

Perceptions of Ghanaian values: A focus group study

Annabella Osei-Tutu^{1*}, Vivian Afi Dzokoto², J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu³, Abraham Kenin¹ and Amanda Stahl⁴

Abstract

Ghanaian values have formed part of important social conversations at the national level in recent times. We set out to explore perceptions of values by conducting 24 focus group discussions within the Accra and Tema metropolitan areas in four Ghanaian languages. Participants (Ga = 36; Akan = 35; Ewe = 23; and Dagbani = 18) aged between 20 and 79 (average age: 45.2 years) responding in the context of focus group discussions elaborated on quintessential Ghanaian values with references to examples that point to a consciousness of concepts of traditional and contemporary values. We analysed the data thematically and observed three themes: (1) Traditional Ghanaian values; (2) Lost values and values in transition; and (3) Contemporary Ghanaian values/preferences. Traditional values replicate things done by ancestors, are typical to African customs and practices, and have long been in place. Lost values or values in transition are those once cherished but have been lost or modified in response to social change. Contemporary values were recently developed or introduced. Our findings are important for policy on national values amidst growing concerns for one. They also make contributions to studies on contemporary African values and the global literature on values.

Article History: Received 25 October 2022

Accepted 21 April 2023

Keywords: values, traditional values, contemporary values, communal values, cultural values

1 University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana

2 Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, USA

3 Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana

4 Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, USA

***Corresponding author:** Department of Psychology, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana

Email: aopare-henaku@ug.edu.gh

Introduction

In 2020, the National Development Planning Commission of Ghana organised a national forum to discuss the importance of Ghanaian values for national development. The event reflects growing concerns that once cherished Ghanaian values have been lost or are under threat of being lost. Discussions about changing societal values are not unique to Ghana. The World Values Survey (2021) conducts research on values globally. Studies on values are important because they show the direction in which a society is moving toward. This is important for education, social, and policy development.

Values have been conceptualised as desirable goals that motivate action and beliefs linked to emotion that transcend specific actions and situations, serve as standards and criteria for decision-making, are ordered by relative importance to one another, and guide action according to the relative importance of multiple values (Schwartz, 1996). This conceptualization implies that values are important both at the level of the individual and the level of the group. Research suggests that there are basic human values (Schwartz, 1992, 2012). However, societies differ in terms of how they prioritise basic values. In his book, *African cultural values*, Gyekye (1998) discussed that religious values, value for family, humanity, communalism, morality, economics, chiefship and politics, knowledge, aesthetics, are central to African societies. Researchers working on Ghanaian values have observed that values associated with kinship systems, honouring elders, communality, hospitality, authority, obedience, and faithfulness are emphasised in traditional Ghanaian societies (e.g., Brown, 2019; Kwame, 2019; Sarbah, 2010). These constitute what is termed as traditional human values. The goal of these values is to promote human flourishing and communal well-being consisting of stability and cosmic harmony (Yankah, 1995).

Traditional values emphasise the importance of the relationships between the earthly and heavenly realms of existence in relating to ancestors and community deities, deference to authority, conformity, and prioritised family ties (Gyekye, 1998). These contrast with secular-rational values which tend to minimise the importance of God and religious norms and advocate less respect for authority. Secular values rather promote independence and individualistic striving (Dobewall & Strack, 2014; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Inglehart, 2006). Values are dynamic and may change in response to shifts in societal priorities (Inglehart, 1971; 1997; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010). Ghanaian societies have gone through major transitions which might affect values that are currently espoused (Assimeng, 1999; Nukunya, 2003). Research suggests that there have been changes in family systems. Traditionally, extended family structures are an integral part of Ghanaian societies. However, these are changing (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2012; Nukunya, 2003).

Developments in religion, politics, education, economics, and commerce in Ghana have forged ideas about what is desirable. Hofstede (1980; 1991) examined values relevant to the operation of social organisations in different cultural settings. Research

building on his theoretical foundations suggests that Ghana ranks high on power distance, indulgence, and uncertainty avoidance. Ghana however is low on individualism, masculinity, and long-term orientation (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). In the 2023 version of the World Values Survey's values map, Ghana was ranked high on traditional and survival values but low on self-expression values (World Value Survey, 2023).

Values need to be understood within the context of cultural transmission as well as change. With a few exceptions, positive changes in economic development have been associated with a shift from traditional to secular values (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). It has been asserted that societies shift from traditional to secular values as they advance economically (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). According to data from the World Bank (2021), Ghana's GDP growth rates have improved from -12.432 percent in 1975 to 6.5 percent in 2019. Ghana achieved a lower-middle income country status in November 2010 (Moss & Majerowicz, 2012). Data from the sixth round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014) show that annual gross household income in 2013 was about US\$8,446. The average per capita gross income was US\$2,713. However, there were wide disparities.

Changes in the political development of a society can trigger shifts in the society's values (Huntington, 1971; Inglehart, 1999, 2019). New political developments, such as a shift from a totalitarian regime to a democracy may have differential impacts on value for freedom, political trust, and respect for authority (Wang, 2005). The establishment of multiparty democracy in Ghana since 1992 has contributed to new authority and power structures (Kumah-Abiwu & Darkwah, 2020; Owusu, 1996). At the national level, more power is invested in democratic government structures and institutions. These developments have eroded the powers of chieftaincy including the role of queen mothers as custodians of public moral order. Spirituality and religious participation are undoubtedly important in contemporary Ghana. Over 98% of Ghanaian adults indicate that religion is important in their life (Inglehart et al., 2014). Heaton, James, and Oheneba-Sakyi (2009) state that religious affiliation, belief system, and religiosity are both public and private issues in Ghana. Important rituals such as funerals and weddings are carried out within religious contexts. Studies show that major developments in the religious scene in Ghana have impacted what people strive for (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2004; Gifford, 2004; Osei-Tutu et al., 2018). It is reasonable to expect that Ghanaian realities may influence the salience of values that differ from other cultural contexts.

Ghana has featured minimally in values research in Psychology. Some documentation of Ghanaian values comes from the interdisciplinary field of African Studies. Traditionally, Ghanaian societies have been described as stratified; with age being one of the main determinants of social role and status. Older people are to be accorded honour and respect. Ghana's Akan societies are patriarchal, with gender being an important factor that influences status (Obeng & Stoeltje, 2002). Gyekye (1996) asserts that Akan culture values religion, communal values, marriage, children, traditional political authority, and wealth-building. Social indicators show cultural change and retention trends during

Ghana's recent history. Some central values (e.g., kinship systems and ties, honouring elders, expectations in romantic relationships, motherhood) have persisted (Darkwah, 2016; Goodwin et al., 2012). Our study contributes to recent discussions on Ghanaian values education and sensitization. We anticipated that changes to Ghanaian values might be happening in urban contemporary contexts where life is fast-paced and traditional family systems have weakened (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2012). Hence, we conducted the study in the capital of Ghana. The research question which guided the investigation is: what do urban dwellers consider to be traditional Ghanaian values (vs contemporary)?

Methods

Study design

The topic of values has been examined using different approaches. One method uses top-down approaches including the use of questionnaires. A second method explores values using bottom-up approaches. The World Values Survey, for instance, uses a top-down approach. In this study, we adopted a bottom-up approach using a qualitative research design which can provide complementary and contextual insight.

Participants

Participants, comprising 64 males and 48 females, aged between 20 and 79 (Mean=45.2; SD=3.55) were recruited from the Accra and Tema metropolitan areas of Ghana. They comprise Christians (n = 82), Muslims (n = 27), and African Traditionalists (n = 3). Participants spoke Ga (n=36), Akan (n =35), Ewe (n= 23), and Dagbani (n = 18). To be included in the study, an individual had to be a Ghanaian who is 18 years or older living in the Accra and Tema metropolitan areas of the Greater Accra region of Ghana. We did not ask participants whether they were born or naturalised Ghanaians. The study areas were chosen because of their mass urban multicultural population. We used purposive sampling methods to select participants who met the study's inclusion criteria. We relied on local community contacts in the study areas. We contacted gatekeepers within 24 communities in the Accra and Tema metropolitan areas and explained the study to them. The gatekeepers recommended potential participants who resided in the respective communities for a focus group discussion. For each of the 24 communities, the gatekeepers recommended between 6 to 10 potential participants. We worked with the gatekeepers and the prospective participants to find a suitable date and time for the focus group discussions. With the assistance of the gatekeepers, suitable venues, mostly community centres which were accessible to all the participants in each respective community and devoid of intrusion, were chosen for the focus group discussions.

Data collection procedures

Approval for the study was issued by the Ethics Committee for the Humanities at the University of Ghana (ECH 025/18-19). We conducted 24 focus group discussions (FGDs) between December 2018 and April 2019. We used gatekeepers in the selected communities to identify and recruit potential participants who were 18 years and older and willing to participate in the study. FGDs were conducted in four languages Akan, Dagbani, Ewe, and Ga. These are some of the major Ghanaian languages spoken in the selected communities. Questions used in the FGD were developed by the authors and were translated by four different people who have individual expertise in the languages. Sample questions in English include: what do you consider to be cardinal Ghanaian values? Give as many examples as you can think of. In what way are these values cardinal/important? Eight (8) FGDs each were conducted in Akan and Ga, and 4 each were conducted in Ewe and Dagbani.

Participants completed consent procedures. Interviews were conducted at venues devoid of noise and intrusion and were recorded with permission from participants. FGDs were conducted by three research assistants (RA) who had a tertiary level of formal education. Two RAs conducted the Dagbani FGDs. One was a native speaker and the other provided logistical support. Ewe FGDs were conducted by an RA who was a native speaker; and was supported by a second RA. One RA who is a native speaker of both Akan and Ga conducted the FGDs in those languages. Participants in the FGDs ranged between 4 and 8. Before every FGD session began, the participants were briefed about the objective of the study, after which FGD rules and regulations were clearly spelt out to them. Their ensuing questions were addressed before the discussion began. On the average, each discussion lasted 1 hour, 30 minutes.

Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed from the four local Ghanaian languages into English language by four individuals. Next, we engaged four different individuals with expert knowledge in the four Ghanaian languages used in the study to validate the transcripts. The experts checked the transcripts against the audio recordings to identify translation errors and ascertain accuracy of the transcriptions. The outcome of the validation indicated that the transcriptions of the audio recordings from the FGDs were good.

We used thematic analysis - a transtheoretical approach for establishing and categorising themes (Braun & Clark, 2006)- to process our data. Consistent with Braun and Clark's guidelines, we used multiple steps in making meaning of the data. We used multiple coders in the analysis to assure credibility of the analysis. One of the authors trained two coding assistants to code the data inductively. Inductive analysis permits the organisation of data using bottom-up approaches (Swain, 2018). The data were organised using NVivo version 12. Each of the two coders familiarised themselves with the data by reading and re-reading transcripts. Coders generated 18 initial codes

(e.g., religious, community, family). Coders applied the codes to all the 24 interviews independently (test inter-rater reliability was 90% or better). They met regularly with a senior team member to discuss discrepancies. Codes were refined and defined such that they were distinct from each other. Next, the coders organised the codes into sub-themes and overarching themes. E.g., values that were described as long cherished and still important were categorised under ‘Traditional values.’ Another team member reviewed the categorisation and suggested revisions. For example, the coders had separated “tradition” and “long standing”, but the team member merged these since they were conceptually similar. A research meeting was held with three of the authors to review the results and they agreed on the final categorizations.

Findings

Three main categories were observed: (1) traditional Ghanaian values; (2) lost values and values in transition; and (3) contemporary Ghanaian values/preferences. For some values, there was no consensus among the participants. Whereas some participants stated that some values had been lost, others stated that they are still in use. These were placed in both themes. Table 1 is the list of all the values nominated by the participants. A summary of nominated values and their status are presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Values code frequencies

Value	Frequency
Religion	850
Respect	169
Aesthetic	161
Love	158
Money	110
Foreigners	105
Politics	102
Education	100
Discipline	100
Family	98
Community/Sense of Belonging	90
Marriage	85
Food	82
Peace/Harmony/Unity	72
Help	64
Occupation	63
Honesty	61
Gender Roles	61
Hospitality	54
Celebrations	52
Hard work	39
Humility	39
Health	36
Technology	34
Superstition	29
Friendliness	28
Obedience	25
Pride for country	20
Truth	15
Generosity	14
Patience	8
Gratitude	4

Theme 1: Traditional Ghanaian values

Traditional values refer to values that reproduce behaviours, practices, and ways of being as was done by ancestors which are considered typical of Ghanaian customs and practices. Under this theme, three sub-themes were identified: communal value, religious values, and traditional celebrations.

Communal value

These values focus on a unified community of Ghanaians and the common good. Participants nominated communal values about authority (e.g., respect, humility); social connectedness (e.g., sense of belonging, peace/harmony/unity); relationships with non-Ghanaians (e.g., hospitality); and work ethics (e.g., discipline, hard work) as cardinal Ghanaian values that are still relevant in contemporary Ghana.

One of the cardinal communal values participants discussed is respect. This is expressed in many ways such as greetings. One participant alluded to this, ‘When you see a child or an elderly person, you greet them to show respect.’ (Twi #7).

Table 2: Summary of nominated values and their status

Value	Status		
	Traditional; and still desired	Lost/threatened/changed	New
Discipline	+	+	
Family		+	
Formal education			+
Gendered value (gender equality, gender roles)		+	
Generosity		+	
Hardworking	+	+	
Hospitality	+		
Humility	+		
Marriage		+	
Material values (money, possessions)			+
Obedience		+	
Peace	+		
Religious values (God, worship, religious beliefs, virtues)	+		
Respect	+	+	
Sense of belonging/connectedness	+		
Superstition (beliefs about ghosts, mystical powers and taboos)		+	
Technology/innovation			+
Tradition (festivals, rites, arts, and celebrations).	+	+	
Traditional authority		+	
Truth		+	
Unity		+	

Another noted, 'when I know you and I greet you, but you don't respond or you don't greet me, I ask myself maybe there is something between us, so greetings are very important.' (Twi #3). In this second instance, greeting is not only a sign of respect but also serves as an indicator of relational harmony. Participants identified humility as one of the traditional values Ghanaians espouse and it is associated with deference in authority relations, 'Humility is part of our national values.' (Ga #8). Another added, 'as you humble yourself, you are submissive to authority so as our younger ones are also learning from us' (Twi #7).

Our participants identified a collective sense of belonging/connectedness as a cardinal Ghanaian value. One participant observed, 'Whichever place there are Ghanaians, they like to identify themselves like a tribe.' (Ewe #1). Another participant agreed noting:

We have empathy, when you meet your fellow somewhere abroad, you know this is your brother and so you have empathy for him; so, you can take them from some situations and if there is any help, you can help them (Twi #8)

Participants also agreed that peace/harmony/unity are traditional Ghanaian values that have persisted over time. One participant stated, 'You can see that as Ghanaians, we are peaceful. We don't like conflict situations.' (Ga #8). Another participant shared, 'So as for peace making for Ghanaians, it is something that everyone does. It is part of everyone, Ghanaians love peace.' (Ewe #1). Regarding unity, some participants suggested that Ghanaians are united. One participant noted, 'Unity is something seen in Ghana very well.' (Twi #5).

Many participants pointed out that Ghanaians are noted for their outstanding value for hospitality. One participant observed, 'In our Ghanaian community, one thing that is associated with us and acknowledged internationally is our hospitality' (Ga #3). The view was shared by other participants such as the following:

I have noticed that Ghanaians are hospitable, when someone comes from somewhere, we have that passion and love to accept them, we don't care about their differences... (Twi #5).

Participants stated that hard work is an important Ghanaian value. One participant stated, 'We like to work hard; farming helps us to export food' (Twi #4). Another participant reiterated, 'For Ghanaians, every work they would like to do it, they will do it' (Ewe #3).

Religious values

Religious upbringing, fear of God, worship, and importance of God in everyday life as well as commitments to religious virtues were described as traditional Ghanaian values. One participant noted, 'There is the fear of God among Ghanaians.' (Ewe #2). Recognizing the Supreme Being is a central feature of Ghanaian spirituality as observed

by this participant, 'We pray to God for progress and prosperity in all that we do.' (Ga #6). Other participants recognized religious socialisation as a common value in Ghana. One participant noted the following:

You are raised according to the principles of your religious faith. Although there are different religious sects, we all believe in God our creator and worship him through Mohammed, Jesus Christ, and the lesser gods. (Dagbani #4).

Traditional celebrations

Participants highlighted that Ghanaians take pride in traditional and religious festivals and practices. One participant observed, 'We have unique traditional practices such as festivals. An example is the celebration of the Homowo festival by we the Gas'. (Ga #1). Another described value for funeral observations:

When it comes to funeral performance, the heavy attendance or patronage depends on who has wealth and can afford to spend lavishly on those who would be attending the funeral. (Dagbani #3).

Theme 2: Lost values and values in transition

Lost values include traditional values that have ceased to be important in the Ghanaian context. Those under a temporal state of change are described as in transition. Six sub-themes were identified under this theme: family, marriage, tradition and superstition, gendered values, traditional authority, and communal values.

Family

Participants noted changes to values about the importance of the extended family, changes to family configuration and an increased emphasis on individuality. As an example, one participant mentioned the decreased value for the extended family as well as changes to the functions of the extended family:

In the olden days, the extended family existed. So, as you live, it isn't your father alone who will nurture you. Your uncles can do that as well. It even existed that when a family member was going to marry, the family would support you. (Twi #4).

Another change was related to changes in family size. One of our participants suggested, 'Some time ago, when you give birth to many children, the greater the respect people have for you but now things have changed a little' (Twi #8). Other changes include weakening extended family ties:

I am quite old now and with regard to where I come from, my family members were united to the extent that till the time I was about to attend Secondary

School, we were eating together and whenever I was going to school, people made contributions towards my education but as of now, that practice is no more. (Ga #1).

Marriage

Our participants discussed changes to marriage practices, marriage rites, and traditions. In the first extract below, a participant noted changes to arranged marriages, marriage preparation processes, and marriage procedures. The second quote notes changes to customary processes preceding a marriage and changes in mate selection priorities.

Even in those olden days that they married for people; the marriage holds. [Today], we only want a wedding, and you realise in three or four days after there is divorce. In those times, the parents will go and investigate another family and get to know how the family is. They will marry for you although you might not love the man. My parents have been able to love each other till now. But even today that they say, 'I love you; I love you', it lasts for three or four days. (Twi #4).

With marriage, for instance, one depended on his parents or elders to get involved. Their advice largely depended on the woman's family lifestyle, upbringing, and other defects. Today, this is no more because one is rooted to a girl for various reasons—such as beauty, wealth, or family positions only to regret in the long run. (Dagbani #1).

Tradition and superstition

Some participants identified important changes to traditional festivals, rites, arts, and cultural celebrations. One participant stated, 'In times past, much attention was given to traditional practices such as our festivals. But because of the influx of other cultures these days, we are losing some of the cultural practices such as the ban on noise making' (Ga #2). Here, the participant alludes to a prohibition on noise making during a specific period in the Ga society of Ghana. In recent times, such bans have been met with disputes (Acquah, 2020; Goshadze, 2020). Another participant noted changes to cultural practices associated with child naming:

When it comes to naming ceremonies, we knew in the past that nothing like parties were done after the children had been named but these days, the women insist that it is done, and it has become the norm. To the extent that even if you don't have money, you will be compelled to borrow money to do it. (Ga #8).

Other changes include belief in superstitions about ghosts, mystical powers, and taboos. The extracts below showcase some of the changes that participants noted in relation to changes to superstitious beliefs:

At first, they said when you whisper while bathing, you will see a ghost, but you will not see anything, and so people have passed that level, and also ghosts and other things; they said one must not see a dead body. (Twi #5).

In the past, we used to wake up early in the morning to sweep around and this was planned in order not to disturb people when the day is busy. We didn't also sweep at night because you might end up sweeping away something valuable because of the darkness. In the past, children were also prohibited from looking into mirrors but today, they are doing so... these taboos instilled fear in us so that we will do the right thing but today, we don't respect those things anymore and we disregard them. (Ga #8).

Gendered values

Participants identified changes to gender norms in Ghana. One participant noted:

Another proof of our cardinal values was the acquisition of wealth, especially by women. The wealth acquired was always kept in secrecy. She would protect her wealth till she confides in a man by asking him to raise some animals with the money acquired. (Dagbani #2).

The quote relates to a practice where women entrusted their wealth to men based on the notion that a man would be better placed to protect the money as well as determine how the woman could invest their wealth. Another participant cited value for the girl child as well as changes in roles in marriage:

Now both boys and girls go to school. At first when something happens at home, what the man will say was final, but now when something happens, the woman even wants to make decisions for the man, and naturally men are supposed to be the head of the house, not the woman... (Twi #6).

Traditional authority

Participants noted that the development of democratic governance in contemporary Ghana has contributed to reverence for democratic authority than for traditional ones. The following extract from one participant exemplifies this change, 'In the past, the traditional rulers of we the Gas were the Wulomei [Traditional priests] and much reverence was given to the Wulomei.' (Ga #3). Another participant explained that what had led to changes in traditional authority:

[Back] then we used to respect our chiefs, when a chief says today no one is going out, as in, no one should go around a water body, we won't go. Because in those days, president, president, things were not really there, though it was there but we gave much respect to our chiefs. (Twi #7).

Communal values

Values such as trust, unity, obedience, respect, discipline, truth, and generosity, which serve as the foundation for the communal nature of Ghanaian life were perceived to be under threat. In relation to trust, one participant stated, 'We all suspect one another, and so that trust and kindness has come down.' (Twi #7). Another participant noted, 'Truthfulness has reduced. This is because we no longer trust each other' (Ga #4).

Obedience was another communal value which was described as lost. One participant noted that proliferation of other values had contributed to this situation, 'These days, our values have become many, and this has resulted in disobedience.' (Ga #4). Another observed, 'I can say that it is as a result of disobedience. Nowadays, we are no longer obedient' (Ga #1). Some participants stated that respect as a traditional value is under threat of being lost. One participant stated, 'Common greetings and the respect due to the elderly seem to be falling apart' (Dagbani #4).

Lack of discipline was also reported as a new phenomenon in Ghana. One participant noted, 'In the past there was discipline. Although you may not be a biological child to someone, they had the right to discipline you' (Ga #5). Another shared a similar view:

At first, ... when you see an older person, you would even be the first person to greet them, previously that was how it was done, some even lie on the floor, you will be the first person to go and wake your mother up and say good morning, but now it has shifted to the extent that people don't even care when they see older people, young people can go naked, and when the elderly talk, they say that is the trend, fashion. (Twi #5).

Our participants suggested that value for truth was under serious threat. One participant noted, 'Truthfulness is compromised in many ways these days because of the influence of money.' (Ga #4). Another stated, 'Ghana now, hmmm... There is no truthfulness in Ghana oo' (Ewe #2). Further, some participants noted that trust had eroded in Ghana. One participant elaborated, "Everyone fears the other, we all suspect one another, and so that trust and kindness has come down" (Twi #7). This view was shared by other participants such as the following:

If I may begin, I will say that in the past, we were more united but if I look at today, we don't have that unity anymore because our truthfulness has reduced, and this often results in conflicts. (Ga #4).

Theme 3: Contemporary values/preferences

We initially approached this study with the aim of looking for core abstract values. However, our participants mentioned societal goals and preferences that are important to contemporary Ghanaians. To accurately portray what our participants said, we kept these responses and coded them under the theme of contemporary values/preferences.

Under this theme, we identified three sub-themes: formal education, material values, and technology/innovation.

Formal education

Although knowledge, wisdom, and experience have always been valued in Ghana and have been part of Ghanaian traditional values (Gyekye, 1998), our participants considered the pursuit of formal education as a contemporary value. One participant mentioned that there has been an increased focus on formal education, 'Today, our education system has improved significantly than previously' (Ga #4). Another participant stated:

As a matter of fact, in the past, education was stuck at a point and only a few people were able to attain higher education but today, I can tell you that the children of fishermen have completed University education and are able to provide for their various households by virtue of the work they are engaged in (Ga #3).

Material values

Participants suggested that Ghanaians have in recent times developed strong material values. One participant stated, 'The acquisition of wealth and monetary gains has been another cardinal value in the lifestyle of today's world.' (Dagbani #2). Another participant agreed, noting, 'In the past, people worked hard to earn their money and they did not have love for money but rather a good name.' (Ga #1). Another participant added:

The way Ghanaians love money nowadays, it is very scary, someone doesn't care to kill his neighbour for money, in the past Ghana wasn't like this but now it seems we are serious about money too much. (Twi #3).

Technology/Innovation

Participants perceived technology/innovation as a contemporary development in Ghanaian society. The following quotations capture some of their views suggesting that technology has contributed to the desire for information:

Because of WhatsApp, Facebook, and almighty Google, so we are open to all kinds of information from all over the world, and that information is having much influence on our day-to-day activities. (Twi #6).

Like in our modern system now communication is very simple, information can reach people irrespective of which country they are but previously a letter must be written, and before a letter reaches where it must reach, then maybe a week or in a month's time. (Twi #7).

Discussion and Conclusion

We set out to investigate traditional and contemporary values in Ghana. Our finding indicates that communal values such as respect, humility, sense of belonging, peace/harmony/unity, hospitality; and discipline, hard work are still cherished in Ghana. Religion and value for some traditional practices are also intact. However, several other communal values, e.g., for extended family ties, marriage, traditional authority, and gender norms, and other-referent values (e.g., trust, unity, obedience, respect, discipline, and truth), were perceived to have changed or lost their importance in contemporary Ghana. Formal education, materialism, and technology were perceived to be new values and preferences in contemporary Ghana.

Consistent with previous studies we observed that collective value for harmony, hospitality, authority, obedience, and respect are still cherished (Brown, 2019; Kwame, 2019). These values are associated with communal ways of being that Ghanaian settings afford (Sarbah, 2010). Research suggests that in societies where religion is highly cherished, traditional values tend to prevail over secular values (Inglehart, 2006). Over 90 percent of Ghana's population report that religion is important in their lives. In most religions, respect for traditional values such as obedience, peace, unity, and harmony, are encouraged. Hence, although they are viewed as cultural values, they also have some religious overtones.

Most of the values that were perceived to be under threat were communal values which were social or interpersonal in nature. For a long time, researchers have noted a gradual shift from extended family ties to nuclearization of the family in Ghana (Assimeng, 1999; Nukunya, 2003). Although marriage is still relevant in Ghana, there have been changes to traditional marriage processes. Relevance of extended family structures has also waned. Just as religion is important in persisting traditional Ghanaian values, it has also been cited as a possible catalyst for changes in family and the institution of marriage. Another factor that might explain the shifts in traditional Ghanaian values is rising formal educational level. For instance, Pinto (2019) has noted that Westernised formal education has contributed to the gradual loss of the Ghanaian cultural identity and values over the years.

Most of the new values and preferences observed in this study were focused on personal development. For example, values for educational achievement and wealth acquisition were aimed at enhancing people's status in society. Technology and innovation can contribute to self-improvement and ease of life in a fast-paced world. Depending on the cultural context, personal development can have several meanings. In one sense, personal development can be aimed at improving personal preferences, wishes, and one's sense of uniqueness. In another sense, it could be aimed at developing oneself to fit well into a hierarchical social structure and enable the individual to satisfy their relational obligations well (See Keller, 2016; 2019). A recent study suggests that among some Ghanaians, the focus of personal development is to help individuals fit into

their position within the family and society well (See Osei-Tutu, Belgrave, & Dzokoto, 2023).

Given the diverse nature of our participants, we assume that the current findings are true reflections of contemporary Ghanaian society. Additionally, we observe that the findings from our study are consistent with the World Values Survey which established that Ghana is high on traditional and survival values (Inglehart–Welzel Cultural Map – WVS, 2015). Hence, it will not be out of place to make important policy decisions based on our current findings.

While conducting the focus group discussions in a socio-demographically diverse urban setting provides us with ample representation of national values, we suggest that a cross-national study is imperative in future values studies. We have not examined differences across age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, and ethnic groups. Future studies can make these areas of focus.

In conclusion, we investigated Ghanaian values through focus group discussions. We observed that our nominated values were modelled around traditional Ghanaian conceptions of socially endorsed imperative, but some of these had been lost or were under threat of being lost. This is because of the “demonization of culture” in some modern religious practices which undermines aspects of traditional values. We also observed new values which had emerged in response to social developments in Ghana.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This project was supported by the Nagel Institute’s African Theological Advance (Grant # 2018-TH470) and the Virginia Commonwealth University’s Honors Summer Undergraduate Research Program.

ORCID

Annabella Osei-Tutu  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9407-8770>

Vivian Afi Dzokoto  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7668-9962>

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1216-016X>

Abraham Kenin  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0818-2403>

References

Acquah, F. (2011). The impact of African traditional religious beliefs and cultural values on Christian- Muslim relations in Ghana from 1920 through the present: A case study of Nkusukum-Ekumfi-Enyan area of the Central Region. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Exeter). Retrieved from <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10036/3473/AcquahF.pdf?...3>

- Ardayfio-Schandorf, E. (2012). Urban families and residential mobility in Accra. In E. Ardayfio-Schandorf, P. W. K. Yankson, & M. Bertrand (Eds.), *The mobile city of Accra: Urban families, housing and residential practices* (pp. 47–72), Dakar, Senegal: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa.
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. (2004). *African charismatics: Current developments within independent indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
- Assimeng, M. (1999). *Social structure of Ghana: A study in persistence and change* (2nd ed.). Tema, Ghana: Ghana Publishing.
- Brown, C. M. (2019). The cultural logic of strangerhood: Subjectivity, migration and belonging among Ghana's transnational Zongo community. (Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database (UMI No. 27692263).
- Darkwah, A. K. (2016). Globalisation, development and the empowerment of women: The case of African traders. In J. Steans & D. Tepe. (Eds.). *Handbook on gender in world politics* (pp. 386-393). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Dobewall, H., & Strack, M. (2014). Relationship of Inglehart's and Schwartz's value dimensions revisited. *International Journal of Psychology*, 49, 240–248. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12004>
- Ghana Statistical Service (2014). *Ghana living standards survey round 6*. Accra, Ghana: Ghana Statistical Service.
- Gifford, P. (2004). *Ghana's new Christianity: Pentecostalism in a globalizing African economy*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Goodwin, R., Marshall, T., Fülöp, M., Adonu, J., Spiewak, S. Neto, F., & Hernandez Plaza, S. (2012). Mate value and self-esteem: Evidence from eight cultural groups. *PLoS One*, 7(4): e36106. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0036106>
- Goshadze, M. (2020). The noise silence makes: The Ghanaian state negotiates ritual ban on noise making in Accra (Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University). <https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37365937>
- Gyekye, K. (1998). Person and community in African thought. In P. H. Coetze & A. P. J. Roux. *Philosophy from Africa* (pp. 317–336). South Africa: International Thomson Publishing.
- Heaton, T., James, S., & Ohenba-Sakyi, Y. (2009). Religion and socioeconomic attainment in Ghana. *Review of Religious Research*, 51, 1, 71-86.
- Hills, M. D. (2002). Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's values orientation theory. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 4(4). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1040>

- Hofstede Insights (n.d.). Compare countries. Retrieved from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations: software of the mind*. London, UK: McGraw-Hill.
- Hofstede, G. H. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Huntington, S. P. (1971). The change to change: Modernization, development, and politics. *Comparative Politics*, 3(3), 283-322. <https://doi.org/10.2307/421470>
- Inglehart, R. (1971). The silent revolution in Europe: Intergenerational change in post industrial societies. *American Political Science Review*, 65, 991–1017. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1953494>
- Inglehart, R. (1990). *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and postmodernization: Cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, R. (1999). Postmodernization erodes respect for authority, but increases support for democracy. In P. Norris (Ed.), *Critical Citizens* (pp. 236/256). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Inglehart, R. (2017). Changing values in the Islamic world and the West. Changing values in the Islamic world and the west social tolerance and the Arab Spring. In M. Moaddel & M. Gelfand (Eds.). *Values and political action in the Middle East* (pp. 3-24). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Inglehart, R. F., & Oyserman, D. (2004). Individualism, autonomy, and self expression. The human development syndrome. In H. Vincken, J. Soeters, & P. Ester (Eds.), *Comparing cultures: Dimensions of culture in a comparative perspective* (pp 74–96), Boston, MA: Brill.
- Inglehart, R., & Baker, W. E. (2000). Modernization, cultural change, and the persistence of traditional values. *American Sociological Review* 65, 19–51. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657288>
- Inglehart, R., & Welzel, C. (2005). *Modernization, cultural change and democracy*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Inglehart, R., Haerpfer, C. Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano, J., Lagos, M., Norris, P., Ponarin, E., & Puranen, B., et al. (2014). *World values survey: Round six - country-pooled datafile* Version: www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp. Madrid, Spain: JD Systems Institute.

- Keller, H. (2016). Psychological autonomy and hierarchical relatedness as organizers of developmental pathways. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 371(1686), 20150070. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2015.0070>
- Keller, H. (2019). Culture and development. In D. Cohen & S. Kitayama (Eds.), *Handbook of Cultural Psychology* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 397-423). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Kumah-Abiwu, F., & Darkwa, S. K. (2020). Elections and democratic development in Ghana: A critical analysis. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 11(2), 1-12.
- Kwame, A. (2019). An ethnographic sketch of social inter-actions in Dagbon society: The case of greeting, sharing drinks and kola nut. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research at Trent*, 2 (1), 1-20.
- Moss, T. J., & Majerowicz, S. (2012). No longer poor: Ghana's new income status and implications of graduation from IDA. *Center for Global Development Working Paper*, (300).
- National Development Planning Commission (2020). *Societal values and national development: Consolidating the gains*. <https://www.ndpc.gov.gh/news/2337/>
- Nukunya, G. K. (2003). *Tradition and change in Ghana: An introduction to sociology*. (2nd ed.). Accra, Ghana: Universities Press.
- Obeng, S. & Stoeltje, B. J. (2002). Women's voices in Akan juridical discourse. *Africa Today*, 21-41.
- Osei-Tutu, A., Belgrave, F. Z., & Dzokoto, V. A. (2023). Conceptualizations of effective parenting: perspectives of religious counselors in Ghana. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 49 (1), 3-31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00957984221077510>
- Osei-Tutu, A., Dzokoto, V., Adams, G., Hanke, K., Kwakye-Nuako, C., Adu-Mensa, A. & Appiah-Danquah, R. (2018). 'My own house, car, my husband, and children': Meanings of success among Ghanaians. *Heliyon* 4, Article e00696. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2018.e00696>
- Owusu, M. (1996). Tradition and transformation: Democracy and the politics of popular power in Ghana. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34(2), 307-343.
- Pinto, R. (2019). The effect of western formal education on the Ghanaian educational system and cultural identity. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 88(1), 5-16.
- Sarbah, C. J. E. (2010). A critical study of Christian-Muslim relations in the central region of Ghana with special reference to traditional Akan values. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham). Retrieved from UBIRA E-Thesis database. <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/1207>

- Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theory and empirical tests in 20 countries. In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 25, (pp. 1-65). New York, NY: Academic Press. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60281-6](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60281-6)
- Schwartz, S. H. (1994). Are there universal aspects in the structure and contents of human values? *Journal of Social Issues*, 50(4), 19–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1994.tb01196.x>
- Schwartz, S. H. (2006). A theory of cultural value orientations: Explication and applications. *Comparative Sociology*, 5, 137–182. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156913306778667357>
- Schwartz, S. H. (2012). An overview of the Schwartz theory of basic values. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1116>
- Schwartz, S.H. (1996). Value priorities and behavior: Applying a theory of integrated value systems. In C. Seligman, J.M. Olson, & M.P. Zanna (Eds.), *The psychology of values: The Ontario Symposium*, Vol. 8 (pp.1-24). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum
- Swain, J. (2018). *A hybrid approach to thematic analysis in qualitative research: Using a practical example*. SAGE Publications.
- The Word Bank (2021). GDP growth (annual %) – Ghana. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2019&locations=GHandstart=1961&view=chart>
- Wang, Z. (2005). Before the emergence of critical citizens: Economic development and political trust in China. *International Review of Sociology*, 15(1), 155-171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906700500038876>
- Welzel, C., & Inglehart, R. (2010). Agency, values, and well-being: A human development model. *Social Indicators Research*, 97(1), 43-63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-009-9557-z>
- World Value Survey (2023). WVS Cultural Map: 2023 Version. Retrieved from <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSNewsShow.jsp?ID=467>
- Yankah, K. (1995). *Speaking for the chief: Okyeame and the politics of Akan royal oratory*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.