



GRASSROOTS SISTERHOOD FOUNDATION

Vision: A safe and equitable society where all voices are proportionately represented in decision making processes for development.

Mission: Empower women to lead efforts to transform and sustain resilient development practices, improve power relations, good governance and develop strategic partnerships and linkages to reduce poverty and enhance food and livelihoods securities.

Who We Are: Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation (GSF) is a women's led organization working with 78 grassroots women's groups in 6 districts¹ of Northern Ghana to ensure enhanced power relations in poor rural communities. Founded in 2004, GSF operated as a support² group for women and girls suffering domestic and sexual abuse, early and forced marriages, teenage pregnancies and abandonment, allegations of witchcraft leading to banishment, to seek justice within the formal and informal justice systems. In 2007, GSF registered with the Registrar General Department with registration number G-19,601 as a not-for-profit non-governmental organization to respond to increasing gender inequality in governance, land rights and livelihood opportunities and to build a movement of grassroots women-led community based self help groups to take up the challenge of leadership and lead efforts at influencing policy within local and traditional government, reducing vulnerability and increasing recognition for women's contributions to national development.

Achievements: Over the years GSF facilitated the establishment of various initiatives which serve as platforms/spaces for advocating women's rights and influencing change, addressing vulnerability, mobilizing and organizing as our entry points for community engagements. The platforms include the Grassroots Women Advocacy Platform (GWAP)³; the Community Land Development Committees (CLDCs)⁴; Home-based Care Alliance (HBCA)⁵; the Community Advocacy Teams (CAT)⁶ and the Community Practitioners Platform (CPP)⁷. Our collaboration with state and private agencies and institutions including the Gender Ministry, Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, Lands Commission and its affiliates, National Management Disaster Organization, Traditional authority and Local government, Legal Aid as well as relevant stakeholders such as youth and women groups have built synergies and support for our work and resulted in the recognition of grassroots women as agents of change, broke silence on negative cultural practices and increased women representation and participation in traditional governance, enhanced women's access and security of land tenure⁸ and built a core of transformative leaders leading the change⁹ campaign.

GSF engages in the bottom up approach using various tools to carry out its mandate and activities. These include mapping (of issues/risks, resources/initiatives, stakeholders, allies/partnerships), stakeholder dialogues and meetings, education, awareness creation and sensitization (using drama), capacity building, strengthening and training and build consensus to arrive at community actions or solutions. GSF also facilitate peer learning and sharing exchanges to enable the sharing of good/best practices among women groups. GSF activities are community based but with national impact as groups engage policy holders at local, national levels to influence national discourse, shape policies and influence change.

Our Programmes: GSF runs two programmes areas and they are:

❖ **Community Resilience against Poverty CORAP¹⁰ Programme**

- Women's Land Rights and Security of Tenure
- Food and Livelihood Security
 - Sustainable Agriculture (Organic Farming)
 - Micro Savings and Revolving Credit
- Environment//Climate Change/Disaster Risk Reduction Education

❖ **Community Driven Actions on Gender Advancement and Rights (CODRAGA¹¹) Programme**

- Safety and Access to Justice
 - Domestic & Gender Based Violence
 - Witchcraft Allegations/Banishment/Reintegration
 - Forced and Early Marriages.
- Transformative Leadership, Decision Making and Governance

GSF integrates the following into all its programmes and activities.

- Networking, Movement and Institutional Partnership Building.
- Information Sharing and Learning.

¹ Tamale, Bawku West and Yendi, Soboba, Nabdram and Savelugu Nanton
² Followed up on DV cases at Police station and courts and in solidarity accompanied victims to court or to report abuses
³ Comprises community women leaders and traditional female chiefs
⁴ Comprising women leaders, youth leaders opinion leaders and representatives of the traditional authority;
⁵ Brings leadership of care givers of HIV/AIDS, the aged and other vulnerable;
⁶ Mostly trained men and women who act as watchdogs against domestic abuse
⁷ Space for climate change advocates.
⁸ Over 300 women secured land tenure
⁹ Considered vulnerable beneficiaries of projects rather than participants in the change drive
¹⁰ Through funding from Human Commission and the Participatory Development Associates (PDA) Ghana under two initiatives, the Women Land Link Africa (WLLA) and the Mwananchi initiatives.
¹¹ Except the transformative leadership decision making and governance activity, the other two are not supported by any funding



GRASSROOTS SISTERHOOD FOUNDATION

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AGAINST POVERTY (CORAP) PROGRAMME:

GSF believes in the capacity of communities to identify their own issues and take responsibility for resolving them through consensus building and building partnerships with relevant institutions and groups to strengthen their advocacy for change. The CORAP Programme integrates the rights of women to access and secure land tenure for food and livelihood security in the changing phases of climate change. To achieve the above CORAP empowers women to be assertive in claiming their rights through training and capacity strengthening on organizing and leadership skills, sensitizes and creates awareness on national, regional and global frameworks for sustainable growth and development such as the Local government Act on Decentralization, Millennium/ Sustainable Development Goals (M/SDGs); Hyugo/Sendai Framework for Action on Disaster Risks Reduction; CEDAW; AU Land Policy Initiative; the Gender Evaluation Criteria¹²; the Guidelines and Framework for Land Policy in Africa among others, while promoting the development of local led initiatives to fulfil the global frameworks, building networks and partnerships strengthening GSF also facilitates training for women farmers to be conscious of the impact of climate change and to practice sustainable agriculture through organic farming, encouraging dry season organic vegetable farming, animal farming and the reduction of bush burning, planting of trees and the establishment of a saving and credit scheme to support women access credit for their collective or individual initiatives.

Practices and Actions Initiated under the CORAP Programme

1. Increasing Food and Incomes Securities-Dry Season Gardening;

This practice enabled the women to access land through advocacy and negotiations from traditional and community leaders near community dams to cultivate vegetables using organic farming methods. This initiative enhances household food and income security, reduces rural urban migration among women and girls, reduces the use of chemical fertilizers and improves nutrition among households. Six women groups in the peri-urban communities of the Tamale Metropolis are engaged in this initiative and negotiate the terms of security of tenure to enable them invest in the cultivation of vegetables using organic practices.

2. Greening and Saving the Environment and the Community Practitioners Platform (CPP)

Our communities are threatened by logging companies and their local representatives who without any recourse to any discussions with communities are felling trees and destroying the fauna and abode of wide life. These actions impact greatly on agriculture and livelihoods. To safeguard their communities against the impact of climate change and its attendant issues, groups undertook greening the environment through the cultivation of tree nurseries and began a tree planting exercise. The groups have since 2015 planted over 6000 trees within their communities and replanting trees when they are felled in the community reservations for fuel wood. These trees planted within the communities served as brakes against heavy winds and rains. Eventually these groups established the Community Practitioners Platform to serve as a space for discussions against deforestation, protecting economic trees such as the shea nut tree and reduction in bush fires and sanctions against perpetrators as well as influencing district and national level decisions on the environment.

3. Transparency and Accountability in Land Administration and the Community Land Development Committees (CLDC)

Despite international conventions against discrimination in all its forms, women still stand discriminated against in land management and administration particularly in Northern Ghana as a result of patriarchy and negative cultural practices. These practices exclude women from land related decisions thus making it difficult for women easily access and secure land tenure. Women identified this aspect of gender inequality as one of the barriers to the advancement of women and the reduction of poverty leading to mass rural urban migration. The groups with support from the Programme initiated an initiative at the community level that will ensure their participation in land related community discussions. This has been a sustainability strategy for the campaign on women's land rights and the security of land tenure. This is an initiative that is all inclusive of gender but led by women and it began in the Wamale and Sanzirigu communities in the Tamale Metropolis and expanded to nine other communities under the Nanton traditional area all in the Tamale Metropolis. The initiative has resulted in 18 women groups (about 360 women) in the Nanton traditional area accessing and securing land tenure for soya bean, cereals and vegetable cultivation leading to increases in household food and income security. It has also resulted in about 80 women in the above mentioned peri urban communities secure land tenure for housing purposes and improved the power relations between women, the youth and the traditional authority.

4. Village savings and Credit Associations (ViSCA)

As a result of the groups accessing land from the traditional authority and family heads, issues of land grabbing and disinheritance of women during widowhood led GSF to institute a revolving fund and to encourage a savings culture among groups to support the women enhance their income generating activities and increase incomes to support the documentation of their lands at the Lands Commission. The ViSCA seeks to eliminate high risks interest rates in commercial banks which often impoverish women, causing

¹² Criteria developed by GLTN for assessing gender responsiveness of land tools



GRASSROOTS SISTERHOOD FOUNDATION

some to flee their communities to the urban centres to work and pay high interests debts owed micro credit and saving banks, this phenomenon has led to broken marriages and homes and the neglect of children leading to children dropping out of school and increasing high illiteracy rates particularly among the girl children. Twelve women groups began a savings scheme in 2014 and with the revolving fund began a credit scheme to lend to groups members to secure their lands particularly the residential plots. The groups have since increased to 18. ViSCA has enabled more women to send their girl children to school and support their household needs leading to huge reduction in domestic violence in the said communities. ViSCA's long term plan is to develop to a co-operative status drawing strength from the experiences of groups outside the region during their peer to peer learning and sharing experience to bring together the organic vegetable and soya bean, cereals and animal farmers, and the agri-processing groups such as the shea butter, rice, and groundnut processing groups. Under ViSCA, about 284 women have so far received support from a 10,000 US United States Dollar seed fund from the Huairou Commission in 2014 as a revolving fund and it has supported vegetable and animal farmers, women in agri-business (processing and value addition as well as women in the land and housing campaign for purposes of securing land tenure all in the resilience campaign.

❖ COMMUNITY DRIVEN ACTIONS ON GENDER ADVANCEMENT AND RIGHTS (CODAGAR) PROGRAMME

Gender imbalance and the role of women in most Ghanaian communities are issues that are often not discussed in the open. Any attempts at leading such discussions are considered a threat to the status quo of male dominance in all spheres of socio-economic and political settings.

The **CODAGAR** Programme seeks to create a support system for victims of gender based violence, improve women's access to justice and safety and the respect for their human rights to life dignity and self worth, enhance the chances of girl children to continue with their education and obtain livelihood skills to enable them respond to their needs and reduce over dependence on others which eventually leads to domestic abuse as well as reduce the incidence of accusations of witchcraft and their banishment to 'witches camps'.

The **CODAGAR** Programme also strengthens grassroots women's organizing and leadership to create awareness of their individual and collective rights, promote the development of the communities by leading efforts through the creation of networks, alliances and constituencies to participate in influencing or changing policy at local, national, regional and global levels .

The above objectives are achieved through education and awareness creation at community level, identifying and training a core group of women leaders as watchdogs against such abuses, supporting women to access justice both at the formal and informal justice systems such as the legal courts and the traditional chiefs courts respectively whiles establishing a network or coalition of advocates or organizations working on sustaining freedoms to advocate for the enforcement of laws and protection of the vulnerable and also advocate for the inclusion of the poor and the vulnerable who are often the victims of such abuse into government programmes of livelihood empowerment at the district level.

Practices and Actions Initiated under CODAGAR Programme

1. Grassroots Women Advocacy Platform:

To ensure the voices of women are heard in governance both at the local and national level and within the traditional systems, there has always been the need to establish a constituency of women trained in leadership skills who lead efforts at transforming their communities and influencing policy or advocating for changes in existing policies and attitudes. Women on this platform include various group leaders under the CODAGAR, community women leaders and queen mothers and traditional women chiefs and individual activists. Over the years the platform is regarded as the mouth piece of the women's movement in the operational area of the CODAGAR Programme..

This platform has campaigned against banishment of women from their communities due to allegations of witchcraft and in the re-integration of accused women from the camps to their homes as well as support victims accessing traditional justice. Through their vigilance, community members of the platform have succeeded in rescuing young girls forcefully withdrawn from school and married off for economic gains or for the fulfilment of customary or traditional religious vows. This platform has also undertaken awareness creation on sexual abuse in rural schools and at workplaces and has contributed significantly in reducing particularly work place sexual abuse as reports to the programme has dropped considerably. School children also now report teachers inappropriate behaviours to head teachers for redress.

GRASSROOTS SISTERHOOD FOUNDATION

The CODAGAR Programme has built the capacity of women leaders on this platform who have participated in several national and international conferences on food security, safer cities, new urban agenda, climate change and risk reduction, HIV/AIDS advocating for inclusion indecision making whiles directing resources to grassroots groups and organizations to move the change agenda and have value for money.

2. Grassroots Skill Enhancement and Social Enterprise Development.

Women's economic empowerment is the focus of all our initiatives as this enhances poor power relations within households and improves on the living standards of members of the community and gives opportunity for women to take roles that bring change and improvement into their communities. To ensure this, skills development is essential to prepare women to undertake community challenges and support or lead efforts at reducing impact of the challenge. Under this initiative grassroots women have been taken through leadership skill training, enterprise development such as cooperatives through the ViSCA, soap and shea butter processing for external market, marketing as well as simple accounting methods to ensure appropriate pricing and profits.

Under CODAGAR women accused of witchcraft and banished from their communities and young girls rescued from forced marriages are supported in the Gnani outcast women's home (popularly known as witches camp) to produce shea butter meeting international standards to enable them improve on their incomes to meet their daily needs and support their wards mostly girls and orphaned children who live with them in the 'camp' to attend school.

INTEGRATED ACTIONS AND INITIATIVES

1. Networking, Movement building, Mentoring and Institutional partnerships.

To strengthen their advocacy on the various thematic issues groups identified, GSF mentors interested and inspiring youth to take up leadership, facilitates building and strengthening partnership between and among groups, stakeholders through local to local dialogues and stakeholder/partners dialogues to build consensus and synergies on issues affecting their communities.

2. Information sharing and Learning

To ensure and encourage cross learning among women groups, peer to peer exchanges were initiated to learn and share and best practices in water management through water harvesting, organic farming, clean energy and value addition, transformative leadership skills networking and building partnerships. This has been strategic as groups transfer knowledge acquired during the exchanges to enhance their own initiatives as in the organic farming, saving schemes, clean environment, risk reduction and climate change adaptation among others.

On the whole GSF articulates the right of women to representation in decision making at all levels whiles ensuring their active participation in bringing about the change they deserve. In the light of the above building the capacity of women through information to undertake this role is key to the overall advancement of women and their communities. GSF stands with the poor and marginalized and facilitates a change in their status as beneficiaries of government largess and freebies to become agents of change and development and seek recognition as experts of that change.

All the above mentioned initiatives and innovations under the two programme areas are ongoing as they are sustainability initiatives intended to keep the conversations active on land rights and tenure security, climate change and disaster risk reduction, promotion of individual human rights and the inclusion and recognition of women in national development.

GRASSROOTS SISTERHOOD FOUNDATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

1. Staff

GSF has 11 staff members consisting of 4 permanent, 4 permanent part time and 3 volunteers. The volunteers include community facilitators and a research assistant.

2. Management Board

A five member board runs the day to day activities of GSF with the Executive Director as the chair.

3. The Advisory Council

GSF runs a seven member board consisting of 4 females and 3 males with a female as board chair.