Tamale to prepare. I fell sick from malaria when I returned home. I stayed at home for a week and then, I moved to stay with my informant at Nantong and go to the villages every day for the data collection.

As a native speaker of the local language in the area, I do not need any body to help me in translating the language. We all speak in Dagbani which is the local language. I visited about fifteen (15) houses in both Kunkundanyili and Chahayili to interact and also build a rapport with the villages usually in the morning and when they returned from their farms in the evening.

As part of my experience in the field, I assisted several people on their farms and in their charcoal production activities. I accompanied some of them (in both communities) to the two main markets in the area which was several kilometers from the communities. In engaging in these activities, I was able to observe and see how social relations operate in these areas. In one of their markets, most of the traders were men with only a few women. I was told that, the women who were there were coming from nearby places while the men were from far off villages. Women from those villages could not travel because of the distance to the market. According to one particular man, women who travel long distances run the risk of not returning home in time to perform their various household chores which would negatively affect their marriages. These observations suggested the type of potentially conflictual and oppressive gender power relations that mark village life.

I also realized that, animals were left in the hands of boys while men and women were engaged with their farming activities. On the farms that I visited, men undertook farming activities while the women were responsible for sowing of seeds and also cooking for the family. Women are also responsible for the care of the children. When I was there, there were few livelihood activities in the area except for the farming, looking after livestock. The villagers do not burn charcoal during the rainy season because rains might wash the charcoal away. Charcoal that were produced and were not sold during the dry season were packed at their farms and some of them brought to the road side and others homes waiting for possible buyers to come and buy. It was only a few who risk in burning the charcoal at that time.

## **Chapter 3 : Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

### **3.0: Introduction**

This chapter discusses the theoretical/conceptual frameworks that are relevant in the analysis of the data for the study. It explains how the research employs gender power relations and theory of access in order to guide the interpretations and analysis of the data generated in the field.

### **3.2: Gender Power Relations**

The way and manner that people relate to each other is determined by how weak or strong the actors involved are. Gender power relations are socially constructed and are context specific (Barbalet 1985:532). Pearson (2000) argues that, gender power relations refer to activities that shape men and women different social responsibilities in a society determined by the differential access to resources for production. These roles give certain people, strong men the power to exercise influence over others, usually weaker men and women. Gender power relations refer to the social dynamic of patriarchy where men exert power over women. Agarwal (1997:34) defines gender power relations as “a power relation that is seen between women and men in the community, the family, the market and the state” which might differ from community to community since it is socially and culturally constructed. According to Eagly and Wood (1999), the roles that women and men perform in their societies affect the way they operate and interact with each other.

Gender power relations therefore can be understood as an institution that encompasses social and economic relations (Lorber 1994). Different gender tasks and roles are carried out by men and women in ways that fundamentally shape relations in communities, economies and societies. In a patriarchal society, the roles performed by men are ranked higher than those of the women, thereby creating unequal power relations in context specific ways (Eagly and Wood 1999). Gender relations shape how productive resources are identified and shared between men and women and affect who can make decisions in the family. Social and cultural expectations of what it means to be a man or woman also shape which gender can take responsibility in the family for decisions which impact family members (Agarwal 1997).

In a peasant community in Sub-Saharan Africa, patriarchy is the “gendered power system” (Kameri-Mbote 2005:3) which “encompasses all forms of male dominance” (Kameri-Mbote 2005, Kalabamu 2006). Patriarchy refers to “a network of social, political and economic relationship through which men dominate and control female labour, reproduction and sexuality as well as define women’s status, privileges and rights in a society” (Kalabamu 2006: no page no). In a typical agrarian settings, most of the agrarian activities and livelihoods are implemented and identified along gendered line (Angeles and Hill 2009). In Sub-Saharan Africa, women’s rights in terms of resource access are determined by gender relations enshrined in the customs and traditions of the societies (Kalabamu 2006). As a result, the rights to own and have productive resources including lands, trees and forest to pursue livelihoods activities is determined by gender power relations where women are expected to follow men’s decisions. As explained by a women group leader, that “before marriage, women were children of their fathers, after marriage they were children of their

husbands, and during widowhood they were children of their heirs of sons” (Molapo 1994, as quoted in Kalabamu 2006:1).

In the patriarchal rural Ghanaian context, people who own productive resources can access them. Who has access to trees to burn in the selected areas is determined by the owners of the lands where those trees are grown and these processes are normally done on gendered lines where priority is given to men over women. Customs and traditions put men ahead of women in the access of resources (Quaye et al. 2016) thereby restricting women’s access. This leads to unequal distribution of resources and access between the women and men.

Applying a gender lens to charcoal production, the research examines how gender power relations between men and women play out in the process of charcoal production and how gender inequality operates in the intra-households decisions-making on who does what in the production and selling of charcoal and the distribution of benefits of the proceeds of the charcoal.

## **2.3: Theory of access**

‘Access’ has been used to look at property and natural resource use. Access is defined as “the ability to derive benefits from things” which is slightly different from the meaning of property which is “the right to benefit from things” (Ribot and Peluso 2003). Access is about “a bundle of powers” as compared to property which is about a “bundle of rights” (Ribot and Peluso 2003:153). This means that, in getting access to something, one needs to have the power that will go together with the right to own that property. Access is “the capacity to benefit from things including material objects, persons, institutions and symbols” (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 153). How an individual benefits from natural resources depends on his or her ability to get access to them, which is different from property which depends on the right on the usage of resources. The right to own a property is usually supported by Mills and customs existing in a society (Ribot and Peluso 2003) according to different societal context. Getting access to a particular property depends on the rights, customs, and relationships that the parties share depending on how properties are acquired and distributed.

Access to the arable lands which determine access of trees for charcoal production in the study area, depends on certain traditional historical customs and norms. Resources are controlled and managed by certain institutions that determine who gains access and who has the right to own them (Ribot and Peluso 2003). Most lands in Northern Ghana are owned through a customarily system of land ownership which gives traditional rulers and some clan heads the chance to own and control lands (Tsikata and Golah 2010; Tsikata and Yaro 2013; Kuusana et al.2013). This means that, theory of access in light of this research work, will be targeted on who gets what land where trees are grown as discussed by Bernstein (2010) and Ribot and Peluso (2003).

Getting access to land to fell trees to produce charcoal in the study area is determined by clans, family heads, and chiefs (Tsikata and Golah 2010 and Ribot and Peluso 2003) who are mostly men and this affects how the distributions are done thereby affecting the women.

Analyzing the findings of the research data involves looking at the different levels of inequalities according to gender and access at both the site of resource allocation, access to the market as well as intrahousehold decision-makings.



## **Chapter 4 : Presentation of findings and analysis**

### **4.0: Introduction**

This chapter presents, analyses and discusses the findings obtained from the field. Gender power relations and theory of access are the analytical frameworks used in this chapter to present and discuss the findings of the field data collected. This chapter consist of four main sections. The first section presents a brief account of how charcoal is produced in the study area. The second section looks at how gender power relations affect who has access to trees and forest for charcoal production. The third section presents and analyzes how the differences in the tasks undertaken by men and women in charcoal production affect the intra-household distribution of benefits. The last section discusses how gender relations determine the intra-household decision-making associated with charcoal production.

### **4.1: A brief description of how charcoal is produced in the study area**

Tree burning passes through several controlled processes before it can be termed as charcoal. In a charcoal production process, the most important thing to look for is dried logs/wood. These logs/wood are obtained from trees that are cut and streamed into reasonable burnable pieces. A piece of land is then cleared where the streamed pieces of wood are gathered and fire is then set on them, after which, it is then covered with leaves of trees with the fire on. Sand is then used to spread around to cover it so that, no part of the leaves or woods can be seen. These processes are left for some number of days depending on the quantity of wood used but mostly for a period of one week. After that specified period, where there is no smoke coming out from the sand again, it means that the wood has been burnt into charcoal and ready to be removed. In the process of removing the charcoal, sometimes, some of the wood will still not burn, so the charcoal will be removed leaving them. The unburnt wood is then covered again with the process repeated until they all burn to become charcoal. After this is done, the producers will then sort them by their size, pack into sacks and ready for sale. These processes were revealed during a mix focus group discussion held in the communities.

All the various processes involved in charcoal production have been grouped into four stages for purposes of this study: Tree felling and streaming, the burning, sorting and the selling stages.

There is a clear gendered differentiation process in the study area, with respect to charcoal production activities. For instance, the first stage is characterized by male dominance. The second stage is seen as a stage for both genders. The third stage is one dominated by women while the last stage appears to be male dominated. The evidence for this finding is discussed in detailed in this chapter. The pictures below show some of the processes involved in a typical charcoal production.

Pic.1: 1<sup>st</sup> stage, cutting and streaming of trees.



Source: field survey, August 2019.

Pic.2: 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, burning stage.



Source: field survey, August 2019.

Pic.3: 3<sup>rd</sup> stage. Wood burnt are removed as charcoal. Some wood kept back to burn after its removal.



Source: field survey, August 2019.



Source: field survey, August 2019.

### **4.3: Gender power relations and its effects on women access to land and trees for charcoal production**

Land continues to be the main resource which determines most livelihood activities. In rural areas of the Savelugu-Nanton Municipality, including the study area, one cannot just fell any tree without owning the land on which it is grown. Unequal power relations between men and women in access to landed resources is clear as men are the owners of land and therefore can exercise control over its productive resources, including the trees which are felled to burn charcoal. The importance of landownership emerged from the focus group discussions and was confirmed from my own observation. For instance, a female farmer wanted to acquire a piece of land to increase her farm size. She is part of the family that owns lands but because she is a woman and cannot own a land, she had to beg the brothers before

she was allowed to go and use it<sup>4</sup>. Such observations confirm what other studies in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana (Kameri-Mbote 2005; Kuusana et al. 2013) have found.

Evidence from a mixed focus group discussions showed that, customary landownership system is what is practiced in these areas. The discussions revealed that, chiefs, and some selected clan heads are those who take care of lands for their people and to allow access for those who wants to use them. These chiefs and family heads are chosen based on their laid down traditional rules. Per the tradition in the area, a woman cannot be a family head even if she is the chief of the village<sup>5</sup>, she still has to bring herself down to her husband. Women are not allowed to own lands according to the customs and traditions of the area. This gives men the upper hand to have control over the women in the area. The discussions further revealed that, majority of the chiefs in the area are men. The access to lands where trees are felled to burn charcoal is shaped by socio-economic inequalities between men and women. Men have more power to exercise in the access of the productive resource than their women counterparts. Women's access to productive resources including lands on which they fell trees for their charcoal burning activities are shaped by their social relationships with their family members and other processes like marriages and inheritance<sup>6</sup>. These findings revealed how land management systems affect women in the study area which confirms other research on land management and access in Sub-Saharan Africa (Tsikata and Golah 2010).

The fact that gender power relations structure decision over the ownership and control over land was reinforced during the focus group discussion with women charcoal producers only, who were united in their view that men have a higher level of control over and access to land than women as indicated in the quote below:

Women in this our community like other communities in the northern part of Ghana, by custom cannot own a land physically. Women can only have some lands through inheritance, and when they are fortunate to be married to a man who has some and also can get some from uncles and sons but in all, cannot claim a legal ownership of them. They only use them for their productive purposes but not to own them forever. Women are to be looked and cared for by the men, so as a result the customs and traditions allows men to have more properties so that they can take care of women better. (FGD at Kunkundanyili on 23/07/2019).

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<sup>4</sup> This woman was very friendly to me. She told me she wanted to expand her farm size, so she needed a land and I know their family owns lots of lands because she was the daughter of the chief of the village who owns most of the lands in the village. I asked her whether she cannot go and work on any land that is lying idle and she said no. one day I was interviewing one of her brothers and she came and requested from the brother that she needed a land which was granted. I later asked him whether there can be an instance that she can be denied which she said yes.

<sup>5</sup> ..... woman cannot be a head of a family but on certain circumstances, a woman can be made a chief of a village. When this is done, even though she can be a chief, she still have to obey her husband and even most of her activities are to be carried out by men on behalf of her (FGD in July, 2019)

<sup>6</sup> ....we heard and know that Government owns lands where people can buy from other parts of the country. This area of the country is different as we are so remote that government people do not even come here unless during voting times. All our land issues are managed by our chiefs and some selected family heads who are considered 'royal' families. A woman cannot be a family head according to our customs but can be a chief on certain circumstances which is very rare to happen. Even when a woman is made a chief, most of her duties are performed by her husband. Our tradition do not allow women to own lands directly as men. Women only get access to lands through inheritance from their families and also gifts from other family members (FGD at Kunkundanyili on 23/07/2019).

These processes<sup>7</sup> in these communities, like other parts of Africa, confirm how the customary landownership system has followed the patriarchal nature of the agrarian settings (Kalabamu 2006). My findings further confirm the finding of a similar study done on women livelihoods in northern Ghana (Apusigah 2009). In my own observations based on the findings above, women are seen as people who need to be taken care of always, as daughters, mothers, wives, sisters, grandmothers, and as result, do not have the possibility to exercise their rights and depend on their male counterparts. Women as part of their survival strategies have to respect the authority of men irrespective of how the men treat them. I observed how women have to keep a good relationship with their men counterparts in order to continue to enjoy the access to livelihood resources. For example, a woman narrates during a one-on-one interview session how her younger brother, who gave her a land duped her but because she fears to lose the land if she talks, she decided to keep quite<sup>8</sup>.

Women who are married and come from families that own lands enjoy more rights than other women who are not in a relationship to a landowner. Women who are married to landowners do access lands through their husbands and can cut down trees for their charcoal burning activities. They can also inherit some of the properties from their paternal families. I observed that, most of the women who engage in charcoal production in this area are mostly married which was reflected in my sample as thirty (30) out of thirty two (32) respondents were married.

Even though, women can inherit from their families, there is also a limitation inherent in this form of land acquisition. Northern Ghana practices the patrilineal system of inheritance which gives more power to men to inherit more of their family's properties than their women counterparts (Yaro, 2010). Women who do not enjoy this right of access to resources have no other option than to look somewhere for an alternative. This explains why some of them take up subsistence responsibilities that are even seen as inferior with limited access to resources, with most of them also migrating to the bigger cities to look for alternative economic opportunities, often exposing themselves to various dangers in the process. This observation was confirmed during a one-on-one interview with a charcoal producer:

.....my husband and I are blessed with six (6) children, two males and four females. Two of the females are married now, so their responsibilities are not on us anymore. We do not own lands. We borrow and also negotiate for some to engage with. Because of that, it is difficult for us. Our two daughters who are not married left this village to Tamale and Accra to see whether they can get jobs to do. The one in Tamale we are told she got a job as a house help and the one who went to

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<sup>7</sup> For processes, I mean women social relationships with men, inheritance from their families and their marriages to landowners as discussed by Kalabamu (2006) and Kameri-Mbote (2005).

<sup>8</sup> My younger brother is one of the people who have been helping me with lands and other things when I need them but recently, my husband travelled, so there was no one to send my charcoal to sell for me, so I pleaded with him to help me by selling it. When he arrived from the market after selling it, he gave me an amount and told me that the remaining amount will be paid on the next market day that it was bought on credit. Since then, I have not heard from him again. What I can only do is to keep quiet because if I try to confront him, he might take off his land where my family and I depends on for our livelihoods (one-on-one interview on July, 2019).

Accra is working as Kayayei<sup>9</sup> (head porter). Our worry now is that, just recently, one of our neighbor's daughter returned from Accra from that same Kayayei business and when I asked how my daughter was doing, she said she is fine but life is not good out there as well, that is why she came back. That they are exposed to so many dangers because of where they sleep and some of them are even raped..... (One-on-one interview on July, 2019)

The high birth rate could be a factor that contributes to the high poverty rate in the area. People do not plan their families. I have observed from the questionnaires and from that of the municipal data that, majority of the families are large with seven as the average family size (Feed the Future 2017). Children are seen as a source of security to their parents especially when the parents are old and cannot engage in physical livelihood activities. From the interviews, I observe that, most people in the area give birth to children with the expectation children will take care of them. Adults are therefore often responsible for elderly parents which leads some of them to travel out from the villages to seek employment. This leads to further pressures in the families for both men and women. This revelations were confirmed from the quote below:

... My parents gave birth to eight (8) of us and one died, remaining seven. We are made up of four males, three female. In our tradition, it is the responsibility of the children to take care of their parents especially when they are old. A man or a woman suffers a lot when he/she is old and do not have somebody to take care of him or her. I am the first born in our family and it is my responsibility to help my parents to take proper care of those that followed me in order to build a good family. Because of this notion, I travelled to Accra some time ago to look for a job so that I can help my brothers to expand our family farm so that, we will have enough food after harvest. Things were not easy as expected but I did my part but most of the money that I sent were not put into good use and because I am a woman, there is little that I can do, I was asked to keep quite by my parents when I wanted to find out why. We the females are married now and two of the men are also married with some of them having children. Now there is a lot of pressure on us especially me who is the first born as to how we take care of our parents who are now old and cannot do anything again and also takes care of our own families. Most of the other members still do ask me for favors when they need something, so now there are a lot of burden on me.... (One-on-one interview on July, 2019).

Women who cannot access lands for their agricultural and charcoal burning activities through marriages and inheritance have to negotiate with the landowners in order to get access to lands. These forms of negotiations were not always favorable. This was revealed in one of the mixed focus group discussions where a woman said this:

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<sup>9</sup> Kayayei is a local name in Ghana for those who work as head porters usually found in the big cities of Ghana. They sit in front of supermarkets and also in the open markets, in case anybody buys something and cannot carry them, they carry them on their heads for them with an agreed fee.



.....we depends on charcoal production despite the environmental effects that it poses, we have no option then to engage with it in order to survive. As you have been told by my colleague, I don't have any land and I am not from a family that owns lands, so, I entered into an agreement with the owner of the land as customs and traditions here demands before I was allowed to use it. The landowner handed the land to me with conditions. He told me to always make available to him one bag each in every five(5) bags I cultivate on the land and also that when I produce charcoal or whatever I use the land to make, I make available same one bag available and because we have to survive, I have no option than to accept it. The biggest challenge is that, I sometimes don't get up to five (5) bags and cannot also go and tell him that. I must manage to get his one bag to him so that I can still use the land in the next season for my activities, if not it will be collected from me..... (FGD on 23/07/2019).

This illustrates the difficulties that women go through in the access of productive resources especially those who are not married, and are not able to inherit or who come from landless families.

Even though the customary landownership system is what is widely practiced in northern Ghana, the Government also holds eighteen percent (18%) of the land management systems in the country (Tsikata and Golah 2010; Yaro 2013) which can be leased to those who are interested but it was revealed in the study area in one of the focus group discussions that, they are not aware whether such systems exist in that area even though it was established that, they are aware of such systems in other parts of the country<sup>10</sup>. Even if such system happens to be there, it will be very difficult for some of them to acquire a land through that process because, it appears to be much expensive which might not be easy for them.

Savelugu-Nantong Municipality has low literacy rates (Feed the Future 2017; Ghana Statistical Service 2010) especially the study area, which was confirmed by the questionnaires administered in the field. As a result, the people do not even know how to properly manage their land systems. For instance, the customary land management systems allows for equal access for both genders but this is not what is practiced there<sup>11</sup>. The reason for this non-compliance to the customary land management system could be linked to the lack of knowledge of the system and how it is supposed to function. In view of this, people cannot stand up to challenge the process for a proper management system to be followed.

A research study carried out in the Upper West region of Ghana revealed that, women who are at the forefront of most livelihood activities are still precluded in their quest to exercise ownership and control over resources as their right to exercise control over these resources due to gendered patriarchal structures<sup>12</sup>, as expressed in the different forms by

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<sup>10</sup> .... All our land issues are handled by our traditional heads. We know that the Government own lands in other parts of this country, but as you can see, we are so remote that, government officials do not even come here. So we cannot tell whether they owns lands in this part of the country or not. We don't even sell lands here as done in other parts. Who will even buy if you want to sell (A man said this in a FGD on July, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> The customary system allows traditional rulers to take care of lands for its people and to allow equal access irrespective of ones gender (Tsikata and Golah 2010; Yaro 2013) but customs and traditions in Northern Ghana do not allow much access to women especially the study area.

<sup>12</sup> Gendered Patriarchal Structures, I mean a one way male dominated way of doing things including the management and access of resources and decision-making.

which people access resources, including through inheritance, customs and traditions and religion, as demonstrated by Dery (2015) and Kuusaana et al (2013) for instance. The so-called traditions will continue that way in those communities where the men will continue to dominate in the expense of the women at least for now (Kameri-Mbote 2005).



Some pictures of a focus group discussions for women only on 23/07/2019 (left) and another for men only on 16/08/2019 (right).

#### **4.4: Implications of differences in the tasks done by men and women in charcoal production and effect on the intra-household distribution of benefits**

In Savelugu-Nantong Municipality, the norm is that men inherit and determine who has access to resources. They take on heavy jobs as well as the decision making on the distribution of resources. These processes, as expected in a patriarchal society, give them more power and respect. The division of work in the charcoal burning process is gendered. Men cut the trees, organize the selling and distribute the benefits. As the discussions for both men and women in the communities indicated, it is generally agreed that men do the hard physical work. A male charcoal producer in the discussion said:

.....traditionally, activities that require physical energy are for men and those that are less physical are for the women. This does not mean that women cannot cut trees but it will take them longer time and they will even suffer a lot before they are able to do it unlike men who can use lesser time to do that, so in order not to waste much time, cutting down of trees are done by men so that both men and women then come together to burn the charcoal after which both will again sort them together but here the activities are less demanding, a man who has other activities to do may leave it for his wife to do so that he attends to other things (FGD on 16/08/2019 at Chahayili).

From the interviews, selling the charcoal is also a gendered process. This was made clear during the focus group discussions when a man commented:

..... my wife and I burn charcoal together and I will then take them to the market one by one on my motor bike to sell..... (FGD on 16/08/2019 at Chahayili).

Distance and customs and traditions that constrain and control women's movements shape the process of charcoal burning in the study area. According to the participants in the mixed focus group discussion, it is a common practice in the study area for men to go to the market centers to transact businesses on behalf of their wives<sup>13</sup>. The markets that the people of Chahayili and Kunkundanyili together with other villages around this area go to are the Kpatinga and Tampion markets. According to one agricultural officer who oversees the teaching of good farming practices for the farmers, the distance from Chahayili to Tampion and Kpatinga are about seventeen (17) and fourteen (14) miles respectively. There is no electricity in these areas nor well paved roads. Vehicles find it difficult to travel on the roads which have many large potholes. The roads become worse in the rainy season, when water floods and blocks all the streets and pathways cutting off the market towns from other villages. Only a few men manage in this period to reach the markets. Kunkundanyili to these market centers are similar distance because the two villages are not far from each other. The men use bicycles and motorbikes to carry whatever the family have to sell. During the research, on market days it was evident that, mostly men were at the markets and the few women came from places close by. According to one woman, why women do not mostly go to market in these areas is because:

.....the distance is one factor why is difficult for us to go to the market but to add to that. It is a taboo and forbidden as a house wife to be outside your home before dark sets in. A wife must always be at home to prepare food for the family and also do her home chores. A woman is not regarded a good wife when you are still not at home when it is time to cook for the family in the evening and when we go to the market, we might not come home in time before dark sets in because of the distance as.....(one-on-one interview on 23/07/2019)

The men in the study area attending markets on behalf of their wives is, one: they do not want their wives to be away before dark sets in, as it is a custom in the area for all women to be at home to cook and perform other house chores which are obligatory as a housewife. They might not want their wives to be labeled as a bad housewife and also might not want the public to think their wives have more power over them which men sees as an abomination to their male pride. Men also want to control the income and if they sell the charcoal, they do not need to tell the women the selling price. This was evident in one of the focus discussions for women only where it was made clear that, most of their husbands do not disclose to them the exact amount they sell their charcoal when they send them to the market to sell. They do not ask for the fear of, if they ask, the men might refuse to go to the

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<sup>13</sup> Men are those who normally go to the markets on our behalf and it is as a result of the distance. When a woman go, she might not come home early to do her house chores as demanded as a housewife. We don't also wants to break our traditional and religious believes to be outside before dark sets in which might even be seen a disrespect to our husbands (mixed FGM on 08/2019).



markets again on the women behalf. As the women stated, they depended on charcoal to buy ingredients for households cooking. Such inequalities are among the challenges women face in rural communities. For example, in a separate one-on-one interview with a female charcoal producer, she said her husband threatening not to go to the market on behalf of her if she continues probing him to know the exact amount he sells their charcoal. According to this woman, that the husband believes probing to know the exact amount means she do not trust him and also showing disrespect for his authority, so as a result, she has to stop<sup>14</sup>.

In addition to this idea of natural male roles which determines the process, the poor infrastructure plays a vital role in shaping who can go to the market and thereby directly sell the charcoal and manage the monies gained. If the roads linking them to the market centers were to be in good shape, at least, there will have been commercial vehicles on those roads that can transport people to the markets and brings them back in time before dark finally sets in. This would have help women access the markets.

Distance from urban areas is another reason for the prevailing gender inequality. According to the interviews and from my own observation, these areas are economically and socially marginalized. Politicians and government appointees only visit those areas when it is time for elections. At elections time, politicians always say they will fix their roads for them ones they get the power but it has never happened. This is what a respondent said in the discussion:

....you only see strangers in beautiful cars in this part of the country when it is time for elections like what we are experiencing now. They normally come to lure and give us small amounts of money and promise to get our roads fixed once they are voted but as soon as the elections are over, you will not see them again till the next election time is due. Good roads, schools and good drinking water are our priorities, because the roads will makes travelling easy and also people can now come and buy charcoal and our foodstuff after harvesting and this will have promoted our livelihoods as well..... (FGD on august, 2019 at Chahayili).

In my observation, the ongoing poverty and the lack of political connections to provide them with the basic infrastructures like good roads, schools and good drinking water which those areas are seriously lacking contributed to the inequalities in the area. Men feel that, since they are those who are involved in the most difficult part of the work, they should get more benefits from the charcoal production process. Men have the power to influence and determine how the benefits of any earnings are shared and also to obtain more of the benefits than their wives. A woman said in one of my interviews how she pleaded with her husband to send their first son to Tamale to go to school and the husband refused<sup>15</sup>. At least,

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<sup>14</sup> The amount that my husband always give me is too small, even though the charcoal belongs to all of us. A friend told me the amount they sell charcoal this days at the market, so I compared and realized that my husband should at least add me some but when I tried to find out the amount he sells ours, he became annoyed and threatening not to go to the market again, so I apologized, because I need the money to buy ingredients for cooking (one-on-one interview on July, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> ..... I last went to Tamale and saw how improved my senior sister's life is and it was as a result of her son who I was told works at the district chief executive office in the Miong district of Northern Region. I was so happy to see that, so when I returned home, I suggested to my husband that, we send our first son who is ten year old now to Tamale to start going to school. At least when he finish his education, he will also be

if the husband reasoned with her and maybe others too does same, their children will have returned back as educated and enlightened people in future who could even serve as Government appointees in those area and also to lobby for developmental projects in the area. I have observed that, the politicians continue to exploit people in these villages because they know there are poorly educated people and could not hold politicians responsible for not fulfilling their promises. Poverty and lack of education underscores much of the inequality.

#### **4.5: How gender relations determine intra-household decision-making associated with charcoal production**

Decision making in households determined the access and control over productive resources and how livelihood activities are met and sustained. In the focus group discussions, male participants explained and underlined how it is important for tradition and for religious beliefs that women perform other house hold chores, and obey her husband. If a woman fails to obey her husband she is regarded as not a good wife<sup>16</sup>. This finding confirms other research done in other parts of Ghana (Quaye et al. 2016). Men assume leadership roles when it comes to religious and cultural activities and in the households which automatically gives them the power to make decisions on how the family spend its income and management. Usually, decisions concerning most of the productive ventures, including farming activities and land management issues are headed and controlled by men and women carry out the care and social reproductive work. For instance, I visited some farmers at their farms in one of the communities during the fieldwork. I observed that, there were two women who were not directly involved in the farming process. One was cooking for those working and the other woman was sowing seeds. I joined the woman sowing the seeds and in the process, I asked her why she and her colleague were not involved in the farming process. Her answer to me was that, the actual farming is done by the men and they (women) are responsible for cooking for them as I have seen what her colleague is doing and also takes care of the little children. When I probe further to find out whether it is a norm in the area. She replied that a woman can do all the farming activities by herself, and widows do it, but when a woman is married, the work is separated<sup>17</sup>.

An exception to this was a business woman who sells maize and other grains. This woman was more economically autonomous. According to her, her husband do not hold the final say as to how decisions are taking in the family. The whole family will sit and discuss and agree what is to be implemented because whatever happens will affect her as well so

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gainfully employed to help take care of his brothers and sisters even including us. My husband rejected my request and because he is the final decider, I have nothing to say about it (one-on-one interview on July, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Religiously, women were created to support men, so as a result, the women have to respect and take care of the children and the home. This gives the men or husband the peace of mind to operate freely to fence for the family as it is the duty of the man too to protect and fend for wives and the entire family (FGD on 08/2019).

<sup>17</sup> ...farming requires physical energy and as you know, men are naturally stronger than women. It takes a longer time for a woman to farm as compared to a man. When a woman is not married, she has no option then to face all her farming activities by herself or she pay for people to farm for her. That is what most widows do but in a situation where a woman is married, the men are usually those who engages with the physical farming activities while the wives sow seeds, takes care of children and also cook for them to eat (interview in the farm with a woman on July, 2019).

there is the need for all of them to agree on what to do<sup>18</sup>. This business woman has autonomy because she does not rely on the men for her business activities, her case stands out from the rest of the people in the village. Her source of livelihood does not require her to plea with a man for a land to get trees to burn, as a result, she has greater autonomy.

It was difficult for the study to interrogate decision making in the home. Most of the charcoal producers were reluctant to discuss this issue. In one focus group discussion, a woman stated, that it is a great sin and a taboo to discuss one's family issues with strangers without the consent of their husbands especially in public. It is regarded as a kind of disrespect to the family and can put the wife in serious trouble with her husband. In a one-on-one interview session, a woman said:

This issue is very difficult to discuss especially in a group that was why we could not discuss it in detail. We fear that, what we will have said might have gotten to our husbands and it will have been a problem for us. The truth of the matter is that, we have been shaped in such a way that, we don't discuss our family issues outside because once you do that, it means you don't respect your husband, and this may lead to a divorce. It is not that our husbands don't take decisions without consulting us, they sometimes do but not all the time. What my husband does whenever we sell off the charcoal is that, he knows that I also have problems apart from the cooking and taking care of the children which are part of my responsibilities as a wife, he gives me any reasonable amount that he feels like giving me and also keeps the rest to take care of his needs as well and when my is not able to cater for my needs, I sometimes ask him to please give me again. Sometimes he gives and sometimes he tells me that, he also used it to solve his problems. .... for example, last month we sold eight (8) bags of charcoal leaving five (5) bags lying down. Some buyers came from Tamale and my husband brought them in and ask me to help remove eight backs for them and leave the five bags and I ask him why leaving them and he told me we should reserve it to sell later to buy fertilizer. He did not consult me before taking up this decision and I don't have to argue with him about it too, because if I do, it might look like I do not respect him as the head of the family..... (A one-on-one interview with a respondent on 24/07/2019. Translated by the researcher).

Considering these narratives, a number of observations are possible. Gender power relations operate so that women have to accept men are dominant, and also, what the husband says as the head of the family is final. Most of the men feel that, because they are the heads of their families, the women should respect their decisions, even when that decision affects the women or the entire family. In a discussion with another woman, it was revealed that, the only way to protest a bad decision taken by a husband is to report it to the husband's elders to speak to him. This can also take a different dimension because in a situation where

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<sup>18</sup> First of all what I want you to know is that, I am not a real charcoal producer. I burn charcoal to be used in my household only but not for selling. I am a business woman who buys and sells cereals in the Tamale market. I go to Tamale every two weeks for my business. My husband is a maize and other cereals farmer. We take decisions on mutual agreement. It is not a one sided affair, because it affects me as well..... I do not farm. It is only my husband who farm. I only follow him to the farm to burn charcoal when the charcoal that we use for cooking finish. What I do is buying and selling and I don't buy from only this community. I have partners in Tamale who comes with their vehicle when I go round the villages and buy goods so that we transport them to tamale to sell (one-on-one interview on July, 2019)

the family does not confront the husband properly, it might generate conflict between the husband and the wife. For instance, a woman said how she is still pleading with her husband for forgiveness that she reported the husband to his elders to call and talk to him to rescind a decision that was taken which according to the woman was not the best for the family. According to the woman, the husband even though he rescinded that decision, he refused to talk with her again about things that will affect the family.

It is important to note that, polygamy is the most practiced type in the area, most of the men are married to more than one wives. A man cannot love all his wives equally. As a result, favoritism of one wife over another impacts on how decisions in the family could be made. The most loved wife may be consulted on decision-making but not the others.

Another observation is that, the women feel that, trying to have a formal discussion to take decisions about a family might undermine the authority of the husband as the head of the family. When a wife undermines the powers and authority of the family, it may lead to serious consequences including divorce. Based on these fears, the women do feel they have no power to challenge men even when there are dire consequences for the family. For instance, a woman charcoal producer shared in an interview how a decision taken by the husband led to a tragic consequences:

My son was seriously sick and we did not have any means of money to travel to Tamale for medical care and by then we have about fifteen (15) or so bags of charcoal to sell but it was very difficult around that time to carry them to the market center because, that time was the peak of rains, so our road was cut off by water. One day, my husband friend who lives in Tamale came to visit us and my husband told him to help us by getting us a motor king (a motor tricycle) to carry the charcoal to the market to sell so that we can get money to look for a medical care for the child. The man left for Tamale that same day and on the third day he managed to come back with the motor king and carry the charcoal to the market for sale. After when the charcoal was sold, my husband changed the initial decision of seeking for a medical attention for the child but rather use the money to buy fertilizer for our rice farm without even consulting me on that. The boy sickness was deteriorating so I mastered courage and ask him how far about the money so that we can travel to Tamale for the medical attention. He told me that he has used it to buy fertilizer and gave me only fifty (50) Ghana cedis which cannot even fair us to Tamale not to talk of going to the hospital. Days later, my son passes on, hmm..... (A response from a respondent on July, 2019).

My research shows that, most women do not participate equally in decision-making, confirming a similar studies in other parts of Ghana (Quaye 2016). What is concerning is the deep gender inequalities mean that, women are so undermined by patriarchal power structures that they do not wish to participate in the decision-making process with their families and have internalized their roles.

## **Chapter 5 : Summary, Conclusions and recommendations and Implications for future study**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of the research work and conclusions. It reflects on the research questions and how far the study addressed them and how the research has contributed to existing literature on the topic and its implications for future studies. It then considers the implications of these findings for those who might be interested in rural development, such as NGOs, Government agencies and other policy makers.

### **Summary**

The study examined the local dynamics and complexity of access to and control over land resources, including trees and forests and its implications for gender relations and women involvement in charcoal production in the Savelugu-Nanton Municipality of Northern Ghana. The study was guided by a main research question as: How and to what extent is women's involvement in charcoal production, as a complementary livelihood activity shape, and is shaped by, existing patriarchal and gendered power relationships in the Savelugu-Nanton Municipality in northern Ghana? To answer the research question, a qualitative method of data collection was used to engage charcoal producers from two selected villages, that is, Chahayili and Kunkundanyili. They comprises of landowners, landless, men and women as well as married people and unmarried were all interviewed which were analyzed through the theory of access and gender power relations to ascertain how both men and women access lands to fell trees to burn charcoal and also determine how both men and women operates in the charcoal burning process as well as the intra-household decisions about the proceeds from the sale of the charcoal.

Evidence generated revealed the deep nature of oppressive gender power relations existing in this marginal economic rural area in northern Ghana. The study showed that, access to trees to burn charcoal depends on the access to lands on which those trees are grown. It also demonstrated that, access to these lands are deeply rooted in the customary land management systems which explains how a piece of land should be acquired. How people access these lands is discriminatory because, those who are mandated by the customary law to take care of the lands in the study area all happen to be men. In addition, most women in the study area cannot own land which limits their access to trees to fell to produce charcoal. Women only get the opportunity to fell trees via their kin and social relations with men who own lands and through inheritance.

The study also revealed the stark gender differences in the tasks done by men and women in the charcoal production process and its impact on the intra-household distribution of the benefits from the sale of the charcoal produced. The activities in the charcoal burning process are categorized by gender. Some activities are meant for men while others are for women. Those activities that appear to be the most physically demanding are done by the men while the less demanding physical ones are carried out by the women. This appears to impact on the distribution of the benefits. The men feel that, since they are involved in the

most difficult part, they should get more of the benefits than the women. This is not able to be challenged by the women who are controlled to see it as natural and culturally-determined division.

The findings demonstrate that, intra-household decision-making associated with the distribution of the proceeds from the charcoal produced is determined by patriarchal cultural beliefs and traditions in the area. The authority of men as household, family and clan heads remains unchallenged in the area. As a result, they take up roles and perform certain activities that show very little respect for the view of women. Men rarely listen to the women as they determine how decisions about the management of the family should be done. Even though women are sometimes consulted on certain decision, their views are non-binding as the men always assume they have the final say in decision making in their families. Women who do not depend on lands or their men counterparts for favors for their livelihood activities are appears to be different as they are consulted by their husbands in decision-making.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, it is clear that patriarchy and oppressive gender power relations determine resource access and use which highly restrict women involvement in charcoal production. While women are involved in charcoal production, it is the men who control the access to resources, and the selling and distribution of the product and its benefits, respectively. Women have very little say in the intra-household distribution of benefits and decision-making especially, which is particularly so, for women who depend on men to get resources like lands to access trees to burn charcoal. Women appear to fear local opinion and want to be good women or wives, even to the point of not contesting their husbands' decisions due to the risk of being labeled as bad wives or losing their marriages. These challenges affect the entire family. The patriarchal customs, traditions, and the customary land management system limits the chances of the women to acquire resources for their productive activities and with this, their movements and autonomy.

## **Recommendations and Implications for future study**

These oppressive conditions fuel the deep-rooted gender inequality between men and women in these remote rural areas in northern Ghana. The Government, Non-Governmental Organizations and other development partners should recognize these deep-rooted gender inequalities and consider how to encourage and involve more rural women in activities that will help them to build their capacity to defend themselves and fight for their rights. Women should be trained and empowered on other livelihood activities that might not require access to lands. Through engaging women in other income generating activities, they can find ways to be economically autonomous. The example of the successful business woman dealing in maize is a case in point. Importantly, addressing gender inequality requires programs that seek to change masculinities in the region, addressing the traditional and cultural patriarchal norms including the practice of polygamy and the expectation of men that they are the sole decision makers.

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## List of Appendices

### Appendix 1: Questionnaire for charcoal producers of Chahayili and Kunkundanyili.

Thank you for doing the questionnaire. In filling out the questionnaire you will be contributing to my MA research at the International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University Rotterdam. The main purpose of this questionnaire for me is to look at how charcoal producers in Savelugu-Nanton Municipality of Northern Ghana are working together either independently or in families. This research is for academic purposes only and the results will not be shared. Your complete confidentiality is assured.

#### Sisu Nbangba Issahaku

Please answer the following questions. Where there is a box please mark the box with a tick. Feel free to add as much information as you see relevant

1. Age: .....
2. Female ☐, Male ☐
3. Tribal Group .....
4. Marital status: Single ☐, Married ☐, Divorced ☐, Widowed ☐
5. Level of education: Non ☐, Basic ☐, High school ☐, Tertiary ☐
6. Any affiliation to a royal family: Yes ☐, No ☐
7. How would you rate your family's income level: rich ☐, medium ☐, poor ☐
8. Number of children:      Number of dependent children:      Number of members in your household
9. Do you or your family or your spouse's family own land?
10. How many hours a day do you work on a farm? .... Which period in the year?
11. Do you work with family members on the farm? If so who?
12. How many hours a day do you engage in charcoal burning? Which period in the year?
13. Do you work with family members in this activity? If so who?
14. How many hours do you spend on other activities? Please name the activities .....

## Appendix 2: interview guide for female charcoal producers

<p><b>MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION</b></p> <p>How and to what extent is women's involvement in charcoal production, as a complementary livelihood activity shape, and is shaped by, existing patriarchal and gendered power relationships in the Savelugu-Nanton Municipality in northern Ghana?</p>	
<p><b>SUB-RESEARCH QUESTIONS:</b></p> <p>1. How do gender power relations affect who has access to trees and forests for charcoal production?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How is charcoal produced?</li> <li>2. How do you get trees (wood) to burn?</li> <li>3. Are you a native of this village, if yes how does it affect you in the access of trees and if no, how does it also affect you in the access of trees to burn?</li> <li>4. Why do you involve in charcoal production looking at the environmental effects that it can cause?</li> <li>5. Do you have any other activity that generate money for you apart from this charcoal production?</li> <li>6. Do you think you have any upper hand than the men when it comes to getting access to trees to burn?</li> <li>7. As a woman, what are the things that you do in the charcoal production process that men are not involved with.</li> <li>8. Does the charcoal production help in solving your livelihood problem?</li> <li>9. What are the factors that affect the access of trees to burn in order to produce charcoal</li> </ol>
<p>2. How do differences in the tasks done by men and women in charcoal production affect the intra-household distribution of benefits?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you sell your charcoal after production; do you send them to the market or people comes here to buy them?</li> <li>2. If they are to be sent to the market, are you the one who send them or there are people who does that, and how does it affect you as a producer in terms of the money that you get, do you feel cheated?</li> </ol>
<p>3. How do gender relations determine intra-household decision-making associated with charcoal production?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you take decisions in your family after selling and receiving your money?</li> </ol>

	<p>2. Do you include your family members like your husband and the children in the decision-making process on how to spend or distribute the money?</p> <p>3. Whose decisions are taking much into consideration, the wife or the husband on how and what the profit is used for?</p> <p>4. Whose has the final say in the decision-making process, you, your husband, children or both?</p> <p>5. Do you actively involves in decision-making process in your family, do you think your decisions are taking into considerations and influential?</p> <p>6. Do you think you are being treated fairly in terms of decision-making in your family?</p>
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### Appendix 3: interview guide for male charcoal producers

<p><b>MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION</b></p> <p>How and to what extent is women's involvement in charcoal production, as a complementary livelihood activity shape, and is shaped by, existing patriarchal and gendered power relationships in the Savelugu-Nanton Municipality in northern Ghana?</p>	
<p><b>SUB-RESEARCH QUESTIONS:</b></p> <p>1. How do gender power relations affect who has access to trees and forests for charcoal production?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How is charcoal produced?</li> <li>2. How do you get trees (wood) to burn?</li> <li>3. Are you a native of this village, if yes how does it affect you in the access of trees and if no, how does it also affect you in the access of trees to burn?</li> <li>4. Why do you involve in charcoal production looking at the environmental effects that it can cause?</li> <li>5. Do you have any other activity that generate money for you apart from this charcoal production?</li> <li>6. Do you think you have any upper hand than the women when it comes to getting access to trees to burn?</li> <li>7. As a man, what are the things that you do in the charcoal production process that women are not involved with.</li> <li>8. Does the charcoal production help in solving your livelihood problem?</li> <li>9. What are the factors that affect the access of trees to burn in order to produce charcoal</li> </ol>
<p>2. How do differences in the tasks done by men and women in charcoal production affect the intra-household distribution of benefits?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you sell your charcoal after production; do you send them to the market or people comes here to buy them?</li> <li>2. If they are to be sent to the market, are you the one who send them or there are people who does that, and how does it affect you as a producer in terms of the money that you get, do you feel cheated?</li> </ol>

3. How do gender relations determine intra-household decision-making associated with charcoal production?	1. How do you take decisions in your family after selling and receiving your money, how is the money used or distributed? 2. Do you include your family members like your wife and the children in the decision-making process on how to spend or distribute the money? 3. Do you take what your wife suggests to you into consideration? 4. Whose decisions are taking much into consideration, the wife or the husband on how and what the profit is used for?
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#### **Appendix 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

##### **Q. How does gender power relations determine who access trees for charcoal production?**

1. How is charcoal produced?
2. How does both men and women get involved in the production of charcoal?
3. Who are the main actors of charcoal production?
4. What are the factors that influences the access of trees for charcoal production?
4. Who has more influence in accessing wood for charcoal production, is it men or women?

##### **Q. Tasks done by men and women and how it affects distribution of benefits**

1. How do you sale the charcoal after production?
2. Do you feel cheated or you are okay with the people you deal with in the course of selling off the charcoal after production

##### **Q. How are decisions about the money from the sale of charcoal made in the household?**

1. How do you distribute or spend the money from the sale of charcoal?
2. Do you engage with your family members before deciding on how to spend the money?
3. Are the contributions of the family members (husband, wife and children) taken into consideration as to how to spend the money?
4. Who has much say in the family when it comes to decision making, the wife, husband, or children?