

SECTION

7

**CULTURAL
PRACTICES AND
GOVERNANCE**

CULTURAL PRACTICES AND TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE

Traditional governance

INTRODUCTION

This section introduces you to the traditional governance structure in Ghanaian society. It discusses the functionaries of the traditional governance structure and their importance. This section seeks to equip you with the knowledge and understanding of the traditional governance structure in your culture. You will become aware of the roles of traditional leaders and the importance of their roles in the development and the well-being of the people in your community.

At the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Explore the traditional governance structure (father, family head, clan head)
- ii Explore the traditional governance structure (chief, sub-chiefs, kingmakers, etc.)

Key Ideas

- A father is the head of a patrilineal nuclear family (where family ancestry is traced only through the father's side).
- For a matrilineal family system, a woman (mother) can be the head of the family.
- Clan heads are chiefs of traditional areas and they are elected into that position by the elders.

Traditional Governance Structure

Explore the traditional governance structure (father, family head, clan head).

Traditional governance

Traditional governance is a form of governance system that is driven by local indigenous knowledge and customs. The traditional governance within our various communities in Ghana forms a well-organized hierarchical structure. This structure varies depending on the ethnic group, but many communities share similar structures.

The traditional governance structure within families

In Ghana, the word family can refer to the nuclear family made up of father, mother and children or the extended family, which includes the nuclear family and other relatives such as grandparents, uncles, aunties, cousins, and others. With this in mind, the traditional governance structure within families includes *father, family head, clan head, chiefs, sub-chiefs kingmakers and paramount chiefs*, among others.

Thinking task: What is the traditional governance structure in your home? Who leads your immediate (nuclear) family? Who leads your extended family? Are you part of a clan?

An Organogram is a graphical representation of the structure of an organization. It shows the hierarchical relationship between leaders and their subordinates.

In the case of traditional governance at home an organogram might look something like this;

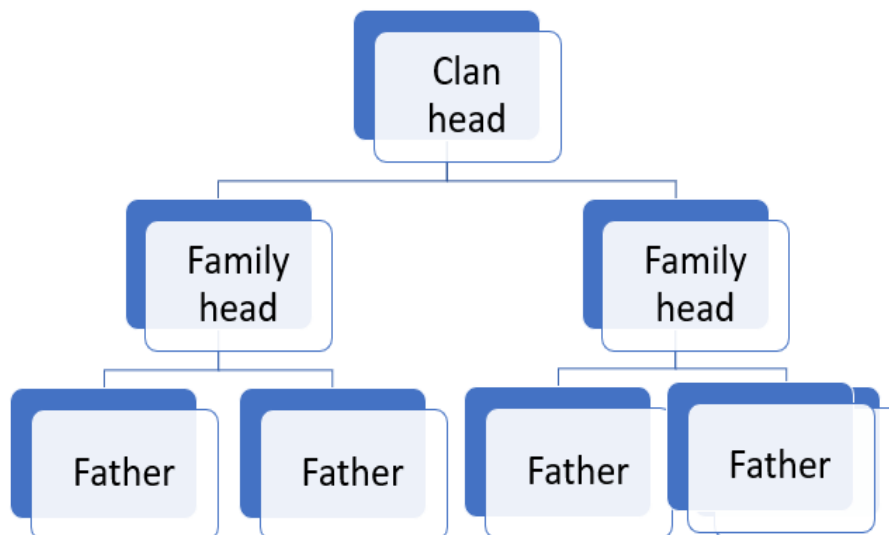


Fig7.1: An organogram of traditional governance at home

1. The clan head:

A clan is a group of people interrelated by a common ancestry or marriage. It is a group of families with a common family name and a common ancestor, acknowledging the same leader. They are usually united by common characteristics, aims, or interests. The person selected by these people to lead them is referred to as the **clan head**. The qualification to become a clan head varies from one community to another community. In some cultures, the clan head is elected by the family heads and in others the title is passed down through generations.

2. The family head:

The family head is a person who has been selected by a family as their leader. Their major roles are to govern and to solve problems within their families. They should exhibit some leadership qualities. Usually, it is a male who is selected as a family head.

3. Father:

The father is the head of a nuclear family made up of himself, his wife and children. The father takes care of the needs.

Thinking task: In terms of hierarchy, who has more power out of the clan leader, family leader and father? Briefly describe the hierarchy in the traditional governance structure.

Importances of the functionalities of the traditional governance structure

1. Clan head

The following are some of the functions of a clan head. The head:

- a. acts as the judge of the clan
- b. preserves the history of the clan
- c. maintains the traditions of the clan
- d. protects the ancestral lands of the clan
- e. ensures the transmission of the clan's heritage from one generation to another

2. Family head

The family head plays many roles and amongst them are the following:

- a. Protects the family from harm
- b. Improves the well-being of individuals in the family
- c. Maintains peace
- d. Manages family resources such as lands, houses, etc.
- e. Resolves internal and external conflicts.
- f. Leads and represents the family in social and community matters.
- g. Offers emotional support and guidance to family members.
- h. Makes important decisions on behalf of the family.

3. Father

There are many functions the father plays in a family. Amongst them are the following:

- a. Lays down rules and enforces them
- b. Provides a sense of security
- c. Promotes inner growth and strength
- d. Acts as a teacher
- e. Provides for the needs of the family

Activity 7.1

Discuss at least three major duties of a clan head. Share your answer with a colleague.

Activity 7.2

Explore the traditional governance structure of your community and discuss its importance.

Activity 7.3

Play the role of a family head to resolve a conflict between two members of your family who are quarrelling over debt one owes the other. Others will play the roles of the feuding members of the family. Pay attention to the important functions of a family head.

Activity 7.4

In your opinion, do you think the traditional governance structure is still relevant? Make sure that you justify your opinions.

Traditional Governance Structure

The hierarchy of the traditional governance structure follows this order;

1. Paramount Chief/King
2. Sub-Chief/Divisional Chief
3. Queen mothers
4. Kingmakers

In addition to the above, there can be other traditional leaders such as warlords, chief fishermen, clan heads, family heads, etc.

1. The paramount chief

The paramount chiefs are the leaders of tribes or ethnic groups. They are the highest-ranking traditional leaders in traditional areas. The position is traditionally inherited through a matrilineal or patrilineal line depending on the area. Each paramount chief has a title. For example, Fiagã for Ewe, Osagyefuo for Akan, Yaa-Naa for Dagomba, etc.

The functions/roles of the paramount chiefs are:

- a. To lead a traditional area that comprises many villages and communities.
- b. To perform ceremonial and other traditional duties.
- c. To maintain custody of the lands in their traditional areas.
- d. To adjudicate and settle matters in their area.
- e. To set rules and maintain order in their area.
- f. To encourage development and progress in their traditional area.
- g. To be responsible for maintaining peace, stability and unity among the people.
- h. To serve as a symbol of unity and a representative of the traditional area.

2. Sub-Chiefs/Divisional chiefs

Sub chiefs are subordinate to a paramount chief. They have authority over smaller areas such as a single town or a village. The position of a chief is inherited by lineage.

The functions/roles of sub-chiefs are:

- a. To act in the absence of the paramount chief.
- b. To help to ensure safety and order in communities within their jurisdiction.
- c. To act as arbitrators in their communities
- d. To ensure peace prevails in the communities
- e. To perform traditional rites for his stool/skin.

3. The queen mothers

The queen mothers are considered as spiritual heads of the females in their communities and the keepers of genealogical knowledge. They play very important roles in taking care of the welfare of the women and girls in their communities. In ethnic groups that practice matrilineal inheritance systems, it is the queen mothers who usually have the final say in who becomes a chief or a king after candidates have been nominated by the royal family. They may appoint their own sub-queens who serve under them.

The functions/roles of queen mothers are:

- a. To complement the roles that chiefs play in traditional governance system
- b. To adjudicate in all matters that affect women and girls in their communities.
- c. To promote women's rights.
- d. To preserve and share knowledge of the genealogy of their communities.

4. Kingmakers

A Kingmaker is a person or a group of people what have great influence on the royal or political succession without themselves being viable candidates. The group meets to take decisions on who the next chief or king is.

The functions/roles of the kingmakers are;

- a. To elect the next chief or king
- b. To perform rites when the chief dies
- c. To be responsible for destooling/deskinning a chief
- d. To introduce the new chief to the elders and the people
- e. To be advisors to the chief.

Activity 7.5

1. In your own words explain who the following traditional leaders are. Share your answers with your colleagues:
 - a. A chief
 - b. The Sub-chief
 - c. The kingmakers

Activity 7.6

Observe the picture below carefully and answer the questions that follow:



Fig. 7.2: Chief and elders in gathering

1. Describe the position of the paramount chief in the picture
2. Mention any 2 things that differentiate the paramount chief from other members in the gathering.

Activity 7.7

There is a school of thought that thinks that traditional governance is an outdated form of governance. To what extent do you agree with this assertion? Present a balance argument and justify all opinions.

Extended Reading

- Banggol, A.M. (2017). *Roles of traditional authority leaders: In taking towns to rural peoples in the republic of South Sudan*. Africa World Books Pty Limited.
- Larbi, P.A. K. (2022). *The trajectory of traditional authority in contemporary governance; The Ghanaian experience*. DOI: [10.47772/IJRISS.2022.6505](https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2022.6505)

Glossary

Figurative language: The use of metaphors, adjectives, symbols and adverbs in painting the picture for the audience.

Governance: Refers to the action or manner of governing a state or area.

Patrilineal: Inheritance relating to or based on relationship to the father or descent through the male line.

Traditional area: It refers to the territory of customary land which is governed by a traditional leader.

Review Questions

1. Who is the head of your nuclear family?
2. Identify 2 roles that you expect your father to play which are not stated in the material.
3. Read the passage below and create an organogram of the traditional governance structure of the community (Paramount Chief/King, chief, sub-chiefs, kingmakers). Use the example seen in your reading on the traditional governance structure at home.

Passage A

Ghanaian traditional governance structure

Before the advent of democratic governance system, there was the traditional governance in the Ghanaian societies. This governance was often structured around a hierarchical system of chiefs and elders. At the community/village level, villages were led by a chief together with the council of elders who comprised the kingmakers, who made decisions on behalf of the community. These elders were selected based on their wisdom, age, and experience. Above the village level, traditional areas were governed by a paramount chief, who oversaw several villages and was responsible for maintaining order and resolving disputes. The Paramount Chief was often advised by a council of chiefs and was expected to make decisions in the best interest of their traditional areas. The Paramount Chiefs were at the top of the hierarchy where there is no king. The Paramount Chief held supreme authority over the entire kingdom. This traditional governance structure emphasized collective decision-making, respect for elders and the importance of community consensus.

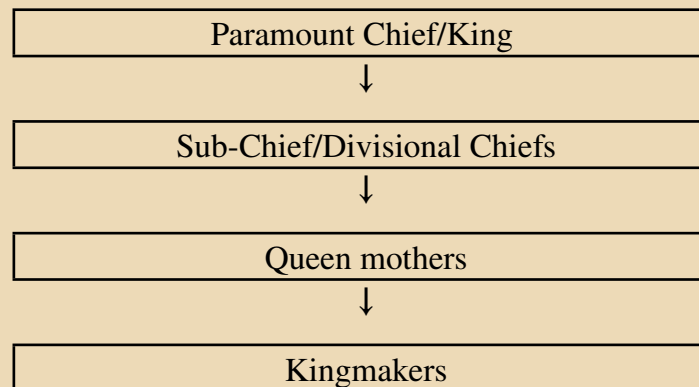
4. Discuss 3 common roles of the functionaries of the traditional governance structure and their importance to society.

Answers to Review Questions

The following are suggested answers for the review questions on family.

1. The father is the head of a nuclear family
2. The following are some of the additional functions/roles of father.
 - a. Acts as a mentor and role model
 - b. As disciplinarians; they help in establishing rules and consequences, teaching children responsibility and accountability.
 - c. As protectors; it is the duty of a father/ mother to provide security and protection ensuring their family's well-being physically and emotionally.
3. An organogram of the traditional governance structure

The organogram may follow the order below:



4. a. The 3 common roles of the functionaries of the traditional governance structure are as follows:
 - i. They seek the development of their communities
 - ii. They ensure peace and tranquility prevail in their communities
 - iii. They enforce rules and order in their communities
 - iv. They serve as the custodians of the tradition and other properties of their communities
 - v. They serve as the ambassadors of their communities, i.e. they project the image of their communities.
 - vi. They seek the welfare and development of women and girls in their communities.
- b. The functionaries are important to their communities in the following ways;
 - i. The people in the communities live in peace and harmony due to the roles of their traditional leaders.
 - ii. The communities have easy access to justice and conflict resolution.

- iii. The communities enjoy developments instigated by their traditional leaders.
- iv. The communities enjoy spiritual protection from their traditional leaders.
- v. The tradition of the people is preserved and transmitted by the traditional leaders.

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