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The dilemma of women empowerment in informal artisanal and small-scale gold ore mining in Ghana

James Natia Adam^{1,2*}, Timothy Adams², Jean-David Gerber² and Michèle Amacker²

Abstract: For several years, women demand more decision-making power from their husbands and the society. Studies indicate that egalitarian decision-making power can be beneficial in many important ways to the household and society, and the pathway to this desire policy objective is through women empowerment. Yet, this is not as obvious as it seems. On the one hand, women empowerment is a game changer. On the other hand, the problem of women empowerment is complex. Thus, our goal is to evaluate the gendered intersectional power dynamics operating in informal artisanal and small-scale mining and the impact on women's empowerment to balance decision-making power in the household. Theoretically, we ask: How does women empowerment enable women to demand more decision-making power from their husbands following their participation in informal mining? And how do men react to women empowerment? Empirically, 38 biographic interviews, 6 key informant interviews and 8 focus group discussions were conducted. Results show that informal mining improves the financial power of women and increases their bargaining power to demand more decision-making power from their husbands. Moreover, increase in women's financial leverage can have a nuanced effect on their empowerment since men can intervene there by playing on the patriarchal rules. In conclusion, women empowerment is complex, and the major challenge is societal. Consequently, policy actions are required to vigorously address societal norms through formal education and awareness creation to bring about transformations.

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1. Introduction

Women empowerment is increasingly being recognized as a game changer for addressing imbalance decision-making power. Studies indicate that interventions like informal employment can empower women to change the household and society in many significant ways (Rodriguez, 2022). As women participate in informal employment, they earn income leading to an increase in financial power, which acts on their bargaining power within the household to demand egalitarian decision-making power (Ngono, 2021a). Yet, the financial power of women, especially wives can have a nuanced effect on their empowerment since their husbands can intervene there. Consequently, women empowerment is inclined to be heard as a “zero-sum” game with winners and losers (Kabeer, 1999, p. 436). Thus, in this paper, we evaluate the gendered intersectional power dynamics operating in informal artisanal and small-scale gold ore mining (ASM) and the impact on women’s empowerment to balance decision-making power in the household and beyond.

However, given the disputed nature of the concept of women empowerment, it is vital to elucidate at the onset what it means in this paper. The concept of women empowerment is defined as enhancing women’s ability to access the elements of development, including quality education, freedom, rights, health and earning opportunities (Duflo, 2012). It also refers to the process through which women acquire the ability to make strategic life choices in a context where their ability was restricted (Kabeer, 1999). Put together, women empowerment is the process of having and exploiting resources in an agentic manner to obtain a desiring outcome, including gender equality, improved well-being, more freedom and a balanced decision-making power (Rodriguez, 2022). There are three interrelated dimensions of empowerment, namely, economic, political and social empowerment (Duflo, 2012; Kabeer, 2005; Pathak et al., 2013). These scholars state that economic empowerment is the capacity of women to move around in the labour market without restrictions; political empowerment refers to the ability of women to participate in politics and occupy central positions in public administration and management; and social empowerment is concerned with the ability of institutions to give more freedom to females (Duflo, 2012; Kabeer, 2005; Pathak et al., 2013). Ngono (2021a) states that a “rise in women’s economic, political and social capability should foster a decrease in income disparity through its actions on the incomes of women, family and human capital” (p. 1908). In all three dimensions, institutions play important roles and affect initiatives that promote women’s empowerment and agency (Falk & Hermle, 2018; Workneh, 2020). Agency refers to the capability to define one’s goals and act upon them (Kabeer, 1999). In the social science literature, agency is operationalized as decision-making. Agency takes the form of “bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance and cognitive processes of reflection” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438).

In line with Vatn (2005), we define institutions as the “conventions, norms and formally sanctioned rules of society. They provide expectations, stability and meaning essential to human existence and coordination. Institutions regularize life, support values, and produce and protect interests” (p. 60). Institutions are categorized into formal and informal. Formal institutions refer to the policies, laws, rules and regulations, while informal institutions describe tradition and social norms. Policies and legislations such as gender quotas in central and local government decision-making positions (Besley et al., 2017), free maternal healthcare (Rodriguez, 2022) and poverty alleviation programmes like the World Bank sponsored Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty and Safety Programme Intervention; the United Kingdom sponsored Global Community-Based Programme; the joint World Bank, Canadian International Development Agency and European Union sponsored Safety Net Programme and the European Union Community Intervention Programme are interventions to affect decision-making power dynamics in the family and the

community (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). These initiatives are essential for fostering women empowerment, expanding women's agency and are more likely to promote same decision-making power between women and men (Rodriguez, 2022). Most recent evidence (Ngono, 2021a) shows that when a woman performs paid activities, she and her family will experience a boost in income and increase spending. Equally, the local and national economy will experience improvements as the woman may contribute to economic development through savings and investment (Ngono, 2021a).

According to Duflo (2012), a woman's control over household resources guarantees her empowerment. There is a reasonable logic to this argument. A woman who adds money to the family food basket is guaranteed more liberty and thus, swayed to search for paid activities outside the home (Duflo, 2012). Correspondingly, a woman with more money demand more decision-making power within the household and can elect how to expend her money. A woman having decision-making power can resolve to spend higher on stuffs that will elevate the well-being of the family (Duflo, 2012). Moreover, a woman having decision-making power can shape formal institutions that affect women and children. A woman in senior government position can, for instance, shape public policies that give more freedom to women and vote social policies and programmes that make the provision of potable drinking water, quality education, good sanitation and hygiene for adolescent girls and children a priority (Dahlum et al., 2020; Duflo, 2012). This makes the call for empowering the role of women critical and compulsory (Ngono, 2021a, 2021b; Rodriguez, 2022; United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

In this context, women's paid activities in informal ASM have the potential to transform communities in different important ways like bringing women out of the supposed patriarchal homes (Kabeer, 2005), granting them a chance to socialize and helping households to changeover from "being a poor household to being a non-poor household" (Ngono, 2021a, p. 1908). Women's self-employment can also contribute to reducing unemployment due to the hiring that ensues and permits them to take part in both paid and unpaid activities (Gawel, 2020; Tita & Aziakpono, 2017). However, Budgeon (2015) observes that the choices women make in the family as well as society are constrained by men playing on the patriarchal rules. As such, Xhaho et al. (2021) note that a woman's financial power does not entirely erode patriarchal relations or fuel social transformations. Ngono (2021a) also observes that a rise in women's informal employment tends to heighten income inequality in the family leading to the reinforcement of decision-making power imbalance. More worrying is the fact that sometimes women work without wages, without social protection (insurance) and are susceptible to harassment, sexism, chronic illnesses, among others, which reduces their potential for empowerment (Baloch et al., 2018; Elveren & Özgür, 2016). This is an apparent paradox which has been overlooked. In fact, many of the past studies focused more on the impact of specific interventions on women's empowerment, the consequences of women's empowerment for chosen policy objectives and among others (Kabeer, 1999).

However, our study aims to evaluate the gendered intersectional power dynamics operating in informal ASM and the impact on women's empowerment to balance decision-making power in the household and beyond. Theoretically, we ask: How does women empowerment enable women to demand more decision-making power from their husbands following their participation in informal mining? How do men react to women empowerment? Results show that informal ASM improves the financial power of women and increases their bargaining power to demand more decision-making power from their husbands and society. Moreover, increase in women's financial leverage can have a nuanced effect on their empowerment since men can intervene there by playing on the patriarchal rules.

Ghana is a good case study because of the high number of women (over 64%) working in informal ASM, in spite of the poor working conditions. The informal ASM is shaped by public policies, private property and customary law. While the Government of Ghana have banned informal ASM activities and thus obstruct people's access to mining license and concessions.

Traditional authorities have been providing illegal mining permits to local miners at the blind side of the state.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: A description of the adapted feminist institutionalism and our working hypotheses are presented in the subsequent section. The study design and methods are described in section three. In the fourth section, we present a case study on the impact of informal ASM in the Talensi district of the Upper East region of Ghana. The empirical data is considered in section five. Issues regarding our working hypotheses are discussed in section six. Our conclusions are drawn in the final section.

2. Theoretical framework and working hypotheses

We adapt the feminist neo-institutionalist theory as our heuristic and conceptual approach (Newman, 2014) to understanding the “gendering effect of institutions, the complexities of gendered institutional change and how to promote outcomes for women in the contexts of institutional changes” (Rossetti, 2015, p. 292). Feminist institutionalist scholars observe that “formal and informal institutions are gendered and that the operations of informal mechanisms that shape institutional processes, developments and outcomes can have different effects on men and women operating in these environments, as well as on the products (norms, rules, policies, and laws) that these institutions produce” (Krook & Mackay, 2011). The feminist neo-institutionalism framework accentuates the significance of strategic agency in institutional change and underscores how strategic actors can initiate change within a context of opportunities and risks (Krook & Mackay, 2011; Mackay et al., 2010).

The framework will enable us direct our analysis on how changes occurring in women can increase opportunities for them to renegotiate gender roles within the family and demand decision-making power from their husbands and the society. In many sectors of the economy, including education, health, politics and the labour market, women in Ghana are treated differently than the men around them. There is also high gender disparity in terms of access to quality education, political participation, access to health and employment between women and men. Previous studies show that women are less likely to get paid jobs and are more likely to be in poverty even when they get paid activities (Duflo, 2012). In the political sphere, women representation is five times less than men in local, constituency and national level political office. Women also face restricted rights in land ownership, asset management, entrepreneurship, inheritance of a husband’s assets or travel without the approval of the husbands (Duflo, 2012). Discrimination against women can hinder their empowerment and deepen inequality between women and men.

Gender scholars, social scientists and policymakers have recognized that a decrease in poverty improves equality between women and men (Ngono, 2021a; United Nations Development Programme, 2020). As such, policymakers often concentrate on creating favourable conditions for economic growth and promoting a level playing field for women empowerment (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Improving women empowerment is also a prerequisite to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (World Bank, 2012). While women have fewer chances in the labour market, it seems that women’s informal employment or self-employment can disproportionately help them through improving their well-being and contribute to same decision-making power between women and men in the household. Both informal employment and self-employment provide income for women, improves their agency and correspondingly, men begin to surrender some rights to women as well as finance their entrepreneurship (Duflo, 2012; Ngono, 2021a). Improving the opportunities available for women in informal employment do translate into better outcomes for women.

Informal employment can also be a hurdle to addressing income and gender inequality. Pathak et al. (2013) indicate that societal prejudices impact women’s confidence in their economic and political capabilities. For instance, women may have access to quality formal education and training, yet the gains of such formal education and training hardly trickle down to them due to lack of access to the

labour market (Kabeer, 2005; Ngono, 2021a). The labour market is also constrained by discrimination, low wages, sexual harassment, sexism, interpersonal violence and appalling working conditions (Adema & Thévenon, 2016; Adoho & Doumbia, 2018). In this context, women empowerment may be followed by an increase in their poverty and a rise in income inequality (Ngono, 2021a). This suggests that the division of labour between women and men cannot balance in the family as women will continue doing most of the non-paid activities and spend less time in paid work (Duflo, 2012). Following the theoretical argument, we present the following working hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *The impact of informal employment can facilitate women's financial power to balance decision-making power within the household.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Increase in women's financial power can have a nuanced effect on women's empowerment leading to men's reaction against women.*

Our working hypotheses will not be tested in a statistical sense but will guide our data collection and discussions. Our investigation in this area seems likely to confirm these two broad hypotheses. In the next section, we describe the research design and methods for our data collection.

3. Study design and methods

We adopt a qualitative comparative case study approach to obtain detailed accounts of the experiences of women and men in informal ASM (Tracy, 2013). A comparative analysis of women's and men's views on informal ASM will provide an insightful understanding of women empowerment and how patriarchal structures are either challenged or sustained. Subsequently, our case was selected from the *Talensi* district in the Upper East region of Ghana because of the dynamics of women's paid activities in informal ASM. For a detailed comparative analysis, we selected two communities, namely *Datuku* and *Gbani*.

The main field work was undertaken in the case study communities in 2019, 2020 and 2021. This timeframe was to enable us develop rapport with key gatekeepers and build trust with our respondents to prevent them from withholding vital information about their economic activities considering the informality of ASM. Afterward, we selected our respondents based on the purposive sampling with a notion of maximum variation to ensure intersectional aspects of peoples' experiences would occur in both data collection and analysis (Tracy, 2013). Intersectionality is a sociological term which refers to the interconnected nature of social categories such as ability, age, class, ethnicity, gender, race and residence status, which are considered as developing overlapping and interdependent systems of disadvantage or discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

To gather our data, we conducted biographic interviews with 38 respondents comprising of 22 women and 16 men. The interview focused on women and men's role in informal ASM, women's position and role within the family, use of income and achievements, including, more freedom, balance decision-making power and gender equality. In addition, 8 focus group discussions with mixed gender and single gender were carried out in a location of the participants' choice. The discussion explored women's economic, social and political capabilities, changes in gender roles, unequal distribution of power, mandate and role of women's self-help groups and women's collective actions. We carried out specific exercises on women's perception of negative and positive effects of informal ASM on miners, on the environment and on bodies of water. The participants also listed and ranked in order of magnitude factors that aided women to effect action or men to react against women's empowerment. Finally, data was gathered from 6 key informants to gain an understanding of the emerging issues like obstacles of informal ASM.

Our responses were recorded in research diaries and notes. We filtered the data to identify the patterns and themes (Charmaz, 2017; Tracy, 2013). Based on our hermeneutic approach, the recurring themes (e.g., agency, structure, decision-making) were interpreted to facilitate the

content analysis. Hermeneutic approach allows interpretation of text into details without losing its relevance (Newman, 2014). Ethically, we adhered to internationally accepted research ethics and protocols to ensure that our respondents' personal information was coded distinctively with pseudonyms to keep their anonymity and to avoid harm on them. In the following section, we outline the context of the case study.

4. Case study: informal ASM in Talensi district of the upper east region

The Talensi district in the Upper East region of Ghana is one of the districts in Northern Ghana with commercial quantities of gold deposits and is increasingly becoming a hotspot for informal ASM (Adam et al., 2021). Earlier discourse was that the Northern Ghana lacks mineral resources like gold as most discoveries were in the South (Renne, 2015; Van de Camp, 2016). Since the colonial era, mining has been an integral part of the local economy offering economic advantages (Renne, 2015; Van de Camp, 2016). Mining has both positive and negative effects on the mining communities and miners. On the positive effect, mining provides income through employment. In addition, mining increases the capacity of households to fund the education of children, health and community initiatives (Adam et al., 2021; Tiernan & O'Connor, 2020). Mining also generates negative effects including environmental degradation, air and water pollution, lack of mine safety, sexual harassment, related health problems (HIV/AIDS) and increase in social vices (Adam et al., 2021; Tiernan & O'Connor, 2020).

In 2006, the government of Ghana enacted the Minerals and Mining Act 703 to grant mining license and concessions to the adult Ghanaian of at least 18 years (Adam et al., 2021). However, the formalization of property rights in ASM are complex and bureaucratic, which disincentivize local people leading to informal or illegal mining activities (Adam et al., 2021). The legal consequences on illegal miners who continue to operate in the banned informal sector is prosecution and confiscation of their mining equipment and tools. Subsequently, the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources developed complementary policies to the 2006 licensing regime—that is decentralization of small-scale mining governance—that can eventually lead to the formalization of property rights in ASM. Also, in 2020, the Ministry launched the Community Mining Scheme to ensure that locals practice sustainable mining within the designated concessions. This has the potential to enhance women socioeconomic empowerment. Female miners often form the self-help groups in the communities to take decision on issues and challenges of mining as well as discuss welfare activities such as helping people in distress. The Community Mining Scheme helps traditional authorities to design their own local monitoring and evaluation activities to profit from the gold ore exploitations. The youth also formed the Movement of Gbani People for Justice to protect their interest in the exploitation of the mineral wealth. All these structures co-exist in the communities peacefully.

Yet, the communities are embedded with male power domination. The patriarchal rules affect every facet of life ranging from education, politics, livelihood and economy through marital rites to the establishment of sexually distinct roles. In terms of education and livelihood, the patriarchal rules privilege boys more than girls (Duflo, 2012). In politics and economy, boys are given preferential position compared to girls. Likewise, in marriage, husbands have more decision-making power than women; and women while performing paid roles are expected by the society to still do more house chores.

In Talensi, marriage is just not a relationship between a wife and a husband, but a social contract between families of both the wife and the husband (Harris, 2012). Marriage establishes a sense of belongingness and social attainment for most local people. These factors influence unmarried people to search for employment in the informal ASM to earn income to pay a dowry in the marriage. Marriage can be limiting if a wife is expected to be submissive to her husband. Women who are submissive are sure of more decision-making power while non-submissive women risk beating as a form of discipline. Therefore, mining has brought significant impact on

women empowerment and consequences. In the next section, we look at the actual impact of informal ASM on women's empowerment at the local level.

5. Results: women empowerment and its consequences

In this section, we show how informal ASM provides both opportunities and risks to women and men and the communities. First, we start by demonstrating that informal ASM provides an increase in women's financial power leading to improvement in their bargaining power to demand more decision-making power from their husbands and society. Second, we explain that the increase in women's financial power can have a nuanced effect on women empowerment due to the complexity of societal problems.

5.1. Impact of informal ASM on women empowerment outcome variables

This section presents results of effects of women's financial power on demand for egalitarian decision-making power. According to hypothesis 1, women's participation in informal employment grants them financial leverage leading to improvement in their bargaining power, which then increases their demand for more decision-making power from their husbands on one side and from the society on the other side. The empirical evidence of our case study confirms this hypothesis.

Both men and women indicate that informal ASM gives quick money compared with employment in agriculture, which is seasonal and often dependent on rainfall. Informal ASM provides women and men income, and revenue to traditional authorities as managers of land resources. The respondents indicate that high poverty and lack of alternative income-generating activities were the main reasons for paid activities in informal ASM by both genders. The traditional authorities spend the revenues on community initiatives like repairing broken borehole parts. The men spend their incomes on acquiring residential land, building a shelter, buying a motorcycle or a car and paying dowry at marriage. Surprisingly, some husbands provide support to their wives by financing their entrepreneurship as well as financing the education of their daughters (Ngono, 2021b). Reflecting in their life trajectories, both genders state that the society is evolving. As such, husbands now value women empowerment. In the words of the husbands, women empowerment has the potential to significantly "transform the family from a poor status to a well-to-do status" (FGDs, 5 January 2021).

Women indicate that they spend their income on welfare needs of the family, including buying new clothes, paying school fees of children, buying enough food stuffs and barrels for water storage (FGDs, 8 January 2021). Spending in the above-mentioned things give us important information about the value society often attach to welfare needs. Women also spend their earned income to start new business as a form of diversification, to become self-employed, to increase sources of constant income flow and to reduce joblessness. Majority of the women, especially nursing mothers indicate that they can move more freely between paid and unpaid activities when they are self-employed (Ngono, 2021a). The different sources of income of the women improve their capacity to make three-times more contribution on family welfare than men. In this context, the women (wives) regard themselves as "vehicles of change" (FGDs, 11 January 2021). Many women also questioned the long-standing traditional breadwinner position of men within the household, suggesting that men's breadwinner position is volatile.

In recent times, women are requesting same decision-making power as men around them (Table 1). The fact of the matter is that women have become real partners to their husbands in managing the affairs of the households. Paid activities in informal ASM made it possible for the women to develop social initiatives (e.g., the savings, loans and welfare group) around solidarity through inclusive finance activities (FGDs, 11 January 2021). The savings, loans and welfare group's inclusive finance activities allow women to make weekly welfare contributions, personal savings, to access micro-credit to develop income-generating activities, to lessen hardships of the lean period through purchase of

Table 1. The summary of views by wives and husbands on the research questions

Research question	Wives	Husbands
How does women empowerment enable them to balance decision-making power in the household following their participation in informal ASM?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wives make three-times more contributions to family welfare needs than men (75%) • Wives demand egalitarian decision-making power from their husbands (71%) • Wives shift care for children above 10 years to their husbands (45%) • Wives can now attend socialization programmes to wither stress (57%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many husbands were financing the entrepreneurship of wives (57%), travelling and living expenses of women in the mines (33%) and financing the education of girls (69%) • Husbands now perform more masculine and neutral roles than before (74%) • Husbands and community leaders were gradually widening the decision-making space for women’s participation (71%)
How do men react to women empowerment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wives are still passive in decision-making (68%) • Wives do not feel that women should take final decision on controversial issues (83%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Husbands were playing on patriarchal rules to ensure that women are submissive (71%) • Husband beat their wives to discipline and make them submissive (73%)

The percentage in the brackets () represents number of times an answer was given by the respondents in the FGD

cereals and to discuss women’s issues and challenges linked to mining. Thus, women’s solidarity groups play vital roles in creating the conditions for societal transformation (Kabeer, 1999). The feminist neo-institutionalist scholars have already explained how structure and agency are critical ingredients for women’s collective bargaining power (Rossetti, 2015). For example, the savings, loans and welfare group has lobbied the central government to revise policies and legislations that hinder women’s paid activities in informal ASM as well enforce the laws that protect women’s rights (FGDs, 18 January 2021).

The results show that women are demanding egalitarian gender roles in the household. Most women indicate that there is a slight improvement in gender roles as the evidence shows that men were performing more masculine or neutral roles such as taking care of children above 10 years than before (FGDs, 18 January 2021). This is good news for mothers performing paid activities in mining because the Minerals and Mining Act 2006 (Act 703) prohibits the direct or indirect participation of children in mining. As most of the mining sites lack social hub, children are more likely to play around mining pits and thus, can accidentally fall in open pits and die. The uptake of more masculine roles gives the indication that mothers could have extra time to stay longer for socialization programmes to wither stress (See Table 1). While men indicate their willingness to perform feminine roles, they “fear that children around them may record and share the information with their peers that their fathers are being controlled by women” (FGD, 19 January 2021). As such, men prefer to perform feminine role in more enclosed environment when children are not around them (FGD, 19 January 2021). These results suggest that the preexisting gender roles are not stable. They can alter if the status of women change. This finding supports the plethora of literature on women empowerment.

The results also indicate that women were now enjoying liberty than when they were unemployed. Women have more freedom to decide for themselves, to belong to self-help group of their choice and to move about freely without the consent of their partners. In Ghana, authors have identified more freedom for women and attribute it to formal education, training programmes, sensitization and awareness initiatives by non-governmental organizations, the National Commission for Civic Education, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice and donor development partners. These initiatives have helped many women and men to tilt towards gender equality relating to role distribution and decision-making within the family and

society. Nonetheless, it appears that men are just pretending to like gender equality because their reaction against women empowerment within the household is bad to say the least. In the next section, we illustrate the reactions men exhibit to women empowerment.

5.2. H2: Consequences of women empowerment

This section focuses on the empirical data of our second hypothesis. According to hypothesis 2, an increase in women's financial power can have a nuanced effect on their empowerment since men can intervene there. This hypothesis was confirmed based on the case study evidence.

Even though the status of women had changed due to informal ASM, it is also a fact that they did experience adverse effects. Both women and men share same views on the negative effects of informal ASM on miners, bodies of water, the environment and the surface of the land. They identify women's vulnerability to risks, including discrimination, sexual harassment, low wages and poor sanitary conditions as negative effects of informal ASM. Women are also given minimal roles in informal employment that provide them mediocre returns. These risks are compounded by the lack of social protection mechanism and the strangely underrepresentation of women in important positions of power (Adema & Thévenon, 2016). The social injustice and the treatment women often face in informal mining make them feel like they are not needed in male-dominated environment (Rossetti, 2015).

The men state that they will not let go part of their decision-making power to women, which results in violence between women and men (Table 1: FDGs, 5 February 2021). Some of the husbands aver that they beat their wives as a way of disciplining and making them to be more submissive (FGD, 7 February 2021; Rodriguez, 2022). Our results aligns to the literature on violence against women. The beating of women embodies violence linked with shifts in power in the household. Beating women as the only way of exercising control over them is an archaic intervention in the 21st Century and should not be countenanced. Sadly, many of the women were unwilling to report violence to the relevant state authorities for remedies. In fact, married women were those afraid to report abusive husbands or seek divorce because of they suffer stigma. Consequently, the state agencies responsible for addressing gender violence in the Talensi district have less work to do compared to the other districts. This result contradicts studies in India where women empowerment led to more women reporting crimes at the law enforcement agencies (Das & Mocan, 2016; Shakya et al., 2017)..

Moreover, men were playing on the patriarchal rules to dominate in decision-making at the household level (Table 1). Since the pre-colonial era, patriarchal rules grant more power to men, which enables men to keep women from asserting their birth rights. At the community level, women invited to the decision-making forum were often restricted from taking the final decision on controversial matters. The reasons adduced by the men were that "men offer the best decisions than women would make" (FGD, 13 February 2021) and "men are always regarded as managers to take tough decisions for the benefit of the society. Every man must perform this role in order to be seen as a person having authority" (FGDs, 15 February 2021). Some of the women indicated that they do not think it is right for women to take final decision on controversial issues" (FGDs, 17 February 2021). This assertion corroborates the United Nations Development Programme (2020), which states that 98.92% of women in Ghana are prejudiced against a woman's progress in society. In the communities, the traditional authorities and their lineage male members were those in-charge of taking final decisions on use, access, control and ownership of the local resources. These narratives are typical cases of men's biases against women's progress, which informs us that the society is evolving at a slow pace (Ngono, 2021a). Earlier studies indicate that men's attitude, practice and behaviour towards household decision-making influence children through mid-adolescence (Hearn, 2012). Children in mid-adolescence tend to mimic their fathers' attitudes, practices and behaviour in decision-making. Therefore, being

a man is “learned and internalized based on experiences, which is normalized through social structures, culture and interactions” (United Nations Development Programme, 2020, p. 10).

All in all, the results in this analysis suggest that women are susceptible to risk including beating in the process of their empowerment. The intertwined social norms and patriarchal rules limit the benefits linked to women’s empowerment. Thus, women’s capacity to make choices are subverted and resisted by men, particularly husbands. The discussions of our empirical result are done in the next section.

6. Discussion: the problem of women empowerment

In this section, our goal is to revisit our working hypotheses and discuss the intricacies of women empowerment. Since the last two decades, there is a growing interest to promote the status and well-being of women globally as part of the efforts to achieve women empowerment (Kabeer, 1999, 2005). The reason is that an increase in women’s economic, social and political capabilities can meaningfully promote egalitarian decision-making power (H1). Therefore, increasing opportunities for women in informal employment is often regarded as the game changer to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (Duflo, 2012; Ngono, 2021a, 2021b; United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Already there are several ongoing initiatives in Ghana being promoted by state and non-state actors to improve women’s access to paid activities. The benefits of such initiatives to women are enormous.

Our case study empirical results show that paid activities in informal ASM offer women income through which new enterprises are created for self-employment (Duflo, 2012; Ngono, 2021a). More importantly, informal ASM enables the women to form self-help groups (structures) and fosters their capability to exercise choice (agency). This makes informal ASM an essential game changer (Mackay et al., 2010; Rodriguez, 2022; Rossetti, 2015). As explained by feminist institutional scholars (Krook & Mackay, 2011; Mackay et al., 2010), increase in women’s financial power offers them a bargaining power to balance the distribution of gender roles within the household and beyond. Additionally, women’s structures are vital for collective action for the reason that they represent “strong voices” to influence power bearer to ensure transformation of rules and policies that impact women. Thus, the structures created by women for decision-making, bargaining, negotiation and resistance of the existing gendered ideology suggest that women are not totally lacking genuine force or effectiveness (Dahlum et al., 2020; Duflo, 2012). It should be noted that the transformation occurring in gender roles and power relations are not just due to the empowerment of women, but also, advocacy by non-governmental organizations, development partners and the state agencies within the communities and beyond.

In many other cases, however, women empowerment can be restraining because men react against the new incentives that come with increasing the financial power of women (H2). Our case study reveals that men sense that they were losing the traditional breadwinner position in the family due to the increasing financial power of women. As such, they activate social norms (e.g., women must be submissive) as well as play on the discriminating patriarchal rules to ensure that women while working in informal employment must still perform non-paid activities in the household. This strong conventional societal expectation affects the ability of women to reach their full potential.

The case study shows an increase in violence against women and thus affects women’s progress towards same decision-making power. This is even more worrying that bias against same decision-making power is increasing in the 21st Century contrary to investments made over the years to achieve gender parity in all facets of society (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). The evidence of the second gender social norms index indicates that the share of people across the globe with moderate and intense biases against a balance decision-making power increased over the past decade. Example, the proportion of men worldwide with moderate to intense egalitarian decision-making power

biases rise from 70% to 71% (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). These results suggest significant changes to women's empowerment across the world and in the Talensi district in particular.

Consequently, the complexity of women empowerment is also a problem of values. If we agree that husbands financing the entrepreneurship of their wives and the education of girl-child tell us something significant about the *value* attached to the empowerment of wives and girls, then men should not find it difficult to concede to egalitarian decision-making power. Same decision-making power will likely make women gain more respect and enjoy status within the household and "their own values and behaviour are likely to reflect those of the wider communities" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 457).

7. Conclusion

This study was concerned with evaluating the gendered intersectional power dynamics operating in informal ASM and the impact on women's empowerment to transform gender roles and power relations between women and men in the household and beyond. This was done in two ways: Theoretically, we focused on how women empowerment enables them to balance decision-making power in the household. We also focus on how men react to women empowerment. Empirically, biographic interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to obtain our data. The outcome variables like decision-making power, change in gender roles and power relations and violence against women were compared between women and men. Overall, we accepted the working hypotheses of the study based on the results and findings.

The case study confirms that informal ASM provides income for women leading to improved bargaining power to demand more decision-making power from their husbands and the society. The case study also confirms that women's financial power can have a nuanced effect on their empowerment since men can intervene there by playing on the patriarchal rules. The evidence is that "household decision-making can shift as incomes alter across genders and these shifts in power can trigger violent outbursts between women and men as ways to regain and maintain control of household resources" (Rodriguez, 2022, p. 10). This suggests that women empowerment is a complex phenomenon to achieve on a silver platter. Therefore, the society remains the principal problem in women empowerment.

In this regard, formal education, capacity building workshops, sensitization and awareness creation on women issues (e.g., violence against women) could provide important information and knowledge to foster behavioural change. The central government should provide enough resources to the relevant state agencies in the local communities to regularly undertake radio programmes to speak against men's use of violence to make wives submissive.

By and large, this study makes an important contribution to the understanding of the feminist institutionalist theory by showing how women's structure and agency facilitate the empowerment of women on the one hand and how women's empowerment can be resisted by powerful actors on the other hand. Nevertheless, an important caveat which concerns the validity of the study results is the small number of respondents. The small sample size is a limitation given the mass participation of women in informal ASM in the district and across the country. An important area for further research would be to expand the geographical coverage and investigate the main forms of men's resistance against women empowerment.

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