



University–Community Relations in Ghana: Traditional Authority as a Stakeholder¹

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Abstract

This article examines the levels and forms of engagement between universities in Ghana and traditional authority. The article is based on an in-depth study of five public universities and their neighbouring communities. Stakeholder theory was used for analysis. Findings from the study indicate that there is a growing awareness among public universities in Ghana of the need to engage the traditional authority of their immediate surrounding communities to enhance university–community relations and coexistence, in order to address the socio-economic and developmental aspirations of the communities and to help achieve the institutional goals of the universities. However, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) appears to have a more comprehensive engagement model than the others.

Keywords: University–community relations, traditional authority, stakeholders, Ghana

Résumé

Cet article examine les niveaux et les formes d'engagement entre les universités du Ghana et les autorités traditionnelles. Le document est basé sur une étude approfondie de cinq universités publiques et des communautés avoisinantes. La théorie des parties prenantes a été utilisée dans l'analyse. Les résultats de l'étude indiquent que les universités publiques du Ghana sont de plus en plus conscientes de la nécessité de faire participer les autorités traditionnelles de

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leurs communautés immédiates afin d'améliorer les relations et la coexistence université–communauté, répondre aux aspirations socio-économiques et de développement des communautés, et atteindre leurs objectifs institutionnels. Cependant, l'Université des sciences et technologies Kwame Nkrumah (KNUST) semble disposer d'un modèle d'engagement plus complet que les autres.

Mots-clés : relations université–communauté, autorité traditionnelle, parties prenantes, Ghana

Introduction

In this article, we examine the level of stakeholder influence that traditional authority wields over universities within their respective jurisdictions. We explore the degree of salience that public universities in Ghana give to traditional authority² in the university administration, by looking at the stakeholder power, legitimacy and urgency of the traditional authority. Recent events in Ghana have shown that chiefs³ are becoming more and more important as stakeholders in addressing societal problems, while in some cases too, they could be the causes of these problems. Moreover, in recent times, there have been growing tensions between universities and their host communities over land, access to employment, admissions and matters relating to universities' corporate social responsibility towards their communities.

In light of this, one key governance strategy of public universities in Ghana for improving relations with local communities is the engagement of traditional authority. As a result, traditional authority, which is encapsulated in the chieftaincy institution, plays an important role in the administration of Ghana's public universities. In spite of the vicissitudes that this institution has suffered, both during colonial times and in the post-independence era, it has proved to be resilient and capable of adapting, while at the same time maintaining its relevance. As a result, Ghanaian chiefs, queens and queen mothers continue to control and command respect and allegiance among their subjects as well as serving as custodians of Ghanaian culture.

In recent years, traditional leaders have helped to address social issues, such as girl-child education, the mobilisation of resources to fund education, teenage pregnancy, unemployment and public health, and have lobbied government and development partners to address socio-economic development challenges within their localities (Boafo-Arthur 2003; Champion & Acheampong 2014). Indeed, chiefs have become the eminent mouthpiece of their communities and they expect educational institutions within their jurisdictions to be their partners in this transformational agenda. For example, during periods of school admissions, chiefs are inundated

by requests from their subjects to facilitate their children's admission into schools under their jurisdiction, and they expect school authorities to co-operate with them. Therefore, three main questions are addressed in this study. First, what form of engagement exists between Ghanaian universities and their local community stakeholders, specifically traditional authority? Second, what type of stakeholder roles are assigned to traditional authority in this engagement? Third, what level of influence does traditional authority exert in this engagement?

Theoretical Framework

This article is grounded in stakeholder theory as advanced by Freeman (1984) and Freeman et al. (2010). The theory focuses on the social contract, networks and partnerships that businesses and organisations develop with people, communities and institutions. According to Harrison, Freeman and Sá de Abreu (2015), the core of stakeholder theory is about creating more value. Lately, this theory has been adopted in the study of the operations of higher education institutions (Khanyile 2018), which have been impressed upon to 'bring the gown to town' and be more involved in improving the wellbeing of their neighbouring communities (Watson 2007; Hoyt 2010; Hoyt & Hollister 2014).

Generally, a stakeholder refers to an individual or a group that can directly or indirectly influence the operations and sustainability of an organisation (Mainardes et al. 2012). Although the Stanford Research Institute coined the term 'stakeholder' in 1963 to refer to 'those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist' (Zsolnai 2006:38), the term is often attributed to Edward R. Freeman, based on his famous book titled *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, of 1984. In this work, Freeman defined a stakeholder as 'any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the realisation of a company's objectives' (Freeman 1984:25; Freeman et al. 2010:9; Hörisch et al. 2014). From these definitions, therefore, university stakeholders could be taken to comprise organisations, groups and individuals (Jongbloed et al. 2008) whose actions influence the functions and operations of the university.

Jongbloed et al. (2008) have argued that universities around the world have the responsibility to 'demonstrate quality, efficiency and effectiveness' not only to the governments and other bodies or individuals who provide funding and oversight responsibility over them, but also to a wide range of stakeholders who are directly or indirectly engaged with them. Mitchell et al. (1997), basing their argument on Freeman, showed that the stakeholder approach helps to determine 'who or what really counts' in an organisation's

operations and governance strategies as it guides managers and leaders of corporate organisations to find ways to pay attention to their stakeholders. Stakeholders are influential and play a critical role in the success or otherwise of an organisation (Khanyile 2018) and can be classified as those who have the power to thwart the organisation's achievement of its objectives, as well as the potential to cause the organisational goals to fail (Prokopy et al. 2015).

Stakeholder types and relevance

Identifying and prioritising stakeholders effectively is an essential component of the stakeholder analysis of any organisation. Therefore, any university that wishes to gain a competitive advantage in the current turbulent tertiary education milieu, characterised by fierce and rising competition, cannot but prioritise its stakeholders (Slabá 2015; Khanyile 2018). This will help the university to determine who its stakeholders are and their relevance (Jongbloed et al. 2008). However, traditional methods for identifying stakeholders have not been applied in the context of universities (Mainardes et al. 2012). Consequently, the identification of university stakeholders has not been empirically researched, which means that the process of identifying them needs to be developed from scratch. Nonetheless, Jongbloed et al. (2008) argue that stakeholder identification within the university occurs not only at the institutional level, but also at other levels, because of professional domination, fragmented decision-making and the diffusion and devolution of power. It is important that university stakeholders are identified and classified in accordance with their relative importance, as the basis for establishing relationships with them (Mainardes et al. 2012). In this context, identifying stakeholder groups is not a simple process (Jongbloed et al. 2008) and universities need to determine each stakeholder's expectations and needs or demands, which goes beyond merely identifying stakeholders (Bertrand & Busugutsala 1998). Therefore, the university's ability to identify, prioritise and engage with communities mirrors its degree of organisational evolution (Jongbloed et al. 2008). In the case of Ghana, identifying the role that traditional authority plays in the administration of universities is vital for ensuring the success and continuous relevance of such universities to society.

Three main attributes have been used to determine the importance of stakeholders to institutions, namely: power, legitimacy and urgency. These attributes are also used to identify the various categories of stakeholders of an organisation and their levels of influence (Mitchell et al. 1997; Parent & Deephouse 2007; Jongbloed et al. 2008; Jeffery 2009; Carroll & Buchholtz 2014; Khanyile 2018).

A stakeholder's power refers to the stakeholder's ability to arbitrarily and coercively exercise his/her will over a relationship with the organisation. The extent of power a stakeholder can exercise over an organisation will ultimately determine how much influence such a stakeholder can have over the functioning of the organisation (Carroll & Buchholtz 2014; Parent & Deephouse 2007; Jongbloed et al. 2008). A stakeholder's legitimacy refers to the entitlement and interest that the stakeholder has in an organisation. This is what defines a stakeholder (Pesqueux & Damak-Ayadi 2005). The claims and actions of a stakeholder can be understood as being appropriate or legitimate, as well as proper and desirable (Carroll & Buchholtz 2014; Jongbloed et al. 2008; Parent & Deephouse 2007). Finally, a stakeholder's urgency refers to the extent to which the stakeholder views his/her claims as being critical and time-sensitive (Carroll & Buchholtz 2014; Mitchell et al. 2007; Parent & Deephouse 2007). These three attributes serve as a measure of the level of influence and the quality of relationship that the stakeholder can have with an organisation. The level of importance of the stakeholder role of a traditional leader depends on how many of these attributes he or she possesses (Parent & Deephouse 2007), which in turn determines how great his or her influence on university decision-making processes will be (Mitchell et al. 1997).

Based on the attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency, three categories of stakeholders are identified that can be subdivided into seven: (a) latent stakeholders – those who possess only one of the above-mentioned attributes; (b) expectant stakeholders – those who possess two of the attributes; and (c) definitive stakeholders – those who possess all three attributes. Using this theoretical approach, and based on the relationship that they develop with universities within their localities, we were able to identify the type of stakeholder a traditional authority is.

The operational hypothesis of this article is that the success of a university is dependent on the level of engagement it has with the local community stakeholders, particularly traditional authority. In line with this, traditional authority is examined as a key stakeholder of university–community relations, as is the extent to which its interests can affect the operations of a university.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology was adopted for this work by employing data in the form of words to generate descriptions and explanations (Bangura 2019; Munene et al. 2019). The choice of the methodology was based on its 'scrupulosity, meticulousness, commitment to scholarly rigor

in the investigation of research questions, determination to find the truth, and intellectual honesty' (Bangura 2019:30). Specifically, the study used a narrative design, focusing on a single phenomenon and the setting of participants (Shisanya 2019:55). This design afforded us the opportunity to explore how universities engage traditional authority in their governance systems. It enabled us to focus on the perspectives of the leadership and management of public universities and those of their host communities. It also allowed for the creation of a platform for in-depth discussions to generate insights regarding the effectiveness of the engagements.

Data for the paper was drawn from various sources: primary data (interviews), secondary data (journal articles, books, print and electronic media) and other informal interactions. The paper is based on seventy-three in-depth key informant interviews across five public universities in Ghana and their surrounding communities. The study sites were the University of Cape Coast (UCC), the University for Development Studies (UDS), University of Education, Winneba (UEW), University of Ghana (UG) and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), and their surrounding communities. Both the primary and secondary data were collected concurrently within the stated period.

Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the participants, who comprised senior administrative and academic staff in the five universities, as well as chiefs, queen mothers and traditional leaders of the surrounding communities. The interviews were conducted over a period of seven months from June 2018 to January 2019 and were at the convenience of the participants. Whereas interviews with university authorities were conducted in their offices during weekdays and during office hours, interviews with the chiefs and elders were conducted in their homes or palaces as was deemed appropriate for the participants. For the convenience of the participants, the time and venue of interviews were determined by them. The interviews were conducted in English, Fante, Twi, Dagbani, Ga and Effutu. They were recorded, transcribed and translated into English. In instances where the research team did not speak the local language to be used for the interview, the service of a community member was engaged for the interview, transcription and translation. The primary data was coded for the purpose of generating themes for discussion.

Apart from the interview data, secondary data including historical documents, reports and commissioned studies, the statutes and acts establishing each university, annual bulletins, brochures and online documents were obtained and analysed. In one form, it was used to validate some of the issues raised in the interviews; in another it was used to support

the governance issues that arose from the respondents. This was meant to complement, compare and corroborate some of the issues emerging from the interviews with the documentary evidence. In order to protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms have been used for them in this work.

Traditional authority engagement in university governance

In this section we examine the involvement of traditional authority and the roles they play as key stakeholders in the general political economic space of Ghana and, more specifically, in the governance of universities in their areas of jurisdiction.

Traditional authority as an important community stakeholder in Ghana

Traditional authority, represented by chiefs, is the oldest form of governance in many African countries. It is an indigenous political arrangement by which leaders of good moral standing are selected and installed in line with the provisions of customs and laws (Nweke 2012). In Ghana, the chieftaincy institution dates back at least five hundred years and was organised into a decentralised political system for efficient administration even before colonisation (Panyin 2010). In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the British government established a bifurcated state (Tieleman & Uitermark 2018), with the established civil service coexisting with the traditional system. Although this system has experienced various forms of vicissitudes by elite political governance systems, it has remained resilient and evolved, mainly because it has roots in and relevance to Ghanaian society. This claim was supported by the Coussey Commission in 1948, which reported in part that:

The whole chieftaincy institution is so closely bound up with the life of our communities that its disappearance would spell disaster. Chiefs and what they symbolize in the society are so vital that the subject of their future must be approached with the greatest caution. No African of the Gold Coast is without some admiration for the best aspects of chieftaincy and all would loathe doing violence to it ... (Panyin 2010:7).

The significance of traditional authority has not changed, and most Ghanaians today cannot imagine a community without a chief (Tieleman & Uitermark 2018). Even those who feel their chiefs are grossly ineffective do not feel that the chieftaincy itself should be abolished (Ubink 2007). Furthermore, the national Constitution provides for the involvement of chiefs as important stakeholders in national and local governance through the creation of a Ministry of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs, since 2005, and the enactment of the Chieftaincy Act

2008 (Act 759). Although chiefs in Ghana do not belong to political parties, there are structures for them to participate in governance and decision-making, at the national, regional and district houses of chiefs. In addition, chiefs are appointed in consultation with their traditional councils into the non-partisan metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies to participate in decision-making at the local level. Thus, the involvement of chiefs at the various levels of governance is indicative of the significance of the traditional authority as key stakeholders at all levels of decision-making in the political economy of Ghana. This notwithstanding, the degree of influence and roles of the chiefs in the political space in Ghana also largely depends on the prominence and clout of a particular traditional ruler within his or her area of jurisdiction and beyond.

Traditional authority: what role in university governance?

The involvement and stakeholder roles of traditional authority in the establishment, governance and management of education is not new in Ghana. For example, Nana Sir Ofori Atta of Akyem Abuakwa traditional state established schools, including Abuakwa State College in 1937, and instituted scholarships for his subjects. Similarly, the celebrated luminary, Professor K.A. Busia, benefitted from a scholarship by the Asanteman Council to pursue higher education in Great Britain. Clearly, traditional authority has been a significant stakeholder in the provision of education in general, and tertiary education in particular, in Ghana. It is therefore not inappropriate that chiefs be involved at different levels of decision-making and play crucial roles in the governance and management of universities.

The public universities in this study engage chiefs² at different levels and in different capacities within their governance structure. The results of the study show that, depending on the exigencies of a particular university, traditional authority is engaged at policy-making level or administrative level or both within the governance structure of the university, which includes: (1) the regulatory bodies (Ministry of Education – MoE; National Council for Tertiary Education – NCTE; and National Accreditation Board – NAB); policy-making bodies (Office of the Chancellor, Governing Council); and administrative structures. In most, cases however, the engagement is very informal. Here we focus on the formal engagement systems.

Chiefs in Policy-Making Bodies

Two of the studied universities engaged the traditional authority of surrounding communities in their policy-making bodies. At KNUST, the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, is the chancellor, while at UEW, the

paramount chief of the Effutu traditional area, Neenyi Ghartey VII, is a member of the university's governing council. The positions occupied by the chiefs within universities in respective traditional jurisdictions enable them to exert some level of influence at the policy-making level of the respective universities. Their access to such position is principally based on their capacity as traditional leaders. During the interviews, university authorities considered such appointments strategic for improved university–community relations. Of the Asantehene as chancellor of KNUST, a former vice chancellor said:

was strategic, yes. We did that because, you see, initially we had a lot of problems with regards to land ... During the construction of our medical school, every time we installed our equipment the next day we go it is not there. There was a particular man who said we should go away because that part of the land does not belong to us. We informed Otumfuo and he instructed the chief in that community to stop that man. In fact, that ended this man's behaviour. In addition, if you understand the process involved in determining who should become a chancellor ... in fact we went through a long list. The Academic Board, Council Select Committee ... preferred his candidature because of the link between himself and the government, and, at the same time, the link between himself and the traditional authority here. That is why I said earlier that it was strategic. If this decision was not strategically considered, we would have run into a host of problems. (AB, former vice chancellor, KNUST).

The appointment of the paramount chief of Winneba as a member of the University of Education, Winneba's governing council was also strategic. It followed a series of court issues by natives of Winneba against the university on matters relating to the university's corporate social responsibility towards the community. We can deduce, therefore, that the involvement of traditional authority in the policy-making organs of public universities is a form of recognition of their position and role in society.

In recent times, it has been argued that, 'The chief is a political and social power center (if even in a circumscribed sense) in the area he rules and *ipso facto* a microcosm of authority who at times rivals the central government in legitimacy, recognition and loyalty by subjects' (Bafo-Arthur 2003:134). As a result, the views and directives of chiefs on some matters are more likely to be adhered to and implemented than those of the government (Panyin 2010; Mitchell et al. 1997). Therefore, involving them in university policy-making within their jurisdictional areas provides important leverage to address governance challenges within the universities. Also, universities that engage their local traditional authority may have leverage over the other public universities, particularly in matters relating to university's relation with surrounding communities.

*Mediation between the university and the community:
conflict resolution and socio-cultural engagement*

What type of stakeholder roles are assigned to traditional authority in their relations with the universities? In other words, what is the purpose of the engagement? Roles that are performed or assigned to traditional authority by the universities vary. During the interviews many functions came up which can be summarised under the following themes: mediation; ceremonies/sociocultural; and conflict resolution.

Mediation

Evidence from our study shows that in university–community relations, traditional authority was engaged to play a mediation role. The leaders mediate between the universities and the communities as well as between the universities and government. The mediatory role of traditional authority is social, political and religio-cultural. In fact, the purpose of establishing university–community engagement committees by KNUST and UCC, comprising traditional leaders of the surrounding communities and the university authorities, is to enable the universities to reach out to the community through the chieftaincy institution. As a medium for extending social relations or corporate social responsibility to the surrounding community, the chiefs serve as a bridge between the universities and the communities. In that sense, any social intervention by the university in the communities is channelled through the appropriate traditional authority. For example, at KNUST, admission quotas have been assigned to each traditional ruler of the surrounding communities, some of whom are women. UG has given a quota to the La Traditional Council, while UCC and UEW permit protocol admissions from chiefs of surrounding communities. This practice is also common among the universities when recruiting junior staff and labourers. On admission quotas, the queen mother of Bomso, said:

Yes. Sometimes the number is even more than the allocated quota. For instance, somebody may not be a native of Bomso but such a person has stayed here and worked with us, attends communal labour to the extent that when they die they are buried here – we have cemeteries reserved for such people. We even have the chief for the Frafra ethnic group. What prevents me from giving such people the opportunity when they need it? For non-indigenes, there are many of them in this town from different ethnic groups. We co-exist peacefully with them so when they request that I should help their wards to get admission into the university I do not deny them.

In some cases, however, the mediation role of the chiefs is political. Chiefs mediate on behalf of universities when the universities have issues with

government state institutions. Sometimes, they mediate on behalf of university dons who are aspiring for top management positions:

Truth, the word truth is one. That is why you are here and I am telling you all this. They cannot deny it. You see those who are vying for VC coming here every now and then. I told you it is through me you see the paramount chief, so they will come and see me first before I also sit down with the paramount chief and then we start lobbying. Then when they get it, that is all. We are even thinking of ceasing to help them because when we help them and they come, they don't do anything for the community (Nana E, Traditional Leader, Kokoado, UCC).

In fact, due to the growing influence of chiefs as power brokers within the country, they sometimes play direct or indirect roles in the appointment of persons to top management positions whenever such positions become vacant. Therefore, the influence of chiefs in determining who becomes the next vice chancellor, pro vice chancellor or registrar of a university within their jurisdiction counts a lot. As a result, and also depending on the extent of power and influence that such traditional authority possesses, people vying for such positions are not likely to get them if they are not on good terms with such authority. In fact, this practice is not limited to universities, but also most top public administrative and management positions in Ghana. For example, in 2015, the Asanteman Council caused the removal from office of the Mayor of Kumasi Metropolis, Mr Kojo Bonsu, when the Council declared him *persona non grata* after he was accused of showing gross disrespect to them (Ashitey 2016). Moreover, following a lawsuit by a citizen of Winneba against the University of Education, Winneba, the largest teacher education university in the country, over several charges, including renegeing on its corporate social responsibility to include local content in the award of university contracts, the government responded by appointing the paramount chief of Winneba to the university's governing council. In this case, he mediated between the university and the community.

Ceremonies and socio-cultural relations

The universities recognise traditional authority as custodians of culture and the representatives of the people, particularly when they organise public events, such as matriculations and graduations. All five public universities we studied invite some of the eminent chiefs and queens of surrounding communities whenever they are organising such ceremonies. The traditional authorities usually attend these ceremonies with their entourage and full regalia. This kind of protocol observed by the universities is significant in giving recognition to the kings who are their landlords. It is also a way of strengthening relations between the universities and surrounding communities.

In addition, when paramount chiefs are performing their annual festivals, the universities provide support at institutional, departmental or sometimes at individual level. In the UEW, the school of creative art makes available staff and facilities for the training of local teams, particularly for the masquerade show during the Aboakyir Festival. Staff and departments of KNUST are also heavily involved in festivals and other cultural programmes of the Asantehene. At UCC, UEW and KNUST, the university community sends gifts to the local traditional authority during the annual festivals.

Conflict resolution

Another role that traditional authority plays in university–community relations is conflict resolution, particularly in matters related to land disputes, encroachment, job access, sanitation, security, infrastructural deficits and inequality. All five universities occupy large tracts of land, the ownership and usage of which is a subject of dispute between them and their communities. At UG, one of the communities, Okponglo, has taken the university to court over land issues. UEW and UCC have also taken some individuals and community members to court over land. At UCC, for example, all the surrounding villages are at loggerheads with the university on such matters. The following views elucidate this point:

Nobody has come to us to tell us how much Nkrumah bought the land or how much he gave to the elders in compensation; no one has done that. Even they are supposed to give a concession to some of our young people here to be taken in the university. The government doesn't do that for us. Yet all the time they are saying this is university land. They have cheated us of our lands, and moreover we don't get anything from the university (Community leader, UCC).

The university–community relations committees established by both KNUST and UCC are primarily meant to help resolve some of these disputes. Their activities are summarised in the following quotes:

When we meet, the problems which normally occur between the community and the university are the issues that we sit down and talk about; what the university will do for the community, and what the community will do so that the university will stand or expand. These are some of the issues we meet and talk about (Nana E., Kokoado).

Whenever there are difficulties we get assistance from the head of the Surroundings Villages Committee who happens to be a paramount chief as well. He is very knowledgeable and has knowledge of what chieftaincy rule means, and he is also a lecturer... His position as a lecturer as well as a chief makes it possible to relate positively with us (Nana Dikro, Boadi).

In Ghana, traditional authority has the power to resolve land-related and other forms of disputes within the context of alternative conflict resolution. Additionally, over 80 percent of all land is controlled by chiefs. This is because, 'land is communally owned, and customary trustees, such as chiefs, earth priests, clan heads and family heads, hold the allodial interest (this is similar to customary freehold), which under customary law is perpetual and inheritable' (Campion & Acheampong 2014:6333). Any land transaction requires the consent of the chief who has jurisdictional authority over that area. An important element which should be kept in mind is that acquisition of lands by the state and state institutions is usually tied to a particular purpose (Gyamera et al. 2018). Therefore, traditional authority, families and clan heads whose land has been acquired for particular projects can agitate or initiate legal action for the return of their lands when there are grounds to suspect that the usage of the land has deviated from the original purpose for which it was acquired. The need for universities to be on good terms with the host community chiefs and their subjects is thus paramount for the continued existence and growth of such universities.

The structures in KNUST and UCC enable the universities to interact with their communities and also accord some form of stakeholder role to traditional authority and local communities. However, in the case of UCC, many community members were not satisfied with the relationship that exists between them and the university. The committee at UCC is viewed by some opinion leaders in the communities as a means to control community leaders to achieve the university's institutional goal to the detriment of the communities. In the villages surrounding UCC, they have serious trust issues with their leaders due to the role they are perceived to be playing in the joint university-community committee. The community members blame their leaders for allowing themselves to be used by the university. This situation demonstrates that UCC's approach to community relations, channelled through traditional authority, is not productive. In addition, it does not give power and recognition to the traditional leaders. Whatever the case, however, the structures provide channels for communication between the universities and their communities. On the other hand, at UG, UDS and UEW there are no formal structures for university–community relation activities. Though the KNUST and UEW have traditional rulers of their local communities serving in decision-making bodies, the others do not. However, at a ceremonial level, all universities engage with traditional authority.

Revitalising traditional authority engagement in university governance

In this section, we focus on the relations that exist between the five public universities and traditional authority in the governance of the universities. In addition, we examine the nature of the engagement and the roles that are assigned to traditional authority by the universities. The purpose is to determine to what extent the position of traditional authority is considered salient, urgent and necessary by the university authority in its governance system.

Chiefs in university governance

Besides involving chiefs in decision-making bodies, some of the universities engage divisional chiefs and traditional heads of surrounding villages especially at the administrative level, through the committee system. Both KNUST and UCC have established formal structures for this form of engagement. In the case of KNUST, the committee is composed of traditional leaders of about twenty surrounding villages and staff from the university, and is known as the Surrounding Villages Committee (SVC). It was set up in 2003 after people in the surrounding communities staged a demonstration against the university over land, employment, access roads and other issues. The committee meets once every semester to deliberate on issues to do with university–community relations. Strategically, the committee is chaired by a senior academic at the university, who is himself a traditional ruler. Since its establishment, the committee has become the channel for the university to interact with community leaders and address some of their issues. In an interview with the chairman of the committee, he said:

In 2003, we (the university) had problems with the surrounding villages. They were agitating for support from the university. They felt the university was not doing much to support their communities, so we had some attacks from one of these communities where they spoilt some flower pots as they marched to the main administration. The Vice Chancellor at the time, Professor Andam, asked for my opinion ... He had this discussion with me in the morning. The following day he asked me to constitute a committee for surrounding villages of which I was made the chairman. Various people from the different departments were appointed to be part of the committee. At the time, we had about 20 surrounding villages (Chairman, Surrounding Villages Committee, KNUST).

UCC has also set up a committee, known as the Joint University–Community Consultative Committee (JUCCC), which addresses matters related to

university–community relations. Again, the committee is composed of university staff and chiefs and elders of all the surrounding communities. The committee is a medium through which the university interacts with community leaders to address issues affecting them, particularly those concerning land, security and conflict. This was corroborated by the university's registrar during an interaction with him:

We have lost so many hectares of our land. It is still an issue. Almost every council meeting, it comes up for discussion. How to control encroachment and at the same time live peacefully with the communities around. But by and large, we have had peaceful coexistence with the communities. In fact, we have a structure. We have what we call University-Community Consultative Committee. So we have a committee in place and it is recognised by our statutes. So from time to time, we meet (Interview with University Administrator).

UG, UEW and UDS, on the other hand, do not have any formal structures in place through which to engage their communities. In the case of UG and the UDS, community members complained about the lack of a relationship between them and the university. In fact, one of the UG communities has taken the university to court over land issues. Due to this, we observed some level of dissatisfaction among some chiefs about their lack of involvement in the governance of universities within their jurisdictions. The following quotes elucidate this point:

We don't have anything at all to do with the university. There has not been an instance where we interact and discuss issues of mutual interest. They don't need, in fact, the town Okponglo. They don't want to hear the name. That is what I am telling you. The university does not want to see our faces, so we too we don't see their face. This is what I am telling you. They hate us because they know when we are coming to them, we are coming to them with land issue. In short, we don't have anything in common with them. They know when you are nearing them, you are nearing them to come and take the land from them, so they don't near us we too we don't near them. In fact, we are enemies. I am telling you honestly. There is nothing in common with us. I am telling you (Nii Kpakpo, traditional leader, Okponglo, Accra).

These same sentiments were expressed among community members living near UDS. They think that the university and the community exist independently of each other and that the chiefs are not involved nor is their authority recognised in university matters. The following comment highlights this point:

There is nothing like that between us. There is no discussion between us, they are just there. They don't even come to the chief's palace. They have never

brought a visitor to introduce to the chief. The chief himself has written to them several times and has gone there personally to tell them that as he is the custodian of the land and so they should employ someone as a labourers but for God's sake Mr., they refused. Chief's letters are plenty with them and he goes there himself (Yidana, traditional authority, Nyankpapa).

Like, I said I have very good relationship with them; the VC, the registrar and some others. But that is on personal terms. Otherwise, I cannot see how my influence as the chief can help my people (Abdulai, traditional leader, Sanerigu).

We can deduce from the above statements that the lack of a formal structure at UDS and UG to engage the traditional authority in their localities is adversely affecting the relations between them and the surrounding communities. This is not to say that the existence of a structure means there are no problems whatsoever, or that the structures are in themselves solutions to the problem, or where they exist that communities are necessarily satisfied with these structures. Some of the community members near UCC suspect that the university uses their representatives on the Joint University–Community Consultative Committee (JUCCC) to disseminate information to them instead of engaging them for mutual benefit. In these communities, people did not trust that their leaders had the power to demand their entitlement and engage with the university on equal terms. In some cases, the chiefs and traditional leadership were seen not to represent the interest of their people on the committee. This is shown in the following statements:

We have the chief and his elders here who are members of the committee, but we don't know if they are able to dialogue with the university and I don't think they do because if they did, we would know what the outcome has been (Yaw, a retired educationist, Amamoma).

We hear the university formed a committee involving some of our leaders and officers of the university, but to be honest with you, we don't know what our people are doing on that committee. Even when the university gave part of the land to us during Professor Adjapong's time, most of it was sold to individuals. Our chiefs and the people who own the land sold them. The supposed chief has run away to America. Hmmmmmm. After selling the land (Traditional leaders in Amamoma, UCC, Cape Coast).

In addition, when the structure exists to serve the interest of the university only, it can generate problems and undermine the authority of chiefs among their own people. In the case of the UEW, given recent events, the university has signed an MOU with the Winneba community and committed itself to add 'local content' to employment and the awarding of contracts.

Stakeholder position and the influence of traditional authority

Among the five public universities studied, it was KNUST that best integrated traditional authority into its governance structure to ensure a smooth co-existence with the communities and also to ascertain that the university has a positive impact on such communities. In this instance, the traditional leaders possess power, legitimacy and urgency in their stakeholder relationships with the university to some degree, due to the lands they gave and other mediatory roles they play for the university.

The Ashanti King, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, who is also chancellor of the university, can be considered a definitive stakeholder of the university. The amount of power he wields both as overlord of the Ashanti Kingdom and as chancellor of the university puts him in a privileged position to seriously influence the goal, objectives and directions of the university. His position also knits a tight knot of collaboration between traditional authority and university (Pitcher 1976). The KNUST case also demonstrates that the positive and structured relations between public universities and their communities can work towards the mutual benefit of both. This emphasises the evolving roles of chiefs to keep pace with modernity and urbanisation (Tieleman and Uitermark 2018) as many chiefs in Ghana are highly educated and duly qualified to perform such roles.

The University of Ghana, Legon, however, which was modelled along the lines of the University of London, does not incorporate traditional authority in its governance structure. Even after the reforms of 2010, elements of the university's governance structure, such as the governing council, consist of different groups and individual representation (Act 806 of 2010) but without taking the traditional authority into account. The university's strategy of recognising the La Traditional Council by, for example, providing admission quotas and inviting them to ceremonies without engaging chiefs of the surrounding villages, has not ensured good relations. In this instance, both the La Traditional Council and chiefs of surrounding villages are latent stakeholders of the university.

At the time of fieldwork for this study, the La Traditional Council and the chiefs of surrounding villages possessed only one of the three stakeholder attributes (power, legitimacy and urgency) (Kanyile 2018). The power that the La Traditional Authority possessed as the landlord of the university remains dormant since it is not accompanied by any urgency. However, the surrounding communities, such as Okponglo, whose demands contain urgency, lack power, and to some extent, legitimacy to press home their claims, though they were litigating against the university.

In the event that they gain power, but do not have the legitimacy to press home their demands, they can easily become dangerous stakeholders of the university. As Mitchell et al. (1997) have observed, such stakeholders could be coercive and potentially violent, which makes them potentially 'dangerous' to the organisation.

The traditional leadership of UCC's surrounding communities is a dependent and an expectant stakeholder, having legitimacy and urgency in their claims for recognition and proper engagement, but lacking the necessary power to realise their demands. This means that they depend on others for the power to pursue their claims. As a result, the chiefs and community leaders are not satisfied with the university. Nor are the community members satisfied with their leaders' lack of power to have their legitimate and urgent demands met. Some of the chiefs and community leaders believe the university's style of engagement with the traditional authority is biased towards achieving only the university's goals, to the detriment of those of the communities. In the event that the communities do gain the power to resolve their demands and grievances, this could actually have a detrimental effect on the existence of the university, unless the university changes its approach. Interestingly, the university views the community as 'demanding' stakeholders, that is, stakeholders who possess only urgency without power and legitimacy. Because they have the attribute of urgency, they are viewed as 'demanding' claims on the organisation (Khanyile 2018).

The cases of UDS and UEW are similar to that of UCC, although the communities near UDS are not in litigation with the university. Their main demand is greater recognition for community heads and more opportunities, such as access to education and jobs. As landowners, their demands have legitimacy, due to the fact that the university was established to help address the socio-economic and environmental challenges of the regions in northern Ghana. But because the loss of land created a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities, the demands also have urgency. However, they lack the power or the motivation to press for their demands. The traditional authority of the UDS can be classified as expectant stakeholders, who are neither dangerous nor dominant, but rather dependent.

In the past, the communities surrounding UEW had only urgency and legitimacy in their claims, but without power. However, in recent times, they have gained power especially since the paramount chief of Winneba has become a member of the university's governing council. This means he can become a definitive stakeholder, possessing power, legitimacy and urgency, when the need arises. When such happens, he will be in a position

to influence the goals, objectives and directions of the university. However, it appears that, at the moment, there is no urgency or exigency for him to exercise such powers because the university appears to be taking steps to address community demands through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the community on its corporate social responsibility.

Conclusion

In this article, we have shown that there is growing awareness among public universities in Ghana of the need to engage with the traditional authority of their immediate surrounding communities to enhance university–community relations and coexistence, in order to address the socio-economic and developmental aspirations of the communities and to help achieve the institutional goals of the universities.

We identified various roles and levels of engagements with traditional authority as important stakeholders in university governance in Ghana. Some of the roles include participating in policy-making bodies of the universities, mediation and conflict resolution, attending university ceremonies, such as graduation, and fostering cordial socio-cultural relations between universities and their communities.

Also, the universities engage traditional authority leaders at different levels and in different capacities, depending on the exigencies of the universities and the neighbouring communities. For some of the universities, like KNUST and UCC, such engagement takes place through permanent institutional structures, especially through the committee system, whereas at UG, UDS and UEW, such structures do not exist. They engage with their communities through their university relations offices which have broader mandates and appear not to give the requisite attention to the immediate surrounding communities.

Among the five universities studied, it was KNUST that had the most comprehensive traditional authority and community engagement model, which positions traditional authority as a definitive stakeholder. The approach of UG and UCC, in contrast, has the tendency to weaken the relationships between these universities and their surrounding communities. This has the potential to turn these communities into dangerous stakeholders since they have urgency but no power nor, to some extent, legitimacy to argue for their claims and concerns. However, the inclusion of the Chief of Winneba in the Governing Council of the UEW will enhance his stakeholder role to engage more effectively and definitively with that university.

Notes

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2. By traditional authority, we mean a form of leadership which derives its source or mandate from customs and tradition. In Ghana, traditional authority is embedded in the chieftaincy institution and according to the Chieftaincy Act 2008 (Act 759, article 57 clause 1) a 'chief is a person who, hailing from the appropriate family and lineage, has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or installed as a chief or queen mother in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage'.
3. According to article 58 of the Chieftaincy Act 2008 (Act 759), there are five categories of chiefs in Ghana in the following hierarchical order: Asantehene and Paramount Chiefs; Divisional Chiefs; Sub-divisional Chiefs; Adikrofo and other chiefs recognised by the National House of chiefs. Divisional and sub-divisional chiefs and the Adikrofo operate under a paramount chief within a particular traditional area, or in the case of Asante, under the Asantehene. In the absence of substantive chiefs or queen mother, a council of elders of a particular stool or skin may act on behalf of traditional authority.

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