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**Negotiating return after witchcraft
accusations: an evaluation of reintegration
projects in Northern Ghana's witch camps**

Master's Dissertation

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Chapter 1 - Introduction: background and significance

1.1 Background of the study

Witchcraft accusations in Ghana are an enduring social phenomenon, with a long-lasting impact on the lives of those accused. Accusations primarily target elderly, widowed, and vulnerable women believed to cause misfortune, illness, death, destroy crops, or spiritually harm others. The accusations lead to severe human rights violations and result in distressing social consequences, including physical violence against the alleged witch, dispossession, and forced displacement to the so-called witch camps. These camps are controversial settlements where the accused individuals are banished and live under the spiritual authority of the traditional priest and custodian of the camp (*tindana*). Belief in witchcraft is constitutionally protected under the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. However, ongoing legislative efforts aim to criminalise witchcraft allegations, that is the act of accusing, declaring, and labelling an individual as a witch.

Anthropological scholars have demonstrated that witchcraft should not be understood as mere superstition, but as a dynamic moral and social language through which communities interpret and regulate misfortune, inequalities, power, risk, and social change (Mair, 1964; Geschiere, 1996; Onyinah, 2002; Azongo, 2020; Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023). The historical transformations of witchcraft accusations originate from precolonial contexts where accusations were part of ritual systems pursuing moral regulation; with the colonial and missionary interventions, these ritual practices were rearticulated due to legal prohibition and Christian demonology. In post-independence Ghana, the proliferation of Pentecostal churches transformed traditional beliefs into a moral and theological critique of wealth and inequalities, thus using witchcraft discourse to negotiate social tensions and capitalist morality. Finally, the new emerging actors, such as NGOs and human rights advocacy, contest the legitimacy and consequences of the accusations.

Contemporary debates on witchcraft accusations are therefore situated between multiple realities: customary authorities, social traditions, state law, and international human rights frameworks. National outrage against witchcraft accusations, and its most violent consequences, was catalysed by the brutal lynching of Madam Mariama Akua Denteh in

2020, which prompted legislative reform efforts to criminalise the practice of witchcraft accusations. At the same time, a wider national movement, the Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusations (CAWA), was established to connect the work of several local and international NGOs, academic institutes, and civil society to advocate against the accusations of persons as witches, and against the violence and stigma created by the accusations. Their advocacy is based on three main pillars: legal reform, education campaigns, and reintegration initiatives. The long-term goal is to close the camps and reintegrate the accused women into their communities.

The witch camps, however, illustrate a dual reality: some women and the *tindaamba* describe them as protective sanctuaries, the only place where accused individuals can live safely, while other actors portray them as sites of strain and human rights violations. In this context, reintegration, therefore, can not be a straightforward humanitarian event, but it becomes a deeply negotiated and delicate process, which involves the reconciliation with kinship, facing spiritual fears, social constraints, and community authority.

1.2 Significance of the study

Research inside the camps is not uncommon, however, as Mutaru and Sekyi (2023: 46) stated, there is a need for further research “investigat[ing] successful – and unsuccessful – cases of reintegration, including what local stakeholders deem to be the secrets of the successes. Such a study could lead to suggestions for research-based and potentially more sustainable forms of reintegration”. This thesis wishes to respond to this call by offering a qualitative, ethnographically grounded analysis of reintegration efforts in three witch camps in Northern Ghana and by examining how return is negotiated, contested, hindered, and experienced by accused women and other stakeholders, and how it can be improved.

This research focuses on three witch camps in Northern Ghana, Kpatinga, Gnani, and Kukuo camps, and examines reintegration initiatives implemented by the NGO Songtaba. This qualitative and ethnographic research draws on interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and document analysis.

The scope of the study is intentionally limited to the reintegration process and its socio-cultural implications, though the relatively short duration of fieldwork and logistical constraints limit longitudinal analysis of reintegration outcomes.

This thesis will navigate through and analyse the tension between human rights-based reintegration initiatives and the local logics, moral and spiritual, that sustain accusations and negotiate belonging. Anthropological research illustrates how witchcraft discourse is employed as a social and political language to challenge inequalities, authority, deviance, economic anxieties, suffering, and exclusion. Effective policy interventions that aim to eliminate unsubstantiated accusations and facilitate return should employ an integrated and systemic approach encompassing legal reform, awareness and education campaigns, and structured reintegration programs. Otherwise, if these layered dynamics underlying the causes of accusations and exclusion are not adequately engaged, the risk for reintegration initiatives is to perpetuate social tensions and fail at reintegration.

A current gap in the research is the insufficient qualitative research examining how accused women experience reintegration, how success and failure are locally and socially defined, and the potential pathways to improvement. This research seeks to fill this gap by ethnographically evaluating the current state of reintegration initiatives.

1.3 Research questions and structure of the thesis

This research is guided by the overarching question: how do witchcraft accusations in Ghana function as a social and political language reflecting inequalities and shifting community dynamics, and how effective are reintegration initiatives in negotiating return between local logics of belonging and international human rights frameworks?

To address this wider research question, other sub-questions were formulated and addressed in the following five chapters.

Chapter 2 established the theoretical framework necessary to historically contextualise witchcraft accusations in Ghana as a social and political language, and their transformations from a mechanism of social cohesion to sources of exclusion and vulnerability. The analysis

focuses on these historical and anthropological transformations, and traces their evolution from precolonial ritual systems of moral regulation through colonial disruption and missionary translation, Pentecostal re-articulations, to post-colonial and contemporary human rights debates.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology and ethnographic approach adopted during the four-week-long fieldwork research in Ghana, between Accra, Tamale, and the witch camps in the Northern Region. It further reflects on the ethical considerations of the research and its limitations.

The thesis then delves into the case study of Northern Ghana in chapter 4, which depicts how the accusations reflect gendered power relations, socio-economic inequalities, tensions within kinship systems, generational hierarchies, and shifting moral economies. The chapter explores the so-called witch camps, revealing their current health and material conditions, and engages with the debate over whether these camps function as safe havens and places of protection or as sites of social exclusion. The chapter also explores the role of the *tindaamba* as the physical and spiritual custodians of the camps. Finally, it analyses Ghana's current legal framework, highlighting how existing formal legal guarantees fail to provide adequate protection for alleged witches.

Chapter 5 brings together the stories and voices of accused women, *tindaamba*, and NGO workers to evaluate the reintegration strategies and their practical realities. It examines the reintegration programs of organisations such as Songtaba and investigates the challenges that accused women face both during and after the reintegration process. Reintegration is conceptualised not as a singular humanitarian outcome, but as a fragile and negotiated social process between the universal human rights framework and local moral and cultural logics. This chapter analyses how reintegration depends on interconnected conditions of safety, sustainable livelihoods, secure housing, family mediation, and sustained community education. It further demonstrates that NGOs' interventions, despite playing a crucial role through community sensitisation, livelihood support, and monitoring, remain structurally limited due to inconsistent state engagement and uncomprehensive legal reform.

Based on the ethnographic findings, chapter 6 proposes context-sensitive strategies and policy-oriented recommendations to improve protection mechanisms, strengthen reintegration pathways for accused individuals, and improve minimum living standards in the camps.

Through this structure, the thesis seeks to respond to Mutary and Sekyi's (2023) call for research-based and sustainable approaches to reintegration, and it attempts to contribute both to academic debates, the ongoing policy discussions, and reintegration efforts in Ghana.

Chapter 2 - Witchcraft accusations in Ghana: historical transformations and social-political meanings

2.1 Defining witchcraft

The understanding of witchcraft has profoundly changed over time due to the influence of a number of historical and cultural factors. Early conceptualizations framed it as a moral and ontological system that regulated communal life, whereas contemporary ones express it as a social and political language employed to negotiate inequality, belonging, and moral anxieties. This shift reflects both continuity and change: witchcraft beliefs intersect with questions of gender, kinship, governance, and human rights. To understand the transformation of witchcraft's conceptualization is to situate accusations within broader community dynamics and to acknowledge how reintegration initiatives interact with local epistemologies and global human rights concerns.

For the purpose of the current contribution, a self-contained definition of witchcraft must be reached, despite the term referring to a diverse set of beliefs, practices, and interpretations that are culturally, historically, and geographically dependent. Some scholars raised compelling terminological concerns about the use of terms such as witchcraft and sorcery. First of all, Evans-Pritchard proposed to differentiate the two terms based on intentionality: while witchcraft was believed to be a “psychic act” and “a substance in the bodies of witches (...) attached to the edge of the liver”, sorcery included the performance of “magic rites with bad medicines” (Evans-Pritchard, 1937: 1-2). However, anthropologists such as Geschiere and Fisiy (1994) reject this classical anthropological distinction, arguing that “these Western terms are awkward translations of African notions which have much broader implications” (Geschiere and Fisiy, 1994: 338). Similarly, Hsu notes that the Western literature does not consistently distinguish between these two terms, using them interchangeably to refer to “the use of magic powers or spirit agencies” (Hsu, 2019: 37). Second of all, Western contexts have historically associated witchcraft with “the worship of Satan and the practice of magic or sorcery” (Onyinah, 2002: 118); this definition contrasts with African usages, especially with “Ghanaian traditional religions where the witch is always the focus” (Onyinah, 2002: 118). For this reason, he rejects “the traditional definitions of the terms ‘demonology’ and

‘witchcraft’ [that] do not fit into the Ghanaian situation” (Onyiah, 2002: 118) and instead proposes a new term ‘witchdemology’ that represents “a synthesis of both the western and the Ghanaian concepts (...) [and is used] to describe the beliefs and practices of deliverance ministries in Ghana [that] include witchcraft, demonology, ancestral curses, and exorcism” (Onyiah, 2002: 118).

It would be more appropriate to use neutral and not connotative terms like occult forces, or witchdemology. However, the African public discourse has claimed the Western terms, witchcraft and sorcery, in newspapers and everyday conversations to identify what is being talked about (Geschiere and Fisiy, 1994: 338). For this reason, this thesis will retain the term witchcraft while taking into account the existence of the terminological considerations noted above. Nevertheless, the term is used here in a descriptive, analytical way, rather than according to any normative or culturally specific assumptions that individual readers may bring to it.

Many African societies define witchcraft as part of a broader cosmology in which “mystical forces or powers that can be trapped by human beings who have the knowledge to do so for good or ill” (Azongo, 2020: 29). A witch, may, therefore, be defined as a person “who can use his/her power to cause misfortunes, death, problems in relationships, lack of progress in life and even business losses” (Azongo, 2020: 29). Similarly, in Ghanaian contexts, witches “were thought to feed on human flesh and drink human blood, inflict material losses on people, infest diseases on people, and make people ignoble through their misdeeds. Consequently, all misfortunes were thought to be the work of witches” (Onyiah, 2002: 112). As Professor Azumah highlighted in his lecture¹, while referencing John Mbiti, who is considered the father of African theology, African cosmology distinguishes between good magic and evil magic. Good magic is used by specialists, for instance in medicine-related practices, for the welfare of the community, while evil magic is used to harm people or their property; it is in evil magic that “we find witchcraft at work”. Against this background, the difference between witches and sorcerers is also worth mentioning. Witches are believed to be born with their supernatural powers; they are believed to be evil and to use their powers to harm, and since they are evil and harmful, they pretend to be ordinary human beings and exercise their powers in secret. On the other hand, sorcerers acquire their powers through training and study, often as apprentices to another sorcerer. They can choose to practice either

¹ The Sanneh Institute - Monthly lectures: “The Bible and witchcraft belief in Africa”. 13 January 2026.

good (white) magic or evil (black) magic. Sorcerers practice in public and often in an official capacity; for instance, a witch doctor is considered a sorcerer, not a witch.

Suffering, misfortune, and moral order can also be explained and interpreted by resorting to witchcraft. Mair argues that in some societies with limited notions of scientific causation, witchcraft beliefs are part of “the universe as a moral order” (Mair, 1964: 335) and serve as an “explanation of undeserved suffering” (Mair, 1964: 336). Similarly, more recent analysis by Amnesty International (2025) considers witchcraft a system of beliefs through which communities interpret harm and inequality. The belief of witchcraft itself is “protected under the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (Amnesty International, 2025: 10) and it is not inherently harmful; however it becomes problematic when “it is used to attack people with particular profiles” (Amnesty International, 2025: 10). Peculiar to the Ghanaian context, accusations of witchcraft result in the exclusion and relocation of the alleged witch to dedicated camps, the so-called witch camps.

Witchcraft emerges as a term shaped by local beliefs, social structures, moral frameworks, historical processes, and wider debates on gender, modernity, and power. Further analysis concerning these aspects will follow.

2.2 Historical transformations of accusations

Witchcraft accusations in Ghana have undergone profound historical transformations: from being precolonial mechanisms of moral regulation to becoming modern expressions of social tension, political anxiety, and human rights discourse. Each phase of this trajectory both reflects changing configurations of authority, economy, and belief and demonstrates how witchcraft operates as a flexible idiom through which communities articulate fears about power, inequality, and belonging. Tracing these shifts reveals that witchcraft is not an archaic residue but a living discourse of power, one through which communities interpret misfortune, negotiate belonging, and contest moral legitimacy. The evolution of witchcraft discourse, from ritual ordeal to bureaucratic and humanitarian management, thus exemplifies what has been described as a language of power: a means by which African societies regulate moral

order and articulate political legitimacy (Geschiere, 1996: 82-84; Mair, 1964: 335-336; Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 34; Onyinah, 2002: 108-109).

2.2.1 Precolonial foundations

In the precolonial period, witchcraft accusations were embedded within systems of moral regulation and societal principles. Northern Ghanaian communities historically believe in two main types of ritual procedures that could lead to a proven diagnosis of an individual as a witch (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 35). These ordeals are the *odum* poison test and the corpse-carrying divination. In the *odum* ordeal, the accused person must ingest a concoction made from tree bark. If the person vomits, it signifies innocence, whereas if the person dies, it confirms they were guilty (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 35-36). The corpse-carrying divination, instead, happens after the death of a person: it is believed that the deceased's body will guide its bearers to the alleged witch or culprit responsible for the death (Gray, 2001: 340-341).

These ordeals were not considered arbitrary or violent interventions; instead, they were regarded as forms of divine arbitration, valid and consistent, that combined theological and juridical rationalities (Gray, 2001: 341-349). The latter rituals seeking to determine whether someone possesses witchcraft are performed by the *tindaamba* (singular *tindana* or *tendana*) and the shrine custodians, who are traditional African priests (Azumah, 2021: 2; Mutaru and Sekyi, 2018: 31). The authority of these rituals lies with the *tindaamba* because they are considered the ritual intermediaries between the living and the spirit world, and the only ones who can preside over the rituals and interpret their outcomes (Azumah, 2021: 2). Their authority was together spiritual, moral, and economic: they maintained the shrines, prescribed ritual reparations or fines, and oversaw social reintegration or exclusion of those accused (Gray, 2001: 340-341; Drucker-Brown, 1993: 535).

2.2.2 Colonial disruption

With colonial conquest came profound disruption of the moral and ritual economy that witchcraft represented, and a new foreign epistemology of justice was introduced. Consequently, indigenous practices were framed as irrational superstition. As the British

consolidated their control over modern-day Ghana, which was at the time referred to as the Gold Coast, from 1874 on they sought to suppress poison ordeals and other “dangerous superstitions” (Gray, 2001: 363) used to establish whether a person was a witch or not, thus aligning imperial governance with the moral rhetoric of self-perceived modernity, civilization, and Christian reform (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 35-36). This implied that people who would accuse someone else of witchcraft would get fined, and those who killed an alleged witch would get prosecuted (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 35). Not surprisingly, banning witchcraft not only did not eradicate the local belief but, conversely, led to a proliferation of shrines aimed at protection from witchcraft or its detection (Parker, 2004: 417-418; Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 35). As a response, British rule, with the intention of properly implementing the ban on the belief, extended the ban to include shrines and anti-witchcraft activities, with the undesired result of “only increas[ing] locals’ intransigence toward British control” (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 35). As a middle ground, in 1927, the British introduced the Native Administration Ordinance (NAO) that allowed Native Tribunals to hear witchcraft cases but explicitly prohibited the use of “noxious medicines” (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 35). The NAO was an attempt to accommodate indigenous beliefs while preventing violent practices. However, the Native Tribunals “constantly abused the power granted them and acted *ultra vires*” (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 35-6). The Native Tribunals resorted to witchcraft testing and shrines, as well as extorting confessions of witchcraft through physical coercion or otherwise. Moreover, the ban on poison ordeals and shrines was defied by the communities, whose conception of justice remained grounded in ritual confessions and spiritual verification, eventually petitioning for the restoration of voluntary confessions and the right to consult oracles (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 36). The colonial administration partially relented through the Native Custom (Witch and Wizard Finding) Order of 1930, which legalised certain forms of voluntary consultation, signaling the limits of colonial control over indigenous epistemologies of truth (Gray, 2001: 349-356).

British rule thus asserted moral authority and reshaped the ritual-legal landscape in contradictory ways. Such evolution of the applicable normative regime mattered not only for procedure, but also for the inherent nature of the phenomenon: what was once central to communal and traditional justice was reconceptualised as pertaining to mere secular and bureaucratic matters. Yet, when Native Tribunals persisted in invoking oracles, the colonial government faced the somewhat ironic reality that its own laws enabled new forms of coercion and public scandal (Gray, 2001: 349-351).

A striking case occurred in 1930 at the Tongo shrine in Suhum. The *Gold Coast Times* reported that a local tribunal in Winnebah ordered an elderly woman to undergo an oracle test to determine if she was a witch. The ritual involved stabbing a fowl: “if the bird died breast upward, then the oracle had declared the old woman innocent. If it died with its breast down, she was a witch. If found guilty, the old woman would be treated with a special medicine that would extinguish the power of witchcraft, a presence the Akan call *bayi*, within her” (Gray, 2001: 339). Her son protested, arguing that as a Christian, his mother should not be subjected to such a traditional test. The newspaper criticised the inconsistency, noting that “when heathen women are accused of witchcraft they are arrested, beaten, and sent to [the Tongo oracle]; and it will be a pity if a different treatment is to be meted to Christian women” (The *Gold Coast Times*, 22 February 1930, in Gray, 2001: 339). The incident triggered debate and prompted the colonial administration to revoke Native Tribunals’ authority over witchcraft cases and outlaw “the practice of witch or wizard finding” (Gray, 2001: 339). Following appeals by Kobina Assifu, Tongo shrine head priest, represented by lawyer J. B. Danquah, the ban was amended in 1932 to allow voluntary oracle consultations (Gray, 2001: 358).

The Tongo controversy illustrates the clash between colonial rationality and indigenous moral order. As Natasha Gray shows, suicides, inquests, and missionary exposés surrounding oracular trials provoked widespread debate and administrative intervention (Gray, 2001: 340-342, 356-362). Thus, while the British prohibitory and then compromise-based approaches did not eliminate witchcraft discourse, they instead reconfigured it. As a matter of fact, while the accusations persisted, the coercive oracles were delegitimised, shrine priests and ritual specialists gradually moved from punitive ordeals to milder practices of voluntary confession and spiritual cleansing (Gray, 2001: 341). As Gray observes, “[t]he law in colonial Ghana made a decisive contribution to the eventual transformation of witch-cleansing from a coercive, quasi-judicial process driven by accusation into a voluntary, therapeutic practice centered on confession” (Gray, 2001: 341). These shifts highlight how colonial power was not a monolithic replacement but an entangled negotiation between juridical and epistemological orders.

By the 1940s, the intensity of anti-witchcraft movements decreased, and the old shrine system was gradually replaced by prophetic Christian churches as they spread across Ghana. As Parker notes, “the healing and protective powers of African gods began to be replaced by those offered by the burgeoning numbers of prophetic Christian churches” (Parker, 2004:

393-394). Witchcraft began to be interpreted through Christian idioms of sin, salvation, and demonic possession. Missionaries played a crucial role in the shift to this new moral field: they translated Christian views to local populations by categorising indigenous deities as demons and recasting the Christian Devil as “the Lord of the former gods” (Meyer, 1992: 119). This shift was both ontological and linguistic: it redefined the spiritual hierarchy of African cosmology and reoriented the moral geography of witchcraft toward a Christian dualism of good and evil (Meyer, 1995: 237 and 244). Birgit Meyer’s ethnography demonstrates that Ewe Christians equated the Devil with witches, and pagan ideas were incorporated into a Christian conceptual universe in which “if you are a devil you are a witch, and if you are a witch, you are a devil” (Meyer, 1992: 98). Furthermore, “the Devil was the link between the missionaries’ and the Ewe’s worldview” (Meyer, 1992: 106), indeed “the Christian Devil became linked with African evil spirits, especially witchcraft [and that] the missionaries understood the Ewe religion as a work of the Devil” (Meyer, 1992: 105). Testimonies show that “if you are a good Christian you must believe in the existence of Satan. And if you believe in Satan you must believe in witchcraft. And when a person behaves abnormally, he is an agent of Satan, a witch” (Meyer, 1992: 112).

This linguistic and ontological shift allowed Pentecostal ministries to interpret social misfortune as demonic activity, thereby legitimising deliverance rituals. Witchcraft authority was delegitimised and recast within a Christian moral economy of sin and deliverance, producing a new interpretive register (Meyer, 1992: 106). Hence, accusations became understood through the idiom of spiritual warfare, a discourse intensified within Ghanaian Pentecostalism (Meyer, 1995: 243-244). Meyer shows that the Devil’s image, transmitted through colonial and missionary translation, continues to shape contemporary “witch-demology”, a synthesis of witchcraft, demonology, and Pentecostal deliverance (Onyinah, 2002: 113-119). This aspect will be later analysed in this chapter.

2.2.3 Post-independence state and rights discourse

Ghana was the first African country to achieve independence from colonial rule on March 6, 1957. After the independence, the country inherited a layered moral and legal landscape, characterised by the coexistence of colonial legal frameworks and postcolonial concerns on development, inequality, and modernity. During the twentieth century, witchcraft accusations

persisted, and often increased in frequency during periods of political or economic instability (Mutaru, 2018: 255-256; Onyinah, 2002: 108; Amnesty International, 2025: 3-8).

In July 2020, Madam Mariama Akua Denteh was publicly lynched at age 90. Her brutal assassination was recorded, and the video became viral: the conscience of the nation was shocked, and the tragic event became a national trauma that triggered reform and prompted the formation of the Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusations (CAWA, hereinafter referred to as the Coalition). The Coalition is formed by local and international NGOs and civil society organizations, including but not limited to The Sanneh Institute (TSI), Songtaba, Amnesty International Ghana, ActionAid Ghana, Legal Resources Centre, Oxfam in Ghana, International Alliance Against Witch-hunts, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Ghana, and LAWA Ghana. The Coalition played a fundamental role in drafting the 2023 amendment to the Criminal Offences Bill to criminalise witchcraft accusations, also referred to as the Anti-Witchcraft Bill or the Amendment Bill (Amnesty International, 2025: 8; Azumah, 2021: 1; Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 30-31).

During fieldwork research, interviews with prominent actors of the Coalition and with members of Parliament facilitated the understanding of the Amendment Bill legislative process.

Honorable Francis-Xavier Kojo Sosu is a Member of Parliament for the Madina Constituency and the main sponsor of the Criminal Offences (Amendment) Bill, and Professor John Azumah is the founding executive director of The Sanneh Institute. They explained that the Amendment Bill was first proposed as a private members' bill, sponsored by the Coalition. However, it remained unimplemented as it was never signed into law by the President. As the 9th Parliament of Ghana commenced its mandate in January 2025, the proposed Amendment Bill was to be reintroduced, this time as a government-sponsored bill. Honorable Sosu's advocacy was supported by over 9 members of Parliament, and by Dr. Agnes Naa Momo Lartey, the newly appointed Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Protection: marking the first time that a Minister of the current Government has issued a public statement against witchcraft accusations (France24 English, 2025: min 09:10-10:06). Despite the amendment bill not having yet concluded the legislative procedure to assume force of law, its proponents hope that, once signed, it will have a deterrent effect leading to an overall decrease in the number of women accused, and in a gradual closure of witchcraft camps. Despite the latter intentions underlying the bill, it is imperative to note that its material scope is limited to

criminalising the act of accusing someone of being a witch, not the belief in witchcraft itself, given the necessity to remain within the confines of the right to freedom of thought and belief, thus exemplifying the ongoing tension between human rights discourse and local moral economies (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 29-30; Azumah, 2021: 1; Amnesty International, 2025: 65).

State-led campaigns and NGO initiatives, such as the Coalition, have called for the closure of the so-called witch camps and supported the reintegration of accused women into their original communities. Despite this, the *tindaamba* continue to defend these settlements as protective shelters rather than punitive spaces (Azongo, 2020; Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023; Mutaru, 2018). From their perspective, the camps function as pragmatic moral compromises: they are places where individuals normally perceived as social threats can live under their ritual supervision, thereby maintaining communal stability (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 31-37; Azumah, 2021: 3).

During the postcolonial period, the new normative actors responsible for the regulation of witchcraft were the state and international human rights institutions. Despite the accusation persisting, and still disproportionately affecting older and economically vulnerable women, new types of instruments and practices emerged, including legal advocacy, media scrutiny, and NGO intervention (Amnesty International, 2025: 8; Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 31-38). This paradigm shift presents several challenges for the actors involved: these difficulties were highlighted during reintegration programs led by ActionAid and various faith-based organizations, which had to navigate complex negotiations among multiple stakeholders. These challenges, alongside the opportunities they generate, are at the core of this thesis and will be examined in greater depth in the following chapters. For instance, a relevant and frequent challenge was the portrayal of the camps: donors and NGOs report them as places where human rights violations are perpetrated daily and where there is no regard for people's dignity, whereas *tindaamba* and many residents report that the camps are safe havens that grant protection in a context of limited welfare infrastructure (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 31-37). The logics underpinning these views have been investigated and will be discussed at a later stage. All considered, reintegration thus becomes more than just a humanitarian project; it prompts a negotiation between two contradictory moral logics: the rights-based discourse on individual autonomy and self-determination on one hand, and the traditional ontology of protection, kinship responsibility, ritual credences, and faith on the other.

This contrast underscores that the challenges faced stem from a broader epistemological gap between the legalistic rationality of human rights advocacy and the relational moralities of local ontologies. As Crampton (2013: 199-200) notes, witchcraft beliefs in Ghana remain embedded, particularly in the moral ambivalence of aging and dependency: while the elderly are commonly respected as authoritative members of a community, if an older woman lacks strong kinship support, for instance, she is a widow or has neither children nor male protectors, she will become highly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations. As of 2010, the Ghanaian Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ)² (Quason, 2010) reported that statistics indicate roughly 1,000 accused women were residing in the six camps present in the North of Ghana (Crampton, 2013: 199). More recent data and fieldwork research show that the number of people living in these six camps is around 550 individuals (Amnesty International, 2025: 18-21; Azumah, 2021: 1).

International institutions, including the UNHCR and the U.S. Department of State, classify witchcraft accusations as a human rights concern linked to global regimes of gender protection and asylum (Crampton, 2013: 199-200). Yet, as Crampton's ethnography shows, rights-driven interventions often fail to address the relational and epistemological frameworks through which local communities understand misfortune. Crampton argues that a more effective advocacy arises from culturally embedded forms of mediation and reconciliation; approaches that work with, rather than against, the moral logics of kinship, obligation, and communal repair (Crampton, 2013: 199-202).

2.2.4 Pentecostal re-articulation and moral economy of wealth

As previously highlighted, after independence, many traditional anti-witchcraft shrines declined, but witchcraft discourse did not disappear; rather, it underwent a theological transformation. From the mid-twentieth century onward, witchcraft was redefined by Pentecostal and prophetic churches through a new idiom: belief in the supernatural and possession, the Devil, deliverance, prayer, confession, and replacing ritual ordeal with exorcism (Meyer, 1992; Meyer, 1995; Onyinah, 2002; Mutaru, 2018). In this context, witchcraft became a form of witch-demonology, also referred to as witchdemology, that can be explained as a type of spiritual conflict enacted through sermons, healing, and deliverance

² <https://chraj.gov.gh/>

rituals (Onyinah, 2002: 113-119). Witches were, indeed, considered not only moral deviants, but as agents of Satan that intended to hinder divine prosperity (Meyer, 1992: 112).

According to the Pentecostal re-articulation of witchcraft, material success was reframed as being potentially tainted by invisible evil forces (Meyer, 1995: 236-238). This moral economy of purity and prosperity revived some old concerns about envy, redistribution, and social balance, but those were articulated through a globalised Christian interpretation (Meyer, 1995: 252; Onyinah, 2002: 236-238). As a matter of fact, witchcraft discourse has become a theological critique of capitalist accumulation: in the case of wealthy people, they might be suspected of colluding with occult forces, while poor people, instead, aimed to be liberated from inherited curses and spiritual restraints (Onyinah, 2002: 113-19; Meyer, 1995: 252).

Geschiere also investigated the role of the so-called *kong* in Cameroon. It is a regional variant and idiom of “*sorcellerie de la richesse* [wealth-sorcery]” (Geschiere, 1996: 89), also referred to as a “super-sorcier” (Geschiere and Fisiy, 1994: 329). *Kong* represents a new form of witchcraft of wealth. According to this representation, *kong* transforms its victims into invisible labourers and exploits them into their workforce. Under authoritarianism in Cameroon, witchcraft narratives moralised political rivalry; instead, during the tentative democratisation of the 1990s, *kong*, and wealth-witchcraft, became a metaphor to contest elite enrichment, criticise exploitative accumulation, and the moral costs of modernization (Geschiere, 1996: 82, 87-91). As Geschiere notes (1996: 87), “*malgré cette ouverture, la sorcellerie reste autant présente qu’avant* [despite this opening, witchcraft remains as present as before]”: democratization did not diminish the force of witchcraft but intensified it, generating new suspicions between urban elites and their local communities.

In rural settings, the rapid accumulation of wealth may signal betrayal of communal reciprocity; for this reason, the wealthy dread visiting home for fear of occult aggression. Geschiere (1996: 87-91) observes this dynamic in Cameroon, where new elites try to avoid their villages out of fear and to prevent being accused. The Cameroonian one is a useful example to highlight a similar pattern in Ghana, where Pentecostal rhetoric about satanic riches expressed unease about inequality, corruption, and the ambiguous morality of success. In this sense, Pentecostalism became widespread in the Ghanaian context because “it supplies people with an image of the Devil which can be used not only to demonise traditional gods and ghosts but also to diabolise negative aspects of the capitalist world economy” (Meyer,

1995: 250). In both settings, people would “face and explain their problems and confront their hidden obsessions concerning wealth and health from a safe distance” (Meyer, 1995: 250). This safe distance is represented by “God’s dark opponent” (Meyer, 1995: 236), the Devil, which in turn is linked to witchcraft. The latter, thus, mediates tensions between traditional expectations of reciprocity and the competitive nature of capitalist individualism.

These comparative insights elucidate the Ghanaian case, where, similarly to Cameroon, economic transformation and changing elite-village relations have reshaped the expressions and targets of accusations. It has already been explained how witchcraft functions as a social language used by communities to interrogate inequality, demand redistribution, and to contest emerging patronage structures (Geschiere, 1996: 87-1991; Meyer, 1995: 238; Parker, 2004: 495). This is also important when considering that, given the sheer disparity in quantity between male and female subjects of accusations, it can be concluded that such accusations are gender-based, as some scholars show, older or widowed women, as well as successful women who exceeded societal expectations, often become the target of their community’s anxieties regarding economic and moral disorder (Amnesty International, 2025; Drucker-Brown 1993; ActionAid 2013; Azongo, 2020; Mutaru, 2018; Van Gent, 2011). It is, therefore, argued that witchcraft accusations are a dually conservative mechanism intended both to restore patriarchal order and to critique elite excess (Crampton, 2013: 199-202; Drucker-Brown, 1993: 535-539). This mix of factors makes interventions based purely on law or humanitarian reasons very complicated and hard to justify, both politically and morally.

Moreover, from the above considerations, the gender-based nature of witchcraft accusations appears apparent, indeed “[t]here is common understanding among scholars in the field of anthropology and human rights law, that suggest that witchcraft accusation is a gendered practice that tend to be bias towards women as a group” (Azongo, 2020: 30). Given that in patrilineal contexts, property and status are male responsibilities, therefore a woman lacking strong male kin protection becomes an outlier and can be easily singled out as a source of spiritual danger (Mair, 1964: 340-343). In this sense, witchcraft is also interpreted as a vocabulary of vulnerability. When offering assistance to accused women, Pentecostal pastors and human rights advocates act on fundamentally different moral premises: while the former seek to deliver the accused from demonic influence, the latter portray them as victims of patriarchal injustice (Crampton, 2013: 202; Mutaru, 2018: 267). These considerations shape

the kind of possible interventions and underscore the broader tensions on agency, belief, and gendered power.

2.3 Contemporary understandings and debates in anthropology

After an initial interest in witchcraft studies within anthropology, they were soon abandoned as they became engulfed in positivist studies that investigated witchcraft rationally and scientifically, as a social and psychic phenomenon. The discourse shifts when Geschiere publishes his book “Modernity of Witchcraft” (1997): here, witchcraft is studied not as an inheritance of past beliefs, but as a contemporary language through which social inequalities are articulated.

Witchcraft has, thus, reemerged as a central field of study in contemporary anthropology. The African contexts are especially investigated as the meanings of witchcraft have shifted in relation to colonialism, Christianity, globalization, and human-rights interventions. Early ethnographic and missionary work considered witchcraft to be a moral and religious system through which people could explain misfortune and maintain moral order. Witchcraft was part of a moral economy where it was believed that justice, reciprocity, and social balance were moderated by cosmological forces (Mair, 1964: 335-336). Against this backdrop, early colonial and missionary authorities treated witchcraft as superstition and assumed that such beliefs would inevitably be eliminated as modernization advanced (Merz, 2004: 572-74). Yet, postcolonial development studies have proven a different trajectory: witchcraft discourse has not only persisted through the decades but has also gained new visibility and legitimacy among elites and ordinary citizens in both rural and urban settings (Geschiere, 1997: 35-36).

Recent literature no longer interprets witchcraft as a residue of premodern irrationality or as an index of cultural backwardness; instead, it considers witchcraft as a dynamic moral idiom that is widely used by communities to interpret inequality, morality, risk, and social change under conditions of global modernity.

This shift was articulated by Peter Geschiere: he argues that for long, witchcraft and sorcery have served as idioms of power: “*les discours sur la sorcellerie ont toujours fourni un des*

idiomes préférés de l'interprétation du pouvoir et surtout de l'explication des inégalités de pouvoir en Afrique [the discourses on witchcraft have always provided one of the preferred idioms for interpreting power and especially for explaining inequalities of power in Africa]" (Geschiere, 1996: 82). Moreover, he observes a duality in witchcraft, used both as a weapon of the weak and a tool of the elite, that supports its conceptualization as a dynamic idiom that challenges and reinforces power: "[la sorcellerie] reflète souvent une tension entre jalousie et ambition [[witchcraft] often reflects a tension between jealousy and ambition]", serving "à la fois aux 'petits', comme arme égalisatrice contre les 'grands', et aux 'grands' eux-mêmes qui cherchent à consolider leur ascendant et à réaliser leurs ambitions [both to the 'little ones', as an equalizing weapon against the 'big ones', and to the 'big ones' themselves who seek to consolidate their ascendancy and realize their ambitions]" (Geschiere, 1996: 85). Geschiere notes that the success of the emerging elite is often seen as morally ambiguous: "l'origine inconnue et donc suspecte de leurs nouvelles fortunes place l'élite elle-même automatiquement dans l'aire de la sorcellerie [the unknown and therefore suspicious origin of their new fortunes automatically places the elite itself in the area of witchcraft]" (Geschiere, 1996: 85). Witchcraft thus becomes "un véritable nœud dans l'articulation entre la sorcellerie et les nouveaux rapports de pouvoir [a real knot in the articulation between witchcraft and the new power relations]" (Geschiere, 1996: 85). In Ghana, these insights resonate deeply as witchcraft accusations mediate the moral interpretation of social change, inequality and success, and provide an idiom to express suspicion, envy, and resentment within evolving social hierarchies.

Building on this tradition, Mutaru and Sekyi argue that witchcraft in Ghana should be understood as a positional concept and that beliefs, "irrespective of how they are viewed by others – true or false, right or wrong – (...) hold sway over the beholder and lead to enduring, unquestioned ontological representations of the world" (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 34). The two scholars carried out an ethnographic study among the Dagbamba ethnic group, and the insights situated witchcraft belief amid local cosmologies and international human-rights frameworks. The debates about witchcraft and modernity were reignited in 2020, after the lynching of Madam Mariama Akua Denteh, a 90-year-old alleged witch: contrary to modernization theories predicting witchcraft's decline (Onyinah 2002: 108), its persistence "is a strong refutation of this witchcraft-development thesis" (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 30).

Building on these insights, a “multiple modernities framework” (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 31) is proposed to explain that modernity is lived differently across contexts, and that witchcraft beliefs reflect these locally grounded experiences of reality. Crampton (2013: 199-200) shows that witchcraft accusations in Ghana became frameworks through which communities could negotiate and contest the legitimacy of social change, gendered hierarchies, economic precarity, and political uncertainty. It is interesting to note that “*la sorcellerie semble être le revers de la parenté: la réalisation effrayante qu’il y a de l’agression cachée à l’intérieur de ce cercle intime où ne devait régner que solidarité et confiance* [witchcraft seems to be the reverse of kinship: the frightening realization that there is hidden aggression within this intimate circle where only solidarity and trust should reign]” (Geschiere, 1996: 84). The role of kinship is particularly relevant to the witchcraft discourse: “witchcraft is indeed the dark side of kins” (Geschiere and Fisiyi, 1994: 325) that transforms intimacy into a space of danger and dependence into a source of suspicion, consequently exposing tensions within communities, between genders, and generations. This anthropological reframing marks a clear distinction from earlier interpretations that considered witchcraft as superstition or psychopathology.

Anthropologists have long struggled with the postmodern “crisis of representation” (Grinker and Steiner, 1997). The discipline’s ability to represent ‘the Other’ has been questioned by postmodern critiques such as Clifford and Marcus (1986): even though relativism and subjectivity were emphasised, there was limited guidance to engage with the lived realities of witchcraft.

Merz (2004) suggests that in order to allow anthropology to move beyond these impasses, a new paradigm should be developed and that it has to validate witchcraft as a meaningful human experience rooted in imagination, belief, and social practice. Merz advocates for a wider consideration of the tool of imagination, which, though underexplored, “has undoubtedly a lot to offer to anthropology (...) and lends itself to a better understanding of witchcraft through its ability to bridge and mediate the Western anthropological discourse with the African one” (Merz, 2004: 576-7).

A major strand of anthropological literature examines the relationship between witchcraft and the economy, often framed as “occult” economy (Merz, 2004: 573). Comaroff and Comaroff (1993: 92-105) argue that the increase of witchcraft discourse in Africa can be explained as a response to global capitalism and postcolonial state-building. Similarly, Geschiere (1997) and

Geschiere and Fisiy (1994) assert that new socio-economic and political transformations influence witchcraft discourse, which lends itself both as a register of these shifts and as a lens through which they become meaningful. Witchcraft discourses have also been demonstrated to articulate the contradiction of neoliberal capitalism: indeed, as previously analysed, the desire for wealth was associated with fears about its moral or supernatural origins (Meyer, 1995; Austen, 1993; Shaw, 1997). Meyer and Geschiere argue that demonological and witchcraft narratives emerge as responses to contexts of economic precarity and moral insecurity because these narratives make inequality, envy, and the distribution of risk socially actionable (Meyer, 1995: 252; Geschiere, 1996: 82).

Some methodological concerns were raised by critics arguing that approaches such as those of Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) risk treating witchcraft primarily as a metaphor for globalization, rather than a discourse with its own internal logic (Rutherford, 1999: 91-92; Englund, 1996: 259). From this critique, a broader epistemological tension within anthropology emerges: the discipline often relies on Western theoretical frameworks that may obscure local realities, even though anthropology has sought to pluralise and decolonise understandings of modernity.

Taken together, the historical and anthropological discussions presented in this chapter demonstrate that witchcraft in Ghana is not a residue of the past, but a dynamic and contextually embedded discourse through which communities confront the contradictions of modernity, the contrast between inequalities and the pursuit of prosperity, the negotiation of justice and power within plural moral orders, and the coexistence of spiritual and juridical explanations of misfortune (Geschiere, 1996: 81; Gray, 2001: 360-62). The overall historical transformation of witchcraft accusations has evolved from being ritualised systems of justice to flexible socio-political mechanisms to regulate inequality and power. Each transformation reconfigured witchcraft as a moral language without eliminating its social force.

Retaining witchcraft as a descriptive term has allowed for the analysis of witchcraft's dynamic discourse, its role as a moral language, and its continued capacity to mediate tensions between inequality and prosperity, spiritual and juridical authority, and local cosmologies and global publics.

The following analytical chapters build on these considerations: contemporary reintegration initiatives will be presented, analysed, and discussed to investigate how they are influenced by layered logic that intertwines history, law, Christian theology, and political economy.

Reintegration efforts and advocacy must acknowledge these layered logics; only by doing so can reintegration and advocacy avoid reproducing the inequalities and epistemic misinterpretations that witchcraft accusations in Ghana have historically experienced. To achieve this, effective interventions must translate contemporary human-rights principles into forms of protection that are locally meaningful, must address the economic vulnerabilities that cause accusations, and must engage with the accused people, camp custodians (*tindaamba*), and local communities acknowledging witchcraft's ritual, social, and political functions (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 31-38; Amnesty International, 2025: 65).

Chapter 3 - Research methodology and ethical considerations

This chapter outlines and analyses the methodological approach adopted in the research. Given the research's focus on lived experiences, local practices, and the negotiation between human rights frameworks and community logics, an ethnographic qualitative design was selected as the most appropriate. This approach allows for in-depth exploration of the practices, meanings, and challenges surrounding witchcraft accusation and the reintegration projects in Northern Ghana.

Fieldwork was carried out primarily in three witchcamps in Northern Ghana: Kpatinga, Gnani, and Kukuo, along with selected surrounding communities in Bimbila, where Songtaba has been involved in reintegration efforts.

The study engaged a range of interlocutors: accused women and other marginalised individuals living in the camps or already reintegrated; the *tindaamba*, as the gatekeepers and custodians of the camps; community leaders; project officers from Songtaba; a professor from The Sanneh Institute; and the politician sponsoring the anti-witchcraft bill. This sampling enabled comparisons across experiences and perspectives, revealing the positions of different actors and stakeholders. Data collection combined semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and focus groups to investigate how accusations and reintegration efforts unfold, with particular attention to the challenges and opportunities involved. This approach allowed for the capture of multiple, sometimes contrasting perspectives, highlighting the negotiations shaping reintegration processes. Field data were further contextualised through a review, both *ex* and *post ante*, of organizational reports, legal documents, and academic literature.

3.1 Selection of field sites and participants

The objective of the research was to engage directly with the actors involved in witchcraft accusations, including accused women, reintegrated women, *tindaamba*, and community chiefs. Access to the camps was facilitated through backstage work and institutional

connections with the NGO Songtaba, which pre-emptively contacted its focal persons on the ground and asked them to arrange my visits.

Songtaba is a Ghanaian non-governmental organization founded in 2005 and based in the Northern Region of Ghana. The name *Songtaba* derives from the union of two words in Dagbani, one of the local languages: *soŋ*, which means to help or assist, and *taba*, indicating each other/one another. The meaning of the name, helping one another, reflects the organization's core values of community engagement and solidarity. Songtaba operates across five regions in Northern Ghana (Northern, North East, Savannah, Upper East, and Upper West Regions). It is a women-led and community-based women's rights advocacy organization that promotes gender equality, social justice, and human rights, particularly advancing the rights of women, children, and other vulnerable groups. During its twenty-one years of work, Songtaba has engaged in a variety of focus areas, including education, integrated health, livelihoods (including climate change adaptation), governance, accountability and transparency, protection and security, human rights and justice, and poverty reduction, with the overall goals of addressing the structural inequalities of gender-based violence and discrimination. The organization also aims to support girls, young women, and youth to participate in leadership and decision-making, and through its livelihood programs, they support women's and youth empowerment when it comes to agriculture value-chain-related activities, business development, and marketing initiatives using digital platforms to promote their businesses.

Notably, Songtaba has developed and implemented social protection programs for individuals accused of witchcraft, including support for the women living in the witch camps, advocacy for their safety and rights, efforts toward their reintegration, and the eventual closing of these camps. For this reason, Songtaba collaborates with international organizations such as Amnesty International, particularly on reporting and advocacy, and with ActionAid on the actual reintegration projects. Through its established and trusted presence in local communities, Songtaba played a crucial role in facilitating my fieldwork by granting access to the witch camps and enabling community-sensitive engagement with its residents and local authorities. Their support, expertise, access, local knowledge, and deep roots in the communities through their appointed focal persons and years of engagement have been pivotal to the success of this research.

There are four witch camps in Northern Ghana. Only one of them, Gambaga, could not be visited because of logistical constraints and access-related difficulties. In the other three camps, Kpatinga, Gnani, and Kukuo, each phase of fieldwork began with an interview with the *tindana* of the camp, or, in the specific case of Kukuo, first with the community chief and then with the *tindana*. The *tindaamba* function as gatekeepers of the camps; it was therefore both methodologically and ethically necessary to begin with them, allowing time for them to familiarise and trust me and my intentions, and accept my presence. I was accompanied by Mr Samadu Sayibu, Songtaba's project manager for the reintegration initiatives, who maintains strong relationships with the accused women and the *tindaamba* in the camps. His presence significantly facilitated access to the camps and to the accused women, and I encountered no resistance in being granted access or permission to interview eligible participants.

Engaging with the *tindaamba* was relatively straightforward, as there is only one per camp. More complex was the process of interviewing the accused women. In Kpatinga camp, the first site visited, there were sixteen women in total; fifteen participated in a single focus group. While this ensured broad participation, it also constituted a methodological limitation, given the difficulty of managing such a large group. For this reason, subsequent focus groups were divided so that no more than ten or eleven participants were present in each session. In Kukuo camp, thirty-two women were interviewed, divided into three focus groups of eleven, eleven, and ten participants respectively. In Gnani camp, by contrast, a focus group was not possible because many women were absent from the camp at the time; two individual interviews and participant observation were therefore conducted instead.

A further group of participants consisted of reintegrated women. The selection of the three reintegrated women interviewed was based on Songtaba's knowledge of who would be more open and collaborative, as well as on their geographical proximity to Bimbilla, where I resided. This choice was shaped not only by relational considerations but also by material constraints: transportation and mobility constituted a significant challenge, especially in areas where paved roads were absent, and journeys required hours of travel on difficult dirt roads.

In total, the research involved interviews with three *tindaamba*, one community chief (in Kukuo), three reintegrated women, and forty-nine accused women across the three camps. Simple random sampling was employed within the camps to ensure relatively representative participation. For reintegrated women, a convenience sampling strategy was used. While this

approach was clearly biased in terms of selection, it was also the only practically feasible option given logistical, relational, and temporal constraints.

3.2 Data collection techniques

An interview guide was developed for each category of interviewee: accused women, reintegrated women, *tindaamba*, community chiefs, and NGO stakeholders. Each guide consisted of a set of questions organised thematically to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for participants' narratives to emerge (Appendix 2). Interviews typically began with background questions to establish rapport, followed by questions addressing life before the accusation, the events surrounding the accusation, experiences immediately after the accusation, and daily life in the camp. The main sections focused on reintegration processes, perspectives on the anti-witchcraft Bill and human rights discourse, and finally, participants' future aspirations and plans. The majority of questions were open-ended to encourage in-depth narratives and allow participants to frame their experiences in their own terms. A limited number of closed questions were also included to collect specific and comparable data.

The interview guides were tested through a pilot phase with colleagues from Songtaba. This pilot served a dual purpose: it allowed for the practice of interview facilitation skills and, through feedback from individuals familiar with the local context, refined the wording of questions. As a result, several questions were rephrased to ensure greater cultural appropriateness, while others were modified or added to address emerging themes and aspects considered relevant for further investigation.

Focus groups were employed to collect in-depth qualitative data on how women accused of witchcraft perceive and reflect on reintegration practices. This method was selected to explore not only individual viewpoints but also shared meanings, collective interpretations, and points of convergence or divergence among participants. The primary objective was to understand participants' opinions on existing reintegration practices, their perceptions of why current arrangements persist, the views they hold, and, crucially, their own proposals for improvement. Particular attention was paid to moments of discussion and disagreement, as

these interactions provided insight into internal community dynamics and differing priorities. Indeed, a defining characteristic of focus groups is the role of group interaction as a data-generating process. The dynamics between participants, such as agreements, contestation, and elaboration, were therefore actively encouraged and treated as analytically meaningful. However, in this specific research context, the advantages commonly associated with the ‘group effect’ also entailed important limitations. While focus groups are often considered less intimidating than individual interviews, the presence of other camp residents may have constrained some women’s willingness to speak freely. As it will be discussed in chapter 4.3, *tindaamba* act as gatekeepers and hold significant authority within the camps. Although *tindaamba* were not present during either focus groups or individual interviews, internal power dynamics among the women themselves may still have influenced participation. In particular, some women may have refrained from expressing critical views about relationships with the *tindana* or with other residents due to fear of repercussions or concerns that criticisms could be relayed to camp authorities. Maintaining a cordial relationship with the *tindana* is widely perceived as strategically important, as it can affect access to support and assistance. Consequently, participants may have engaged in self-censorship to avoid being perceived negatively: this highlights the importance of interpreting focus group data with caution, with close attention to cultural, social, and situational factors shaping participants' responses.

Furthermore, leadership structures within the camps also shaped focus group dynamics. Each camp has designated female leaders, six in Kukuo, two in Gnani, and three in Kpatinga, who serve as reference points for other women. Their responsibilities include supporting women who are ill or food-insecure, monitoring health conditions in the absence of the *tindana*, and representing camp residents in program meetings organised by NGOs such as ActionAid and Songtaba. Within the framework of a regional reintegration initiative, representatives from the camps are brought together to ensure the participation of accused women in decision-making processes. These leaders are commonly referred to as *magazia* or *gazia* (ActionAid, 2012: 4; Mutaru, 2018: 258-259). They are generally senior women, themselves victims of accusations, selected according to age hierarchy. Although the role of the *magazia* is not a primary focus of this research, it emerged as a relevant contextual factor during data collection. Notably, Mutaru (2018) reports that *magazia* are appointed by the *tindana* and function as senior female figures acting as “the principal coordinator or ‘liaison officer’ between the custodian [the *tindana*] and the other residents of the camps” (Mutaru, 2018:

258–259). This interpretation contrasts with how the role was described by several women interviewed in this study and highlights the importance of considering multiple perspectives. All *magazia* were present during the focus groups, and it was evident that they dominated the discussions. Despite efforts to ensure equal participation, they spoke more frequently, were rarely interrupted, and were regarded with visible respect, for instance, other participants did not speak while they were talking. These dynamics likely shaped the content of the discussions and must be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with accused women, *tindaamba*, the community chief, and representatives of institutions and NGO stakeholders. This method was chosen to allow both comparability across interviews and flexibility to explore in-depth individual life histories, experiences, beliefs, and perspectives. The interviews conducted within the camps were particularly valuable for collecting detailed narratives related to personal trajectories, perceptions of accusation and displacement, lived experiences in the camps, and opinions on the reintegration projects. Because the interviews were semi-structured, participants were able to emphasise issues they considered most compelling, while ensuring that key thematic areas relevant to the research questions were consistently addressed.

Participant observation, informal participation, and informal conversations were also employed. These methods enabled us to engage directly with the accused women, build meaningful connections, earn their trust, and create a safe space where they could feel comfortable sharing their perspectives. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of everyday life within the camps: living conditions, social interactions, and daily routines were observed, thereby providing additional context to the data gathered in the interviews and focus groups. In particular, the extended period spent in Kpatinga and Gnani camps facilitated informal exchanges with the accused women who voluntarily guided me around their living spaces, explained the conditions and challenges of their huts, and discussed daily challenges. These interactions provided valuable insights into the women's perceptions of dignity, basic needs, and desired reintegration practices. Overall, participant observation, informal conversations, and participation were pivotal to gaining a more contextualised understanding of camp life and reintegration needs, and reinforced the triangulation of data.

3.3 Data analysis

After each interview, I began not with transcription, but with my handwritten fieldnotes: partial, provisional records written in the immediacy of encounter, capturing main points, striking phrases, gestures, and moments that felt, if not yet clearly articulated, analytically suggestive. Soon after the interview day had ended, I returned to the audio recordings, listening again in order to produce a more complete version of the exchange. This was not simply an act of correction, but of thickening: the fieldnotes were expanded through the recordings, and the recordings were read through the sensibilities of the fieldnotes, allowing details overlooked in the intensity of the moment to re-enter the record. Alongside this, I added editorial notes in brackets that are traces of my own affective and perceptual position, marking sensations, doubts, emotional responses, and fleeting interpretations that would otherwise disappear from the analytic archive. This recursive process, in which listening, writing, and remembering folded back onto one another, was essential for producing fieldnotes that were not only precise in content but attentive to the conditions under which that content had been apprehended.

All notes were then consolidated into a single document (Appendix 3), which became the basis for thematic coding and pattern identification. Analysis proceeded iteratively: moving between my own field materials, comparative insights drawn from other researchers' work, and the theoretical frameworks outlined in chapter 2. Rather than a linear path from data to theory, the process unfolded as a series of returns, where concepts reshaped what could be seen in the field, and field encounters, in turn, unsettled and refined the concepts meant to explain them.

3.4 Research limitations

Although this research offers insight into witchcraft accusations in Ghana and reintegration efforts, it is necessarily shaped by a series of limitations and ethical tensions that arise not only from practical constraints but from the morally charged and socially precarious nature of the topic itself. These are not merely methodological limitations to overcome, rather, they are intrinsic in the form of knowledge that this research produced: what can be said, how it can

be said, and what remains uncertain are all shaped by the conditions under which the research unfolded. These reflections on epistemological reflexivity are crucial because they question how the research method(s) and theories chosen influence the knowledge that the research produces.

A primary limitation concerns time and financial resources. Effective fieldwork in the Northern Region was restricted to a relatively short period, two weeks, which constrained both the number of participants involved and the geographical reach of the research. These limits affected both the quantity of data collected and, mainly, the depth of engagement. As a matter of fact, repeated visits to the camps and long-term follow-up were complicated, although they might have revealed shifting relationships or evolving interpretations of accusations. What emerges, therefore, is not a longitudinal account of social transformation, but a series of densely situated moments: scenes thick with meaning, yet bounded by time.

A second limitation is the qualitative character of the study. The research relied only on a qualitative research method, namely, interviews and focus groups. Although interviewees advanced and discussed issues such as the difficulty of access to healthcare or the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Programme, it was not possible to gather quantitative and firsthand data on enrollment patterns or institutional functioning. For this reason, my findings were reviewed in conjunction with existing quantitative and qualitative studies, allowing for a form of triangulation that proved very useful to further contextualise my findings: my observations could be either supported, complicated, or challenged by other sources.

A further research limitation arises from the sensitive and potentially stigmatising nature of witchcraft accusations. In the context of the research, experiences of accusation, displacement, violence, and living conditions in the camps are not always understood and articulated in terms that align with international human rights or development frameworks. At first, when asked if there had been human rights violations in the camps, the accused women often answered no, only to go on a moment later to describe the very conditions in the camps, and complain about insecurity, lack of safe housing, and unreliable access to food and water. These are conditions that clearly constitute human rights violations in international frameworks, yet they were not experienced or named as such by those who lived through them. To overcome this, a context-sensitive approach was necessary: certain questions could not be asked directly, and some issues could only be approached obliquely or through

alternative framings. For instance, rather than asking whether their rights had been violated, asking whether they felt it was fair to have to sleep on the ground without mattresses proved a more effective way of eliciting reflection on hardship, responsibility, and moral expectation. While this limits comparability with other studies, it also underscores the importance of ethnographic attentiveness and participant-centered interpretation.

Mediation and interpretation pose a further constraint. The interviewees all spoke only Dagbani; the interviews were conducted through interpretation from Dagbani to English, which is my proficient working language, but still not my mother tongue. The interpretation was carried out either by Songtaba's project manager, Mr Samadu Sayibu, or by Mr Mustapha at Kukuo's camp. Therefore, meanings, emphases, and emotional textures may have been altered or lost in the process of interpretation. Rather than treating this solely as a methodological flaw, I understand interpretation as part of the social process through which knowledge was co-produced: mediators were not external actors, but had been working within those camps for years, therefore, in a way, they were also part of the dynamics of the context. Hence, they did not merely transmit meaning but actively shaped it, emphasising certain aspects of narratives while softening or omitting others. This was especially evident in focus groups, where discussions could at times become diffuse or diverted by interpersonal tensions. In these moments, the mediators' intimate knowledge of the community and of local social dynamics proved crucial: they were able to help me redirect conversation, soften emerging conflicts, and guide discussion back toward the issues at hand without imposing an external agenda.

3.5 Ethical considerations and reflexivity

Researching witchcraft accusations involves profound ethical responsibility. The main target group of this research was the alleged witches, and since they are victims of stigma, exclusion, and physical danger, this puts them in extremely vulnerable positions. Therefore, it was fundamental that the research design ensured their safety and confidentiality. Informed consent was treated as an ongoing process rather than a single event: interviewees were reminded of the study's aims and their participants' rights, that what they disclosed would not

be shared with the *tindana* or anyone else, and that they could withdraw or refuse to answer any question. Interviews were typically conducted outside the accused woman's hut, making sure the setting was private, and identifying details have been removed or altered to reduce the risk of social repercussions.

Another ethical consideration was the asymmetry between the participants and the researcher. As a young, white, European student, I was aware that my presence could shape what was said, how it was said, and what was left unsaid, indeed, "the ethnographer must try continually to be aware of how his or her presence may have shaped the data" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; 177). The interviewees may have framed their stories and narratives in a way that they believed could be meaningful, advantageous to them, or uncontroversial to an outsider. Throughout the research process, both during the fieldwork and during the writing phase, which is when the representation itself becomes an ethical act, it was essential to pay reflexive attention to this asymmetrical dynamic.

Ethical reflection also extended to interpretation. While documenting experiences that can be understood as human rights violations or structural marginalization, I sought to avoid imposing external frameworks that might flatten local meanings. Accusations of witchcraft, disputes over resources, and experiences of suffering cannot be fully captured through the language of law or development indicators alone. Analysis, therefore, required a constant balancing act between academic interpretation and fidelity to participants' own moral and cosmological worlds.

Researcher positionality and the effects of my presence in the field require explicit attention. I was never alone during fieldwork. I was accompanied by at least two people: a mediator from Songtaba and our driver, who also took on the role of photo and video recording the research. In Kukuo camp, another person joined us: Mr Mustapha, a community member, former assemblyman, and Songtaba's focal person in the area. It was through his contacts and facilitation that access to Kukuo camp became possible, and he also acted as a mediator. His presence had a dual effect. On the one hand, because he was well known to the accused women, the *tindana*, and the community chief, he made my presence less threatening. Interviewees were generally open, willing to speak, and comfortable interacting with me. During focus groups in Kukuo camp, his role was crucial in organising turn-taking, preventing the discussion from becoming chaotic, and ensuring that quieter participants were not entirely overshadowed. He sometimes drew my attention to particular situations in a

woman's life or to the silence of certain participants, enabling me to address issues I might otherwise have missed. On the other hand, precisely because he was embedded in local social relations, previous conflicts or alliances may have shaped what participants felt able to say in his presence. In Kukuo, where camp and community are not spatially separated, some participants may have censored themselves, aware that what they said could circulate within their own social world. What made access possible may also have shaped its limits.

My social position, characterised by my ethnicity, age, gender, and educational status, inevitably shaped access, interaction, and interpretation. My identity as a white European immediately positioned me as an outsider. Even when unspoken, whiteness and Europeanness carried symbolic associations with colonialism, Christianity, development aid, and global inequality. I was often assumed to be educated and wealthy, regardless of my student status. This perceived privilege sometimes encouraged strategic speech: several participants expressed hope that my work would help them or solve their problems, despite my repeated explanation that I was a student with no power to provide material assistance.

At the same time, my youth and gender complicated these dynamics. As a young woman, I was sometimes treated as unserious, particularly by male leaders. As it will be discussed in chapter 4, Kpatinga's *tindana*, Adam, told me he did not believe in witchcraft. After discussing this with Professor Azumah, it became clear that this statement was both about disbelief and about his perception of me as non-threatening and socially insignificant. In other settings, however, especially with accused and reintegrated women, my age and gender often facilitated trust and a sense of non-threatening presence.

Gender also shaped my relationship with alleged witches. I occupied an ambiguous position: potentially a sympathetic listener, yet also fundamentally distant from their experiences of age-based marginalization, poverty, and long-term social exclusion. This distance could not be erased, only acknowledged. Ethical considerations and reflexivity were, therefore, a critical and continuous process of self-awareness. The interviews with the alleged witches involved many stories of trauma, loss, abandonment, and distress. Listening to their stories, while being unable to share or resolve them, required ongoing ethical reflection: I was conscious of both the limits of empathy and the danger of being positioned, either by myself or by others, as an advocate or a savior, roles that were sometimes projected onto me by participants. It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure honesty and that the people at the center of the study do not get exploited for information, however scholars demonstrated how "researchers may be seen as easy prey, as fair game whose sympathies and desire for

information can be exploited for gifts and favours” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 224; see also Wax, 1952; Adler and Adler, 1991).

The racialised dimension of my presence is inseparable from the history of witchcraft discourse in Ghana. As shown in chapter 2, accusations cannot be detached from colonial and missionary histories that framed African cosmologies as irrational or primitive. As a student trained in a European academic tradition, I was aware of the risk of reproducing exoticising or extractive forms of knowledge production, in which the cultural knowledge, experiences, and insights of an Indigenous or marginalised community are taken from them without any form of reciprocal benefit. This dynamic perpetuates colonial dynamics where people serve just as resources for academic or capital gain, rather than being part of a collaborative process of knowledge-building. The awareness that research from a privileged location risks reproducing patterns of exploitation, global inequalities, and misrepresentation shaped both my methodology and my analysis. I approached witchcraft not as a belief system to be judged as true or false, but as a moral and social language and framework through which communities negotiate and explain suffering, conflict, and inequalities. Yet, the possibility to leave the field, return to Europe, and write this research from a privileged location remains a profound asymmetry; indeed, after my departure, the people who were part of the research continue to live with the consequences of witchcraft accusations, stigma, and displacement.

Language barriers further shaped the research (Borchgrevink, 2003: 106-108). All interviews involved interpretation from English to Dagbani and vice versa. Interpreters enabled communication, but also shaped it. They participated in meaning-making, highlighting certain elements of stories while downplaying others (Borchgrevink, 2003: 109-112). Rather than eliminating this mediation, I treat it as part of the social process through which knowledge was produced.

Representation itself was an ethical problem because, as the author, I decided which voices and stories to amplify, which quotations to include, and how stories are framed in this thesis (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 97-98, 203-205). Given the vulnerability of the interviewees, especially the accused women who have limited opportunities to speak publicly, let alone within academic discourse, this power of representation is particularly noteworthy. Complete neutrality is neither possible nor desirable; after all, anthropology itself began as a colonial science, studying the ‘exotic Other’, and the different ways “of constructing ‘the ethnography’ will bring out different emphases” (Hammersley and

Atkinson, 2007: 191). My interpretations are shaped by my education and context, which include feminist, postcolonial, anthropological perspectives, and human rights frameworks, that do not always align with local explanatory frameworks. These asymmetries, rather than being erased, were treated as analytically productive and were used to examine how different systems of meaning coexist, clash, and are negotiated. Overall, my positionality has both enabled and constrained this research: it has provided me with opportunities and opened doors, while simultaneously influencing what could be said, by whom, and under what conditions. The final aim is to remain reflexive and transparent about the partial and situated nature of the knowledge produced.

Given participants' vulnerability, ethical concerns were central from the outset. Informed consent was initially acquired in written form (Appendix 1) with explanations provided verbally and confirmed through a fingerprint as a signature. However, during the focus groups, written consent was more difficult to gather, as the risk was to create too much formality and distance with the accused women. Therefore, it was suggested to gather only verbal consent, both to participate in the sessions and to be photographed and recorded. Consent was not always granted. Anonymity and confidentiality have been ensured in reporting unless participants explicitly requested their names to be used.

In conclusion, these constraints and ethical conflicts highlight that this study provides a context-specific and situated understanding of the phenomenon in question. The research has its own limitations and constraints; recognising them is not a flaw but a prerequisite for transparency, rigor, and ethical duty.

Chapter 4 - Living on the margins: social actors, material conditions, and legal protection in Ghana

This chapter examines the identities, social positioning, and structural vulnerabilities of the women accused of witchcraft in Ghana, with particular attention to the gender dynamics that shape accusations and responses. It further presents the so-called witch camps, which are sites often portrayed as protective sanctuaries for the alleged witches, yet where abuses and human rights violations were documented. In addition, the chapter analyses the Ghanaian legal framework for the protection of its citizens, assessing its scope, limitations, and practical implications in relation to witchcraft accusations. The discussion draws on and integrates ethnographic researches, human-rights reports, and secondary academic literature to critically highlight the moral economies of power, gender, and precarity related to the accusations.

4.1 The witch camps

While the belief of witchcraft is deeply rooted across many African societies, albeit with important intra and inter national variations, the specific practice of banishing accused individuals to the so-called witch camps is unique to Ghana (Azumah, 2021: 1). At present, four camps remain operational: Gambaga camp is located in the North East Region, in the East Mamprusi District, while the other three are all in the Northern Region, Gnani camp in the Yendi district, Kpatinga camp in the Gushegu district, and Kukuo camp in the Nanumba South district (see image 1 below). In addition to these, the Gushegu District hosts a shelter run by a Catholic church (Amnesty International, 2025: 16-21). Civil society initiatives, supported by the Ministry of Gender, have achieved the closure of two camps: Bonyase in 2014 and Nabuli between 2019 and 2020. Former residents were either reintegrated into their communities of origin or relocated into new communities (Amnesty International, 2025: 15-16).

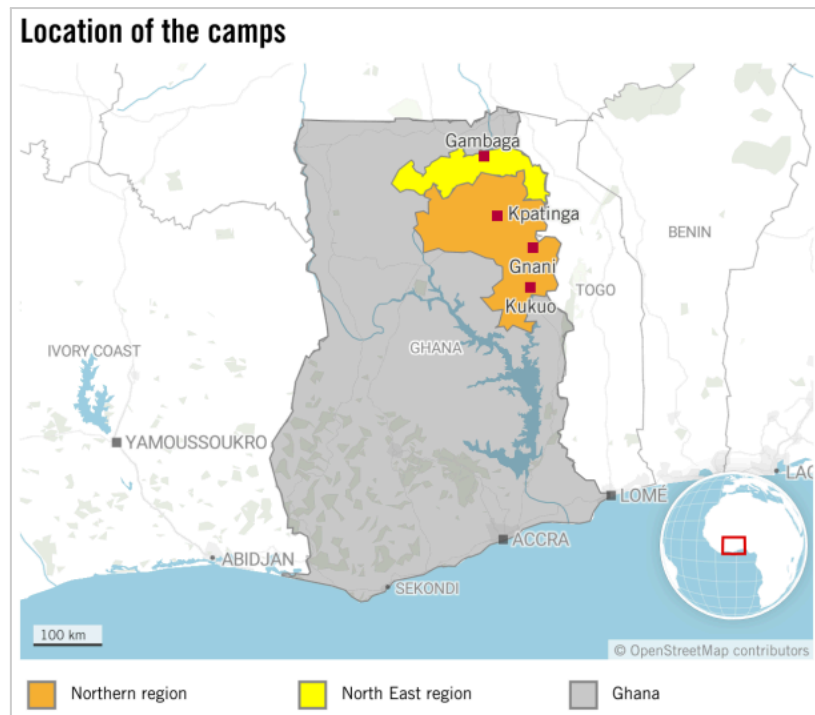


Image 1 - source: Amnesty International, 2025: 17

Although these camps have existed for more than a century, there is no clear recollection of their precise origins, as their establishment was informal: the camps emerged as community members approached the *tindaamba*, the traditional priests and male spiritual custodians, to perform rituals determining whether someone possessed witchcraft. The camps, including the land on which they stand, belong to the *tindana* and are transferred through lineage. In each camp, there is a shrine, which is where the *tindaamba* carry out the diagnostic and cleansing rituals central to the camp's spiritual authority (Amnesty International, 2025: 16).

All of the witch camps are located in northern Ghana, which reflects the region's long history of economic marginalization and unequal integration into national development. As Crampton (2013: 201) observes, "social tension underlying witchcraft accusations can be linked to unequal incorporation of villages and regions into capitalist market systems". The moral discourses surrounding witchcraft thus intersect with broader structural inequalities, as discussed earlier, helping to explain why witch camps have emerged specifically in northern Ghana. These regions have historically received fewer developmental investments and have long been compelled to "support a southern-based economy through colonial and postcolonial government policies" (Crampton, 2013: 202). Furthermore, the spread of capitalist values has intensified competition within communities and weakened traditional mechanisms of solidarity. Amnesty International (2025: 11) notes that "members of

communities are now willing to forgo solidarity to try to gain more properties and wealth, including accusing widows of being witches to push them out of their lands and take possession of it”.

Fieldwork conducted in three of the camps (Kpatinga, Gnani, and Kukuo camps) revealed both common structural features and notable differences. All of them contain living quarters for the accused individuals, either cement-built structures (images 2-6), as in Kpatinga, where World Vision International constructed these more durable rooms over a decade ago (Amnesty International, 2025: 18), to more precarious huts made of mud, sticks, and thatched roofs, such as those in Gnani (images 7-9) and Kukuo camps (images 10-11). Each camp includes a shrine (image 12), typically a small hut encircled by wooden barriers, functioning as the ritual centre where the *tindana* performs both diagnosis and cleansing rituals.



Image 2 - Kpatinga camp



Image 3 - Kpatinga camp



Image 4 - Kpatinga camp



Image 5 - Kpatinga camp



Image 6 - Kpatinga camp, inside a hut



Image 7 - Gnani camp



Image 8 - Gnani camp



Image 9 - Gnani camp



Image 10 - Kukuo camp



Image 11 - Kukuio camp



Image 12 - Kukuio camp's shrine

Spatial organization, however, varies. Kpatinga and Gnani are physically separated from nearby communities, though not enclosed by gates or walls, residents simply recognise the informal boundaries of the camp. Kukuo, by contrast, is peculiar for being embedded within the broader village settlement. The huts of accused women stand alongside those of other community members. During interviews, several women remarked: “when they sell, we buy, and when we sell, they buy [our products], and we participate in their religious ceremonies”³, revealing a notably collaborative and non-stigmatising relationship between the Kukuo camp residents and the host community. The accused women’s grandchildren attend school with other village children, and no incidents of discrimination were reported. Given Kukuo camp’s particular location, I asked both the *tindana* and the community chief whether living and sharing the same spaces with alleged witches generated fear or tension among community members. Both emphasised that once an accused woman undergoes the ritual at the shrine, “she becomes powerless, her witchcraft powers are neutralized”⁴ said Kukuo’s *tindana*, and the community chief confirmed that “we believe in the oracles, so the powers of witchcraft do not work here. Once a witch comes inside our community she becomes powerless”⁵.

Across all three camps, women, despite having been banished, retain a degree of mobility. They can go to the market, harvest on nearby farms, visit clinics, and attend local offices for administrative matters related to their health insurance cards or the government-funded Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Programme. Their movement is therefore not formally restricted (Mutaru, 2018: 266-267). Yet, as Professor Azumah noted during our interviews, many women have been indoctrinated that leaving the camp without undergoing cleansing rituals would expose them to grave misfortune or even death. This belief reinforces their reliance on the *tindana*, who is perceived as the only figure capable of ensuring both their physical safety and spiritual protection.

The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Programme is Ghana’s principal cash-transfer safety-net for the country’s most vulnerable households. It was established in 2008 by the government to mitigate extreme poverty, especially in the northern and north-eastern regions where subsistence agriculture, limited infrastructure, and high vulnerability indices converged; to improve basic consumption, nutrition, access to health, and complementary services. The programme’s secretariat operates under the Ministry of

³ Focus group interview with residents of Kukuo camp, 27 November 2025, Kukuo camp.

⁴ Interview with Kukuo’s *tindana*, 26 November 2025, Kukuo camp.

⁵ Interview with Kukuo’s community chief, 26 November 2025, Kukuo camp.

Gender, Children and Social Protection, and it is financed through both domestic resources, bilateral and multilateral development partners, such as UNICEF, the World Bank, and UK Aid. The enrollment of households is carried out by the local districts' social-welfare officers who use a standardised questionnaire to interview each household, collect demographic and socioeconomic data, and forward the documentation to the ministry's head office for eligibility verification. Once approved, the secretariat issues the LEAP cards to the selected households, enabling them to receive cash disbursements, supposedly every two months, although delays are reported in several districts. Registration is typically conducted in phases, often annually or biennially, based on the availability of fiscal resources. In the camps, especially in Kukuo camp, a significant wave of registrations took place in 2023, due to advocacy efforts by Songtaba towards the local district's government. The entire cycle, from the registration phase to the first cash disbursements, may span three to six months, based on logistical capacity and timeliness of central processing. Among the eligibility criteria are being aged 65 or above and not receiving any other form of social support. In addition, beneficiaries of the LEAP Programme are exempt from paying premiums under the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), as enrolment is integrated into LEAP benefits to facilitate access to healthcare services (Amnesty International, 2025: 39-42).

4.2 The accused women

As previously mentioned, there is a gendered dimension to witchcraft accusations (Drucker-Brown, 1993; Goody, 1970; ActionAid, 2013; Adinkrah & Adhikari, 2014; Azongo et al., 2020: 29-30; Amnesty International, 2025). Gendered social hierarchies reinforce witchcraft discourse: "the narrative within its practice is highly gendered with power relations, and gender agency playing a critical role" (Azongo et al., 2020: 4). Interviews with Prof. Azumah and Mr Samadu Sayibu, Songtaba's project manager, revealed that accusations directed at men are themselves mediated through gendered logic. A man is rarely accused independently; rather, his alleged witchcraft is understood to derive from a woman's influence. In some cases, the mother of the accused man is believed to have been a witch, thereby transmitting her powers to her son. In others, if an alleged witch dies within the same household as a male relative, it is assumed that he has inherited or absorbed the spirit of

witchcraft. Even when men become the direct targets of accusations, the explanatory framework remains profoundly gendered: their supposed powers are imagined as originating from women. This dynamic further underscores the gendered architecture of witchcraft belief, in which femininity is positioned as the primary locus of danger, transmission, and moral suspicion.

Empirically, women are accused in significantly higher numbers than men. Although comprehensive national statistics remain unavailable, the demographic compositions of the four operational camps in the Northern and North East regions of Ghana (Gambaga, Gnani, Kpatinga, and Kukuo camps) offer a useful indication of the gendered nature of accusations and banishment. Data gathered by Amnesty International, with research conducted between December 2023 and May 2024, recorded 419 women, 91 men, and at least 42 children residing in the four camps. The numbers concerning the children remain partially indeterminate, as two camps, Gnani and Kukuo, did not provide specific data. The children, usually girls, in the camps are brought to assist elderly relatives accused of witchcraft, typically the grandmother, with daily domestic labour. Another reason why children are in the camps is if the mother was still breastfeeding when accused and expelled from the community; in this case, some women may be able to bring their young children (Amnesty International, 2025: 16-22).

Through my fieldwork, I was able to gather the most recent data on the number of accused people living in the camps. Gnani camp hosts 132 women and 87 men. According to their most recent census, conducted in 2024, there are also around 105 children, although no updated data for 2025 is available regarding the number of children. Kpatinga camp hosts 16 women and 3 children, who are the grandchildren of some of the residents. In Kukuo camp, there are 156 women and approximately 71 children. Although the research plan included a visit to Gambaga camp, I was unable to go there.

Interestingly, while the women accused must leave behind their families, the men can bring their entire family to live with them in the camp. Most men accused are sent to Gnani camp, in the Northern Region; however, some choose to leave their community by themselves due to the living conditions in the camp, which are not suitable for a decent life (Amnesty International, 2025: 16).

This numerical disparity between women and men accused and banished to the camps is influenced by intersecting factors of gender and structural socio-economic vulnerabilities. Men are generally less vulnerable to banishment due to better economic conditions, greater resistance to physical violence, and, most importantly, they “have the opportunity and power of negotiating and renegotiating their destinies and the varied outcomes of witchcraft accusations, and are sometimes not banished and mistreated” (Songtaba, 2022: 3; ActionAid, 2012: 4).

Firstly, a crucial dimension of vulnerability emerges from gendered expectations: women “who do not fulfil expected gender stereotypes” (ActionAid, 2012: 3) and societal expectations regarding reproductive and domestic roles are particularly vulnerable to accusations, for instance, widows, unmarried women, or those unable to have children (ActionAid, 2012: 3-4, 8). This is linked to the broader issue of gender inequality and the patriarchal society in Ghana: younger, and thus fertile, women are considered “more useful to society” (ActionAid, 2012: 8) and will likely not be accused of witchcraft; but as they age and become older, there are “no longer useful to society and not conforming to what people expect” then they become targets of accusations (ActionAid, 2012: 8). Accusations are therefore seen as “a convenient excuse for the cruel treatment of women who are poor, excluded, different, or seen to be challenging the status quo” (ActionAid, 2012: 8). During the focus group in Kukuo camp, one of the women openly acknowledged that “the accusations are just an excuse to get rid of us”⁶.

The layered and gendered nature of witchcraft accusations is, for instance, further illustrated among the Gonja people, an ethnic group living in the northern regions of Ghana; “being a wizard or a witch is based on gender because wizards are expected to protect their dependants from evil attacks, while witches kill for meat, for spite or caprice” (Azonga, 2020: 34). This reflects professor Azumah’s analysis that “[m]en can also get the spirit of witchcraft but in their case, it is seen as something positive, to do good things, while for women it is just to do bad things” (Amnesty International, 2025: 14).

Moreover, the majority of the accusations originate from male relatives following a death, illness, or miscarriage in the family or in the community, but financial distress or a dream could also initiate an accusation (Azumah, 2021: 2; Amnesty International, 2025: 6-7, 11). Witchcraft accusations simultaneously reinforce and challenge family internal hierarchies, and are used to reflect and regulate moral discourse and social disputes over inheritance,

⁶ Focus group interview with residents of Kukuo camp, 27 November 2025, Kukuo camp.

dependency, and authority (Amnesty International, 2025: 6-7; Crampton, 2013: 203-205). The phenomenon of accusation among family echoes scholars' observation that witchcraft constitutes "the dark side of kins: it reflects the frightening notion that there is hidden aggression and violence where there should be only trust and solidarity" (Geschiere and Fisiy, 1994: 325). However, the relationship between accusation and kinship is characteristic of West and Central African countries; it is not a universal phenomenon. Accounts from New Guinea, for instance, show that accused witches are more commonly strangers rather than kin (Geschiere and Fisiy, 1994: 338).

This strongly reflected in my fieldwork, where accusations were typically generated within the family and were described as sudden, unexpected, and disconnected from any recognizable wrongdoing. Across the camps, women emphasised that the accusations came as a surprise, often emerging from everyday family conflicts rather than extraordinary events. During the focus group in Kpatinga and Kukuo camps, several women reflected that they had been considered too outspoken within their families, which they believed contributed to the accusation. One account from a resident in Kpatinga camp is particularly revealing of the instrumental use of witchcraft accusations within economic disputes: a woman explained that she had lent her brother money on two occasions, when she later asked to be repaid, he accused her of witchcraft in order to avoid returning the loan. Another woman reported being accused of being the reason behind her sister's insomnia, thus illustrating how illness, especially when unexplained, can be easily redirected into an accusation.

Similar patterns emerged in Gnani camp. Mawan is a small and slender elderly woman from Dasujbini, near Yendi. Before being accused, she was a farmer and ran a small business brewing and selling pito⁷. She was also trained as a Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA)⁸ and described how her socially valuable role ultimately became the reason behind her accusation. She had assisted in delivering a child who, many years after the birth, fell ill. Long after this, she was accused by the community of being a witch, and even her own younger grandchild accused her of causing the child's illness. Her story highlights the profound moral rupture produced by the accusations: she could not understand why she was accused, especially because before the accusation, she used to cook, bathe, and take care of the children of the very people who later accused her: "how can you turn around and accuse me? I bathed your

⁷ Pito is a traditional, locally brewed beer in Ghana, primarily produced with guinea corn or millet.

⁸ A TBA can be compared to the work of a midwife. In rural communities far from health facilities and hospitals, some women are trained to assist women during childbirth.

children and cooked for them”⁹. She did not report the accusation to anyone because, she said, “I know I don’t have the powers to bewitch anybody, and now everything is in the hands of God because when someone accuses you wrongly, you pray for them and give them to God”¹⁰.

Yacham is a woman in her mid-70s from Nabalgu, who used to be a farmer and has been in Gnani camp for about 8 years. In Yacham’s case, the accusation followed her stepmother’s illness. With no relatives in the community and having been threatened with death, she requested to be taken to Gnani camp “to stay peacefully here”¹¹. Her repeated insistence, “I am not a witch, I don’t know why I am here. They accused me, but I am not a witch”¹², echoes the broader sense of arbitrariness and dispossession expressed by many accused women, for whom the accusation marks a sudden breakdown in social belonging.

The focus group in Kukuo camp was particularly insightful, further clarifying the multiplicity of triggers behind accusations. The accused women collectively identified several recurring reasons behind accusations: hatred and jealousy, inheritance disputes, illness or death, excessive kindness, being hardworking or outspoken, lies by the accuser, perceived inappropriate sexual behaviors, dreams, and the failure to economically support one’s family. Ironically, regardless of whether a woman is economically independent or dependent, outspoken or quiet, helpful or withdrawn, she still risks being accused: the women in Kukuo camp responded with murmurs of agreement, and one stated plainly, once again, that “the accusations are just an excuse to get rid of us”¹³.

Finally, the story of Hajia Marwa¹⁴, a woman who had been reintegrated, further demonstrated the gendered lens of accusations. Before being accused, she ran a business selling various goods. She was accused following her son’s death: he had been involved in a road accident with another man, which resulted in the death of both of them. Hajia was accused of having spiritually caused her son’s death because she birthed him: hadn’t she birthed him, he and the other man would not be dead. She expressed confusion as to why she

⁹ Interview with Mawan Inumbei, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

¹⁰ Interview with Mawan Inumbei, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

¹¹ Interview with Mawan Inumbei, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

¹² Interview with Mawan Inumbei, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

¹³ Focus group interview with residents of Kukuo camp, 27 November 2025, Kukuo camp.

¹⁴ This interview was particularly challenging, due to the participant’s visible fatigue and expressed frustration with repeated interviews that, in her view, rarely lead to meaningful change. In light of this, I deviated from my prepared questions and allowed the conversation to unfold on her terms so as not to further burden her. Despite these constraints, her story was particularly striking: she described a life trajectory that moved from being accused of witchcraft and confined to a camp for many years, to being successfully reintegrated and ultimately completing the Hajj pilgrimage. Her own framing of this transition, “from an alleged witch to a pilgrim” underscored both the profound personal transformation she experienced and the broader social and moral reversal embedded in her story.

alone was accused, while no one was accused in relation to the death of the other man involved in the same accident. She stated that she harbors no anger toward her accusers: “I am not angry with them. I only pray for them because they are ignorant. They don’t know what they are doing. I pray that God reveals the truth to them, and that is what God has done now”¹⁵.

Secondly, witchcraft accusations are linked to broader forms of structural inequalities, including poverty and socioeconomic marginalization (Amnesty International, 2025: 14-15; Azongo et al., 2020: 29-30). Indeed, the intersection of different vulnerabilities, such as older age, disability, poverty, and lack of formal education, increases the likelihood of falling victim to accusations (Amnesty International, 2025: 6; Azongo et al., 2020: 31-32). The data gathered across the four camps documents that 62% of accused individuals were women over 50, most of whom were poor, disabled, or without formal education (Amnesty International, 2020: 6).

Older age

Despite the absence of a legal definition of older age, common standards based on biological age typically consider it from 50 or 60 years old. This threshold does not necessarily indicate that a person is subject to the vulnerabilities of older age (Amnesty International, 2025: 13-14). It is reported that the age of people accused “ranges from the mid 50s to late 70s” (Azumah, 2021: 2). Moreover, some scholars argue that accusations can be triggered by ageism and younger people resenting the oldest: “[t]he fact that some old people lived a very long time, whereas young members of the family died prematurely, was taken as an indication of their evil tactics: they managed to stay alive at the expense of the young” (van der Geest, 2002: 458; see also Pierre, 2018: 17-18). Other scholars, such as Crampton (2013: 200), theorise that just like in other African contexts, also in Ghana “these accusations can be analysed as interpersonal conflicts of jealousy and also as intergenerational power struggles when youth accuse elders of preventing success within families and communities”. Lastly, it is noticed that the perception of being ‘old’ is linked to the onset of menopause and the accompanying decline in physical strength. Menopause marks a major change in a woman’s life, and in the farming communities where many of the accused women come from, this is

¹⁵ Interview with Hajia “Marwa” (name changed for security reasons), reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

associated with the time when they start to lose physical strength needed for hard work like farming. Moreover, around this age, many women become widows, hence leaving them with less support and more vulnerable (Amnesty International, 2025: 14).

Health conditions, disability

Several health issues are often associated with accusations. Mental health conditions, such as depression, dementia, or schizophrenia, or even physiological changes due to menopause, can usually trigger an accusation. These medical conditions are interpreted through the local cosmological framework rather than through medical support and understanding (ActionAid, 2012: 8; Amnesty International, 2025: 14-15; Pierre, 2018: 17).

Poverty and no formal education

Data indicate significant regional disparities in access to education: 75% of adults living in the rural areas of northern Ghana are illiterate, compared to 43% nationally (Amnesty International, 2025: 15). Both accused individuals and their accusers come from communities marked by low socioeconomic status and limited formal education. Consequently, reduced access to information constrains the interpretative tools available to explain misfortune, illness, or social tensions. By contrast, in more urban settings, where formal education and state institutions are more accessible, the likelihood of accusations as explanatory tools appears significantly less prevalent (Amnesty International, 2025: 15; ActionAid, 2012: 7; Pierre, 2018: 18).

Furthermore, the absence of economic activity and autonomy, and the lack of male social protection reveal how disproportionately accusations affect women positioned outside patriarchal structures of dependency (ActionAid, 2012: 8). Nevertheless, a woman who is economically dependent or outspoken may also be a target of accusations, precisely because they are perceived as challenging patriarchal norms, linking this back to the gendered dimension of the accusations (ActionAid, 2012: 8). As one researcher declared to Amnesty International (2025: 13): “elderly women who try to contribute to the local economy are branded as a witch, and those who do not are also branded as a witch”.

At Kukuo camp, ethnographic research demonstrated that 63% of respondents were widows and 90% reported no occupation prior to the accusation (Azongo et al., 2020: 31-33). The

findings from my fieldwork, although subject to methodological considerations that will be discussed later, present a more complex picture. In total, I interviewed 52 women through focus groups and individual interviews with alleged witches in the camps and interviews conducted with reintegrated women. Of these, I discussed the previous occupation with 44 women. Notably, 23 of them, so 52.27% reported having had an income-generating activity before the accusation. These activities were largely informal, small-scale, and embedded in the everyday subsistence economy, but nonetheless constituted important sources of economic autonomy. At Kpatinga camp, for instance, twelve out of the fifteen (12/15) women interviewed reported having a job prior to being accused, including: farming, such as cultivation of peanuts and maize, shea butter production, preparation and sale of local cakes, kenkey, rice, and *koose* (black beans fritters). In Gnani camp, Mawan and Yacham were farmers. By contrast, in Kukuo camp, just 30.77% of women reported prior economic activity. During the focus groups discussions, of the 26 women with whom previous jobs were discussed, only eight reported having one. These activities included work in shea butter production, farming, selling rice, preparing and selling porridge and groundnut paste, preparing and selling yam cheese, and selling local drinks (pito) and nuts.

All together, these findings suggest that economic activity does not necessarily shield women from accusations; rather, it may coexist with, or even exacerbate, vulnerability. The fact that from my data, 52.27% of the accused women were economically active before the accusation challenges representations of them as merely dependent or socially unproductive, and instead points to a more complex intersection between gender, age, informal labour, and social power. Women's economic participation, particularly when it is small-scale, autonomous, or insufficiently controlled by male relatives, does not translate into protection and may instead render them more visible, and thus more vulnerable, within contexts of social tension and inequality.

Another aspect that contributes to these structural vulnerabilities is the regional disparity in resources between the southern and northern regions of Ghana, with the latter being historically poorer regions (Crampton, 2013: 201-202; ActionAid, 2012: 7). Vulnerabilities and tensions within communities are exacerbated by social marginalization, economic precarity and the scarcity of formal safety nets (Amnesty International, 2025: 6, 10-11). Witchcraft accusations thus become "indicative of the marginal status of women and their subordination in communities in the Northern and North East regions of Ghana" (Songtaba, 2022: iii).

Once a woman is accused, “they are on their own, as people are afraid to come to their defense, including biological adult children and spouses” (Azumah, 2021: 2): social abandonment among the alleged witches underscores that the belief of witchcraft also acts as a mechanism of moral sanction, which enforces conformity through ostracism and fear. Azongo et al. (2020: 32-33) illustrate that relationships between the accused women and their former communities are largely severed, reflecting the enduring social ostracism: “[n]obody in my family even wants to talk to me again. They think I am going to harm them if they relate with me” (Azongo et al., 2020: 33).

These women become targets of violent acts, sometimes escalating to lynching: “[t]he fear of abuse and death, psychological and emotional trauma may push these accused women from their own homes and communities to witches’ camp” (Azongo et al., 2020: 32). Despite the several human rights violations, the witch camps are yet perceived, by several alleged witches, the only safe spaces where they can go and live without risking their lives (Mutaru, 2018: 266; Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 41; ActionAid, 2012: 5; Amnesty international, 2025: 6). Between 2020 and 2024, in the Northern, North East and Savannah regions, 19 assaults and 7 killings related to witchcraft accusations were reported; yet, only 2 individuals were convicted (Amnesty International, 2025: 23). Crucially, Amnesty (2025: 23) highlights that in Ghana “there is a lack of official data on investigations into abuses linked with witchcraft accusations and how often they result in prosecutions”, and acts of violence against accused individuals are rarely reported to the police “partly due to a lack of understanding among affected people regarding their rights, as well as the fear of going to the police” (Amnesty International, 2025: 6).

4.3 The tindana

The *tindaamba* (sing. *tindana*) are the traditional priests, and always male authorities, responsible for identifying and cleansing alleged witches in northern Ghana. When a person is accused of witchcraft, they are brought to the camp to undergo the diagnostic ritual performed by the *tindana*. If the *tindana* interprets the outcome as confirming the accusation, that becomes the community’s legal proof that the individual indeed possesses the spirit of witchcraft. The accused is then required to undergo a second ritual intended to cleanse them

of the witchcraft spirit. Only once the woman has been ‘cleansed’ by the *tindana* is she theoretically permitted to return to her community. All of these rituals carry a fee to be paid to the *tindana*, in addition to the cost of the fowl. This becomes a significant issue, as many women cannot afford to pay these costs and therefore remain stuck in the camps until someone covers the expenses for their cleansing ritual.

During fieldwork, the three *tindaamba* interviewed described these procedures in detail. The first ritual involves the killing of a fowl; if the bird falls on its back, the accused is deemed to possess witchcraft. The *tindana* may also administer the *odum* ordeal, a precolonial practice described earlier, in which the accused must ingest a concoction made from tree bark. If the individual vomits or dies, they are judged to be a witch; if they survive without vomiting, they may be cleansed through a subsequent ritual. Yet, interviews with Prof. Azumah revealed the fragility and manipulability of these procedures. He recounted that the Gnani’s *tindana*, Alhassan Shei, had once confided in him that after he became *tindana* upon assuming his father’s position, he faced pressure to confirm certain women as witches. To influence the outcome, he admitted to adding poisonous bark to the ritual mixture. As Azumah (2021: 2) notes, the *tindaamba* are popularly regarded as analogous to “doctors who ‘diagnose’ and ‘treat’ witchcraft” yet these same spiritual authorities often privately acknowledge that “most of the accusations are fabrications out of malice, jealousy, and hatred by family members” (Azumah, 2021: 2).

Even following a cleansing ritual, reintegration into one’s community is far from guaranteed. Witchcraft accusations function as a social and moral language through which communities negotiate tension, authority, deviance, and exclusion (Amnesty International, 2025: 15-16). Amnesty further observes that:

“Reintegration in communities is often made difficult by the continuity of the accusations. Once someone is accused of witchcraft, there is a risk that this person is accused again. As a result, most women agree to go to the camps and prefer staying there rather than going back to their village” (Amnesty International, 2025: 31-32).

Another dimension shaping women’s prolonged residence in the camps is the cost of the rituals (Mutaru, 2018: 265). Many women cannot afford the payments required for both the diagnostic and cleansing rites, effectively stranding them under the spiritual and social

authority of the *tindana*, who becomes their protector in both moral and practical terms (Mutaru, 2018: 265). According to Prof. Azumah, witchcraft has “become a business”¹⁶, with *tindaamba* financially benefiting from each accusation; this economic incentive fosters resistance to reintegration initiatives and broader efforts to close the camps, as such measures would diminish their authority and income. On the other hand, Kpatinga and Gnani *tindaamba*, when asked how much they charge for the cleansing rituals, they responded they do not charge a specific amount, it depends on how much the family can afford, and they consider payment as a sign of appreciation for the years spent keeping the woman safe and Kpatinga’s *tindana*, Adam Musah, considers this money “a retirement benefit for keeping their woman for them”¹⁷.

Prof. Azumah further noted that local communities and NGOs frequently deliver essential items, such as toiletries, hygiene products, and basic necessities, for the women. As the custodians of the camps, the *tindaamba* assume responsibility for distributing these supplies. However, they often withhold these goods or divert them, reinforcing their control over the women and illustrating how spiritual authority is intertwined with material power.

All in all, the *tindaamba* are central figures because they hold religious legitimacy: the community believes that only the priest can mediate between the living and the spirit world, and their verdict is treated as divine arbitration rather than human judgment. They also provide social cohesion, since by delivering a clear, ritualised decision, the *tindaamba* resolve intra-kinship disputes, such as tensions around inheritance, caregiving burdens, or domestic conflict, that might otherwise erupt into violence. Furthermore, all of the interviewed women reported having cordial relationships with the *tindaamba*. It was particularly interesting that all of the women used the same word, cordial, to describe their relationship with the *tindaamba*: at first, it was unclear whether the Dagbani term being translated truly meant cordial, or if it was a term used to conceal deeper issues. Upon asking clarifications to Samadu Sayibu and Prof. Azumah, they both confirmed that the women are indoctrinated by the *tindaamba* to use that specific word to describe their relationships, in order to hide the truth about the coercion and abuses. At the same time, the *tindaamba* consider themselves and are considered by most of the accused women as saviours who took on the well-being of the alleged witches. “He is our father, he is our mother, he is the only one who accepted us when we were banished”¹⁸, were the words used by an alleged witch in Kpatinga camp to

¹⁶ Interview with Professor John Azumah, 02 December 2025, The Sanneh Institute, Accra.

¹⁷ Interview with Adam Musah, Kpatinga’s *tindana*, 24 November 2025, Kpatinga camp.

¹⁸ Focus group interview with residents of Kpatinga camp, 24 November 2025, Kpatinga camp.

describe *tindana* Adam. It is worth noting that interviews with Prof. Azumah revealed that in the 46 years of his tenure as *tindana*, there were reports of Adam abusing, raping, and impregnating some of the women. In addition to this, during the interview, when asked if he believed that illnesses and deaths could be explained through witchcraft, Adam replied that “witchcraft is there for those who believe in it”¹⁹, but he does not believe in it. The contradiction was evident: on one level, Adam is a *tindana* who is believed to diagnose and treat witchcraft through rituals, so one would assume that he, indeed, believes in what he is preaching. On another level, how could someone who is actively involved in the belief of witchcraft, therefore considers these women dangerous and evil enough to be banished from their communities, still choose to touch, rape, and even have their children? Follow-up interviews with Prof. Azumah helped make sense of the situation: firstly, he was astonished by *tindana* Adam’s blatant confession of not believing in witchcraft, but he was not surprised. All of the information gathered made it clear that Adam’s actions only made sense if he did not actually believe in witchcraft and its evil spirit at all.

The *tindaamba* further exercise economic power: fees for the fowl ritual, the purification drink, and the ongoing maintenance of the camp generate income for the priest, who is also the camp’s gatekeeper. There is also a link to the state: both colonial and post-colonial legal systems recognised the priest’s role (for instance, native tribunals referring cases to oracles), which ultimately reinforced their authority in contemporary NGOs’ reintegration programmes. Taken together, these points show that the *tindaamba* are the central actors who both diagnose alleged witchcraft and operationalise the camp’s ritual economy, while simultaneously reinforcing social order through a divinely sanctioned process.

4.4 Health and material conditions in the camps

International human rights standards regard the right to health as “an inclusive right that extends beyond healthcare” (Amnesty International, 2025: 47). Indeed, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) notes that:

¹⁹ Interview with Adam Musah, Kpatinga’s *tindana*, 24 November 2025, Kpatinga camp.

“[the right to health] embraces a wide range of socio-economic factors that promote conditions in which people can lead a healthy life, and extends to the underlying determinants of health, such as food and nutrition, housing, access to safe and potable water and adequate sanitation, safe and healthy working conditions, and a healthy environment” (CESCR, 2020, General Comment 14, para 4).

Health and material conditions in the camps are precarious. Access to medical care is limited, often due to expired insurance and reliance on herbal remedies, while food and water insecurity are widespread, only partially mitigated by support from priests or fellow residents (Azongo et al., 2020: 32-33). In this sense, the state’s inability to ensure adequate shelter and reliable water and food access in the camps directly undermines the health and well-being of the accused women, putting their right to health in jeopardy.

Azongo et al. (2020: 32-33) investigated how the accused women are affected, particularly in their ability to seek healthcare. Interviews showed that many of these women had been registered in the NHIS (National Health Insurance Scheme) by local and international NGOs, such as Songtaba and ActionAid. However, once the NHIS card expired, the renewal process was lengthy, and until renewed, these women could not seek medical assistance. Furthermore, interviews and Amnesty’s report (2025: 7) highlighted that “the health centre often has no drugs” and that patients “cannot afford prescribed medicines”. The focus groups and individual interviews uncovered that the health centers and clinics are very far from the camps, for instance Kpatinga’s *tindana* explained that every time a woman feels unwell, even at midnight or when the women are working on the farms harvesting, they have to call him to come, but he has no means of transportation, so he doesn’t know how to get there. He has made proposals to people to support him, but has not received a positive response. The health center is very far from the camp, so they are unable to walk there, and can only go if he is lucky enough that someone lent him a motorbike, and if the health center cannot manage the person’s condition, they must go to an even farther district-level health center.

In Kukuo camp, for instance, the focus group highlighted the lack of a health clinic and poorly equipped facilities as the main challenges. The women were particularly concerned about maternal health services: the nearest clinic has very limited equipment and only one bed for labouring women, resulting in some women being sent home or referred to Bimbila, which is far away and difficult to reach. As a matter of fact, some women ended up

delivering on the road to Bimbila. They recommended that NGOs invest in improving the local clinic, noting that this would represent a major and much-needed change. Moreover, other issues were raised regarding the NHIS: it does not cover all medical expenses, and renewal procedures are often difficult and subject to long delays, resulting in periods during which women are left without coverage. The NHIS office in Bimbila is located far from Kukuo camp, making access particularly challenging. On some occasions, a government representative collects the cards from the camp for renewal; however, significant delays occur, and in some cases, women reported receiving their cards back without the renewal having been processed, without any clear explanation. This is due to limited government funding; not all women can be enrolled, leaving some without access to health coverage.

More serious conditions that require specialised treatments are only handled in private hospitals that do not accept NHIS, thus forcing women to either pay out of pocket or renounce their right to receive care (Amnesty International, 2025: 50). Medical outreach is neither regular nor state-led; screenings occur only when NGOs temporarily fund them, meaning they are sporadic rather than systematic. Given the difficulty of accessing modern healthcare and the economic strain, many women in the camps rely on alternative medicine, especially herbal remedies supplied or prepared by the *tindana*. The researchers also observed that many women were likely suffering from malaria, given the environmental conditions of the camps, which were bushy and full of mosquitoes and reptiles (Azongo et al., 2020: 32). As a result, the state's obligation to guarantee the right to health remains unfulfilled: the camps lack reliable healthcare, safe water, and secure food sources, leaving residents dependent on inconsistent external support (Amnesty International, 2025: 47-48).

Another significant study was conducted in 2022 by Songtaba with support from Ghana Somubi Dwunadie, a UK-funded four-year programme focused on mental health. Research was carried out in the four camps in the Northern and North East Regions of Ghana, involving 277 people accused of witchcraft. The study aimed to investigate the prevalence of depression among accused individuals and assess their quality of life through a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology. The findings were alarming: “over 97% of alleged witches have low or extremely low quality of life” (Songtaba 2022: 46), and more than half (52.7%) showed symptoms associated with depression. Sociodemographic characteristics such as being female and having a marital status of divorced, widowed, or separated “were strongly associated with depression”, underscoring the gendered dimension of accusations (Songtaba, 2022: 46).

Food and water access represent yet another critical health-related issue, remaining a significant challenge for most camp residents. In research conducted at Kukuo camp by Azongo et al. (2020), respondents reported the difficulty of eating three meals a day, noting that food scarcity is a daily concern. Some residents face fewer challenges when relatives regularly visit and supply food; these families often relocate the accused woman to the camp to protect her from violence or community retaliation. These women survive on “whatever little [they] get” (Azongo et al., 2020: 32). However, support from relatives can be irregular and unreliable, and respondents highlighted that assistance often comes from fellow residents or the *tindana*. They reported that they “practice the principle of sharing so that everyone will survive” (Azongo et al., 2020: 33). This communal practice of sharing resources creates an informal safety net among the women in the camps. It was also reported that the women are able to eat and survive thanks to the support of the *tindana*, who “responds to their feeding needs, however (...) not without pressure” (Azongo et al., 2020: 33). In Kukuo camp, the *tindana* was said to ask the women to work on his farm in exchange for food supplies. These survival strategies reflect critical aspects of life in the camps: the absence of family support, the lack of a reliable safety net, and the absence of formal welfare systems.

In Kpatinga camp, the *tindana* explained that the local government support is virtually absent, except for occasional small food donations. He noted that he has a nearby farm and that some women work there during harvest in exchange for food. At times, external farmers also come to the camp to request labour: women are asked to assist with harvesting, again in exchange for food rather than wages. Some relatives occasionally bring food, but this support is irregular and cannot be relied upon. These arrangements underline how food access is contingent, negotiated, and conditional, rather than guaranteed.

In Gnani camp, similar dynamics were described, albeit within a larger and more structured setting. Mawan explained that her children, some of whom now live in Kumasi, approximately a nine-hour drive away, sometimes visit her and provide her with food. She added that other relatives also bring food occasionally. Beyond family support, she mentioned Barnabas, a local philanthropist who sometimes brings maize for them to cook, as well as local farmers who invite women from the camp to help with harvesting in exchange for food. With 132 women currently living in Gnani camp, she stressed the importance of internal solidarity; as she put it, “you can not eat [while] your neighbor does not”²⁰, highlighting that women rely on one another as a primary support system. If someone has no food at all, they

²⁰ Interview with Mawan Inumbei, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

can go to the *tindana* and request some. However, even within this system of mutual aid, food insecurity remains pervasive. Mawan explicitly described food as an ongoing challenge and linked it to her desire for economic autonomy, stating that she wishes to have a ruminant animal, such as a goat, “to farm again”²¹. Her statement echoes earlier findings that livelihood opportunities are not simply about income, but about restoring dignity, agency, and a degree of control over daily survival.

Gnani’s *tindana* confirmed his role in this informal welfare system. He explained that he is also a farmer with fields near the camp, where he allows women to work during harvest in exchange for food. He stated that he supports the women when they approach him for food and that he works together with the leaders of the accused persons to assist those who are unwell or lack food. According to him, there are no disagreements, and relations remain cordial. While this portrayal emphasises harmony, it also highlights how access to food depends on personal relationships and goodwill, rather than enforceable rights.

In Kukuo camp, food insecurity appeared even more acute. The community chief stated that many accused women beg for food, while others survive on leftovers from farmers. Although he assists with food when possible, he described this as a significant burden. He noted that government agencies and NGOs had previously provided food and shelter support, but that this occurred before his tenure as chief and has since stopped. Kukuo’s *tindana* further expressed this concern, describing food as his biggest challenge. Feeding the women places considerable pressure on him, as he struggles to provide for his own family alongside the accused women who depend on him. He explained that his “budget does not meet the target”²², leaving him with insufficient resources to support both. These accounts were strongly reflected in the Kukuo focus groups discussions, where women repeatedly emphasised food insecurity and dependence on begging. Support from relatives, when present, usually took the form of food or small amounts of money, but was widely described as insufficient. As one pattern emerged clearly across camps, food access is neither stable nor predictable, and women’s survival is shaped by chronic uncertainty.

Water scarcity emerged just as strongly in both institutional reports and interviews. Amnesty International reports that “[n]one of the camps have access to running drinking water, and residents often have to walk long distances to get it” (Amnesty International, 2025: 45). In Kpatinga camp the nearest water sources include a 4-km trek in Kpatinga and a 12-km walk

²¹ Interview with Mawan Inumbui, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

²² Interview with Alhassan Shei, Gnani’s *tindana*, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

to a tank in Kukuo (Amnesty International, 2025: 6-7; interviews). Accounts from the camps make these structural problems visible. In Kukuo camp, water access is extremely difficult. The community chief explained that the nearest borehole, donated by Songtaba, requires a walk of roughly seven kilometers uphill, but that it only functions during the rainy season. For the rest of the year, women have to rely on costly tankers from Bimbila, which is the nearest city, 12 km away from the camp, or undertake long, physically demanding walks to the Oti River. Elderly and residents with disabilities depend on grandchildren or fellow women who often fetch water twice a day to meet basic needs. He suggested installing a piping system to connect the community directly to the borehole, noting that such an intervention would significantly reduce the daily burden on residents. Similar situations were reported in Gambaga and Gnani, where broken boreholes and stalled infrastructure force residents to walk long distances or rely on irregular church or NGO support. In Gnani, especially, water access was identified as a critical issue. The *tindana* stressed that the existing borehole is too far from the camp and that it should be mechanised through a piping system, or replaced with a closer one. Those who cannot walk must buy water or depend entirely on others, deepening their vulnerability. The lack of piped supply forces daily long walks for water, and when water is purchased rather than fetched, it becomes an expensive resource (Amnesty International, 2025: 45). The physical strain of carrying water over long distances, combined with chronic food insecurity, reinforces the precarious conditions that define camp life. Contrarily, in Kpatinga camp, the *tindana* explained that since the government had assigned a borehole to him and the camp, which is shared with members of the surrounding community, water is not an urgent issue in the camp.

At the national level, some reforms exist on paper, such as the shift toward a centralised rural water management system through the Community Water and Sanitation Agency, and the 2024 revision of the National Water Policy (Amnesty International, 2025: 44-46). Although these national reforms aim to improve access to water, “to manage small towns piped water supply systems as a public utility organization (...) under the principle of ‘leaving no one behind’ (...) to enable equitable access to sustainable, safely managed and affordable water for all” (Amnesty International, 2025: 45), these policy commitments have yet to translate into meaningful and tangible change in the camps, as “some communities still do not have access” (Amnesty International, 2025: 45). Ghanaian authorities are not in compliance to international law, which states that water access is to be ensured “within, or in the immediate

vicinity, of each household [and within] safe physical reach” to all (CESCR, 2003, General Comment 15, para 12 in Amnesty International, 2025: 46).

4.5 Witch camps between safety and social exclusion

Through the analysis of the so-called witch camps, Mutaru and Sekyi (2023) contrast global humanitarian framings with local understandings. NGOs and state actors describe the camps as “women’s prisons where inmates have been given no trial, have no right of appeal but have received a life sentence” (ActionAid 2012: 5). Local communities and some of the accused women, however, see them as protective refuges under the guardianship of *tindaamba*.

Fieldwork confirmed the persistence of this dual and deeply ambivalent understanding. Several women described the camps not as sites of confinement, but as places of relative safety when compared to their home communities. Yacham, who resides in Gnani camp, declared that “when I was back in my community, my difficulty was the accusation. But since I have been here, nobody is harming me, nobody is accusing me, and there is no discrimination”²³. For her, the camp represents a suspension of threat rather than a permanent solution. Once she becomes weaker, she hopes to be reintegrated into her children’s community; however, she does not want to return now for fear of being accused again. She further emphasised the social cohesion within the camp, explaining that “we don’t fight with each other, also we are not witches. But when we are here, we are all one”²⁴.

Mawan, who has lived in Gnani camp for 23 years, expressed a similar pragmatic attachment to the camp. Over the years, she has witnessed many women being reintegrated and demonstrated her own desire to eventually leave. However, she stressed that her reintegration should occur not immediately, but only when she becomes weaker and can not do chores alone anymore. Moreover, she does not wish to return to her original community; instead, she hopes to move to the community where her children live. For the time being, she prefers to remain in the camp as long as her granddaughter can live with her and support her.

As one woman in Kukuo camp explained, despite the severe material deprivation in the camp, such as lack of water, food, and adequate clothing, the familiarity and relative safety of

²³ Interview with Yacham Surumba, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

²⁴ Interview with Yacham Surumba, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

Kukuo led some women to perceive it as haven compared to the uncertainty of life elsewhere and to the risk of renewed accusations if reintegrated: “we are living in this community [Kukuo] and we are used to this community. We don’t know what will happen next when we move to another community. Even though there is no water, no food, no clothing here, when you go to a new community, you don’t know what will happen to you. So some of us feel that here it is heaven for us”²⁵.

This framing is echoed by Gnani’s *tindana*, Alhassan, who strongly rejected the idea that camps exist to detain women: “their lives are not safe in their communities. Here, they have agreed to accept them, feed them, clothe them, and give them accommodation. So, which is better: should they stay in their communities or stay here?”²⁶. His statement encloses the local logic that presents the camps as humanitarian responses to immediate danger and threats, even as they simultaneously normalise long-term displacement.

Efforts to close these camps and reintegrate accused women have thus been described not only as humanitarian projects but as epistemological interventions, attempts to impose a singular rationality upon a plural moral landscape (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 31). As Mutaru and Sekyi note, this divide reflects a broader epistemological tension between anthropologists and civil society actors. Anthropologists, following Evans-Pritchard’s view that we should not “condemn or view the practice of witchcraft as primitive” (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 33), seek to understand it as a coherent system of meaning. Civil-society organizations, by contrast, often “repeat the colonial bias and regard witchcraft beliefs as primitive and as mere superstitions that ought to be discarded in a modern, rational world” (Mutaru and Sekyi 2023: 33), indeed, for those civil-society organizations not believing in witchcraft, “the inability to provide any scientific proof qualifies witchcraft as bogus and irrational” (Ashforth 2015: 7). This reproduces the colonial assumption that witchcraft is incompatible with progress.

The clash between human-rights activism and local ontology thus exposes the persistence of colonial epistemologies. Where colonial administrators dismissed witchcraft as superstition and anthropologists sought to interpret it, today’s NGOs often adopt an “eliminativist view” (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 34), seeking to replace local cosmologies with scientific rationality. Yet, as Mutaru and Sekyi (2023: 31) argue, “the concept of belief is a complex, enigmatic, and fundamentally positional one, which is key to understanding the diverging discourse surrounding the settlements between proponents of human rights and local stakeholders”. For

²⁵ Focus group interview with residents of Kukuo camp, 27 November 2025, Kukuo camp.

²⁶ Interview with Alhassan Shei, Gnani’s *tindana*, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

local communities, witches are morally dangerous figures and “perpetrators of criminal violence” (Ashforth 2015: 7), whose presence threatens social harmony. For human-rights advocates, instead, the accused are victims of patriarchal violence and ignorance. The conflict is thus not between modernity and tradition, but between competing modernities, different ways of understanding and inhabiting the world. As noted, “the current NGO-led framing of ideas of witchcraft and ‘witch camps’ in Ghana (...) clashes with the postmodern concept of multiple modernities, pointing out the plurality of epistemologies of modernities, including rather than excluding ‘beliefs’ in witchcraft” (Mutaru and Sekyi, 2023: 31-32). From this perspective, witchcraft emerges as a social-political language through which local and global epistemologies negotiate meaning, morality, and authority. The disjuncture between human-rights rationality and local belief exemplifies Bruno Latour’s observation that “we see one group of people covered with amulets scoffing at another group of people covered with amulets” (Latour 2011: 44). Both modern humanitarianism and traditional cosmology are moral projects of world-making, grounded in distinct ontologies of truth and virtue.

4.6 Ghanaian legal framework: formal legal guarantees and the protection gap for alleged witches

This section outlines Ghana’s international and national legal obligations and assesses their relevance in protecting citizens from witchcraft-related abuses, while highlighting the gap between existing legal standards and lived realities. The analysis demonstrates that, despite a robust formal framework that offers formal guarantees of legal protection, the Ghanaian state fails to effectively safeguard its citizens accused of witchcraft from violence, discrimination, and severe socioeconomic deprivation (Amnesty International, 2025: 53-59).

Primarily, to provide a systematic overview of Ghana’s legal obligations at the international level, Ghana has ratified the major international and regional human-rights instruments. These include the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1986; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 2000; the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (Banjul

Charter) in 1989; and the Charter's protocol on the rights of women in Africa, also known as the Maputo Protocol, in 2007 (Amnesty International, 2025: 53; Pierre, 2018: 19-21).

Taken together, these instruments are legally binding and impose obligations on the ratifying states to respect, protect, and fulfill a wide range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights; to prohibit discrimination; guarantee the right to life, and safeguard persons from gender and age-based violence. Amnesty International (2025: 53) emphasised that these obligations are particularly relevant for people in situations of heightened vulnerability, explicitly identifying alleged witches as a group at increased risk of violence and abuse under international human-rights law.

Human dignity constituted one of the foundational principles across the international human-rights framework. It is recognised as inherent to all human beings and requires protection against any degrading treatment, violence, or exploitation (Amnesty International, 2025: 53; see also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; ICCPR; ICESCR; Banjul Charter; Maputo Protocol). This principle is further reinforced under CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol, which impose on states to take specific obligations against harmful practices and gender based violence to protect specific groups of people: women, older women, and other marginalised groups (Amnesty International, 2025: 53).

With regard to the right to life and security of the person, the ICCPR and the African Charter require Ghana not only to refrain from arbitrary deprivation of life, but also “to put in place a legal framework to protect individuals from foreseeable threats by other people, especially for individuals in vulnerable condition” (Amnesty International, 2025: 53). This entails, first, criminalising acts of violence such as lynching and physical assault; second, establish effective institutions for law enforcements and accountability; third, adopting specific protective measures for vulnerable groups, including those accused of witchcraft. A fourth dimension entails the state's responsibility concerning preventive obligations, including awareness-raising initiatives to challenge harmful beliefs and social norms that underpin accusations.

Economic, social, and cultural rights are equally central to this framework. Under the ICESCR, Ghana must ensure an adequate standard of living, including access to food, water, housing, and the continuous improvement of living conditions without discrimination. Even in contexts with limited resources, states are required to prioritise the most vulnerable groups through targeted measures. The right to health, including mental health, further compels

states to ensure that health services are accessible and affordable, and to address the structural barriers that systematically deny care to marginalised groups.

Alongside human dignity, non-discrimination constituted another cross-cutting obligation. The international instruments cited above require states to take “all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women” (CEDAW, articles 2(e)-(f)). The Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women explicitly recognised witchcraft accusations as one of the “harmful practices against women and girls and explicitly prohibit[s] such practices” (Committee, 2022: 15). States are therefore required to prevent such practices, protect those at risk, investigate abuse, punish perpetrators, and provide appropriate remedies. Particular attention is required for older women, who experience intersecting forms of discrimination related to age, gender, disability, and poverty, factors previously identified as increasing vulnerability to witchcraft accusations.

At the domestic level, the 1992 Constitution of Ghana formally guarantees fundamental rights and social protections through several key provisions. These include article 13 “Protection of right to life”, article 15 “Respect for human dignity”, article 34(2) “Implementation of directive principles”²⁷, article 37(6)(b) “Social objectives”²⁸, article 39(2) “Cultural objectives”²⁹. The Constitutional principles, thus, guarantee the right to life, human dignity, good health care, freedom from discrimination; in addition, it also contains provisions requiring the State to “provide social assistance to the aged such as will enable them to maintain a decent standard of living” (Constitution, 1992: 37(6)(b)) and require “that traditional practices which are injurious to the health and well-being of the person are abolished” (Constitution, 1992: 39(2)).

Additionally, aspects of criminal and statutory law, most notably the Criminal Code of 1960 and the Domestic Violence Act of 2007, provide mechanisms that, in principle, could be used to address offences such as threats of death, violence, assault, linked to witchcraft accusations. However, neither the Criminal Code nor any other specific statute criminalises

²⁷ Ghana Constitution, 1992. Article 34(2): “The President shall report to Parliament at least once a year all the steps taken to ensure the realization of the policy objectives contained in this Chapter; and, in particular, the realization of basic human rights, a healthy economy, the right to work, the right to good health care and the right to education.”

²⁸ Ghana Constitution, 1992. Article 37(6)(b): “The State shall (...) (b) provide social assistance to the aged such as will enable them to maintain a decent standard of living.”

²⁹ Ghana Constitution, 1992. Article 39(2): “The State shall ensure that appropriate customary and cultural values are adapted and developed as an integral part of the growing needs of the society as a whole; and in particular that traditional practices which are injurious to the health and well-being of the person are abolished.”

witchcraft accusations as such. This absence constitutes a significant legal gap, which the proposed amendment to the Criminal Offences Bill seeks to address.

Despite all of the above legal obligations, Amnesty International concludes that Ghana's legal protection framework is not effectively applied and enforced to safeguard individuals accused of witchcraft. While there are constitutional guarantees and criminal provisions that may be used to address witchcraft related violence, such as assault, threats, attempted murder, or trial by ordeal, the lack of specific legislation that expressly criminalises witchcraft accusations as a harmful practice and provides targeted protection for those accused, results into a situation where perpetrators may be prosecuted under general criminal or domestic violence legislation, leaving a legal vacuum that fails to address the structural nature of the harm and to protect alleged witches.

The conditions in the camps, characterised by insecurity, deprivation, and social exclusion, seem to be incompatible with rights to dignity, life, health, adequate housing, non-discrimination, and access to food and water, as described both in international treaties and in Ghana's Constitution. While the abrupt closure of the camps is not recommended, as it would likely be more detrimental to the women's lives (Pierre, 2018: 23-24), interviews with practitioners, political actors, and academic stakeholders consistently underlined the need for a gradual process. Such a process should begin with sustained education and awareness-raising initiatives within communities, aimed at tackling stigma, harmful beliefs, and the social practices that legitimise accusations, alongside legislative efforts, and carefully designed reintegration projects. These three pillars, education, legislation, and reintegration, form the basis of the Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusations (CAWA)'s advocacy and lobbying efforts.

Pierre (2018: 24-25) emphasised another compelling point of view. Her analysis suggests that "criminalizing witchcraft allegations might actually increase human rights abuses (...) if community members chose to see the criminalization as an act of witchcraft itself". As a matter of fact, Geschiere (1997) explained that when a community's belief system is grounded in accusations as a legitimate response to perceived existential threats, in this case witches are believed to endanger collective welfare through their supernatural abilities, for instance destroying crops, causing illness and death, or spiritually harming others; then, from this perspective, it becomes evident that accusations are used as protective measures grounded in a shared cosmology. Consequently, prosecutors "cannot elude the population's

pressing demand that witches be pursued” (Geschiere, 1997: 185, 196-197, in Pierre: 2018: 25), but at the same time prosecutors may feel unsafe and “fear reprisal from the community” (Pierre: 2018: 25) if investigating on cases of perpetrators of witchcraft accusations and their crimes. Communities may interpret state inaction as a failure to safeguard the rights of those allegedly harmed, thereby justifying actions such as the alleged witch banishment as non-arbitrary forms of self-defence. However, while freedom of belief is to be respected and communities are entitled to act upon their beliefs, this entitlement ceases when such beliefs result in the violation of the rights of others.

Chapter 5 - Reintegration as a process, not an event

5.1 Experiences of accused women

Interviews and focus groups with accused women in Kpatinga, Gnani, and Kukuo camps reveal that reintegration is widely desired but deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, most of the women express the wish to leave the camps at some point; on the other hand, they are hindered by the fear of renewed accusation, economic insecurity, social rejection, and overall uncertainty about survival outside the camps. Reintegrated women provide a crucial counterpoint to these fears and uncertainties: the stories of the three reintegrated women interviewed reveal the obstacles and opportunities they faced during and after their reintegration. Placing the voices of camp residents alongside those of reintegrated women allows to trace reintegration not just about the return to one's community, but as an ongoing and complicated practice of rebuilding life beyond accusations and displacement, that requires a prolonged process to ensure adequate planning, safety, livelihood, and social acceptance.

Desire for reintegration and the centrality of safety

In Kpatinga camp, thirteen out of the fifteen women interviewed were aware of reintegration projects. Most of the women expressed their desire to be reintegrated under certain conditions. Fourteen out of fifteen accused would accept reintegration only if it involved relocation to a new community, not a return to the one that accused them. This fear of renewed accusations is echoed in Gnani camp as well. Yacham hopes to be reintegrated not in her old community for fear of reaccusations, but she hopes to be relocated into her children's new community. Similarly, Mawan, who has lived in Gnani camp for 23 years, stated that she wanted to be reintegrated only when she becomes too weak to manage her daily duties, and even then, not to her original community but to where her children live.

These narratives reveal two elements: firstly, the fear of being reaccused highlights the shared understanding that accusations are not isolated events, but socially embedded processes that can easily reemerge if the woman returns to the same social environment and if the community does not accept her back. Secondly, reintegration is not primarily perceived as

reconciliation with the accusing communities, but as strategic relocations to spaces perceived as safer.

In Kukuo camp, focus groups uncovered that the fear of the unknown also shapes accused women's reluctance to leave the camp. Despite severe material and relational deprivation, familiarity itself becomes a form of safety: "Even though there is no water, no food, no clothing here, when you go to a new community, you don't know what will happen to you"³⁰. Insecurity outside can make even the deeply marginalised living conditions of the camps preferable: reintegration efforts must tackle this sense of insecurity, acknowledging that safety is not measured in material terms alone, but in protection from violence and accusations, as well as economic support.

Economic survival as a precondition for reintegration

Across all three camps visited, interviewed women emphasised that reintegration is impossible without economic support. In Kpatinga, many women wished to return to their previous livelihoods and recognised that reintegration requires capital to build or rent a room to live in. One woman questioned who would support her after leaving, explaining that in the camp, she receives food in exchange for farm work. Another woman reported that she had been removed from the LEAP Programme and therefore would not know how to financially sustain herself if reintegrated. Her testimony incited the other women to critique the inadequate state support. They emphasised that LEAP support is insufficient to sustain them and their families after reintegration, and expressed hope that the monthly amount would increase, that payments would be made regularly and on time, and that the number of beneficiaries would be expanded. Economic insecurity is a decisive factor in whether reintegration is imaginable at all.

Economic insecurity is also complicated by age and physical strength: many women reported that returning to farming would be physically difficult due to their advanced age, and suggested alternative livelihoods such as selling rice, processing rice, soap-making, or shea butter production (Kpatinga camp).

In Gnani camp, economic priorities were articulated with clarity by Mawan, who clearly

³⁰ Focus group interview with residents of Kukuo camp, 27 November 2025, Kukuo camp.

states that “a livelihood will keep my body and soul”³¹, and her priorities included financial support, animals to raise and to sell their products, assistance with accommodation, and general economic empowerment. Yacham similarly requested ruminant animals, such as goats or sheep, donations and financial support to restart her livelihood, and assistance to return to her children’s community.

In Kukuo camp, economic insecurity also shaped decisions to remain, and the idea of reintegration is perceived as economically riskier than continued displacement and banishment. While some income-generating activities are available within the camp and the community, reintegration offers no guarantee of employment, leading some women to state that they prefer remaining in the camp where they can rely on a minimum but consistent source of daily income.

Housing and material conditions

In all of the camps, housing emerged as another major obstacle to reintegration. Many of the interviewed women emphasised that they could not afford to build or rent a room, and stressed that to feel safe, they needed an independent, affordable, and comfortable housing. Several expressed reluctance to stay with relatives, fearing conflict within extended family households, also as a reminder, and as seen in chapter 4, accusations typically originate from family members, therefore the fear of conflict is linked to the fear of renewed accusations, as a consequence a further challenge of reintegration is not only to be socially accepted but being able to live independently and without further humiliation.

Given that reintegration is a long process, material conditions in the camps emerged as a concern to many women. In particular, Yacham, in Gnani camp, argued that the government should provide mattresses, aluminum or zinc roofs, and generally improve housing conditions in the camps. This concern highlights something that also Mr Samadu Sayibu also argued, that before reintegration is achieved, there are five priorities to consider: food, water, housing, health, and clothing. These key aspects concretely uphold accused women in the camps and are of utmost importance because these women think in terms of surviving with dignity while waiting, sometimes for years, for reintegration to become feasible.

³¹ Interview with Mawan Inumbei, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

Social acceptance and family relations

Recurring themes in the interviews were the deep fears of stigma and community rejection that eventually shape reintegration decisions. Women fear rejection both by the receiving community and by their families. Some women explained that the accusations led to neglect by their families, and others stated that the risk of conflict within their family made them hesitant to rely on kin networks, even when those networks represent a reintegration pathway. Victims are often perceived as permanently dangerous; even when the priest declares them cleansed, relatives and neighbours continue to fear that the woman may bring harm back (Mutaru, 2018: 264–265). Long-term residents also reported anxiety, depression, and a persistent fear that returning home would trigger a new accusation, all of which further discourages reintegration. Psychological trauma, therefore, becomes a major obstacle to the process (Amnesty International, 2025: 52; see also Songtaba, 2022). ActionAid’s 2008 survey found that 40% of the women who were reintegrated returned to a camp within a year because they had been re-accused. The same study notes that “the fear of being blamed for any future misfortunes” is the main reason women refuse to go home (ActionAid, 2012: 11). Even seventeen years later, this remains true. Overall, interviewed women in Kpatinga camps agreed that accusations constitute human rights violations, and emphasised that the resultant abandonment and neglect are the most painful consequences.

Relations with NGOs

The NGOs working in synergy on the reintegration projects are Songtaba NGO and ActionAid Ghana. Women in the camps widely perceive them as key enabling actors. Mawan recalled that when Songtaba arrived in Gnani camp, the women “dance to welcome them because they bring good news and items we need”³². NGOs’ visits break isolation and create moments of recognition: their support has been praised. Yacham, especially, shared her memories of Songtaba’s capacity building project in soap-making and in leadership skills, and vividly remembered the previous Mother’s Day (11 May 2025), when Songtaba came to the camp for a day of celebration, that was marked by shared meals, storytelling sessions, the distribution of essential items, and the performance of a local musician from Tamale; Yacham recalled that day happily because “[she] love[s] to dance and that day [she] could dance all day”³³. During these moments of celebration, Songtaba seized the opportunity to conduct

³² Interview with Mawan Inumbi, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

³³ Interview with Yacham Surumba, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

profiling to better understand if new women wished to be reintegrated and how they wished to do so.

In Kukuo camp, Songtaba's reintegration strategy focuses on extensive community engagement and psychosocial support for the accused women. The receiving communities where the women wish to be reintegrated or relocated require multiple visits and prolonged dialogue: Songtaba initiates the process by educating and sensitising the community, including chiefs and community leaders, about the reintegration process and the specific needs of the accused woman. Simultaneously, they support the women themselves, who often need reassurance. In some cases, the accused women initially resist reintegration due to fear and uncertainty, and Songtaba staff work to support, reassure, and gradually prepare them for the transition. According to Mustapha, despite initial hesitations, all women who expressed the wish to be reintegrated eventually agree and finalise the reintegration process, highlighting that reintegration practices are not merely logistical relocation but a deeply emotional and challenging process/negotiation, requiring trust-building and acceptance on both sides.

Reintegration and the Anti-Witchcraft Bill

During the interviews, previous knowledge about the Amendment Bill, which aims to criminalise witchcraft accusations, was limited and largely mediated through NGOs, who are the only actors that informed the accused women about its existence and about the Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusations (CAWA)'s advocacy efforts. For the most part, the women expressed concern about the approval of the Amendment Bill and how it would affect reintegration and life in the camps. One woman in Kpatinga camp argued that the government should focus more on safety in the local communities after reintegration has taken place. Another interviewed woman recommended that the government provide stronger support while they remain in the camps. They agreed that the core violation was not the camp itself, but the accusation that made the banishment in the camp their only option.

In Gnani camp, women expressed clearer support for the Bill: Mawan welcomed it because "accusations are not fair for any person"³⁴, and she supported the closure of the camps and agreed that community education is essential. Yacham further supported the closure of the

³⁴ Interview with Mawan Inumbei, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

camps but emphasised that “convincing communities to accept us will be difficult”³⁵, and she continued supporting the importance of community education, again highlighting that legal change alone cannot guarantee social acceptance, but it must be a joint strategy including legislation, education, and reintegration.

Women’s own priorities and visions for reintegration

Across all the camps, alleged witches articulated clear priorities they deemed essential for successful and feasible reintegration: physical safety, the majority of the interviewed women stated they preferred to be reintegrated through relocation rather than return to the original community; sustainable livelihoods, including jobs adapt to their age and strength; financial support and reliable state assistance; support to find decent housing; social acceptance and family reconciliation when possible; community education to prevent renewed accusations and sensitise on the consequences of being accused. Furthermore, Songtaba’s capacity-building training and workshops, including soap-making and shea butter production training, were widely appreciated among the camps and perceived as concrete forms of care and hope.

The reintegration efforts are therefore not restricted to logistical relocation, but encompass intricate negotiation between fear and hope, risk and necessity, continued banishment and acceptance, and between the accused woman’s needs and rights and the community’s stigma and beliefs.

5.2 Perspectives of reintegrated women

The reintegrated women’s points of view provide a crucial counterpoint to the fear and uncertainties expressed by women still living in the camps. Reintegrated women’s narratives show that reintegration does lead to profound improvements in life conditions and dignity, but also that it remains fragile and dependent on family support, health, and material assistance. Three reintegrated women were interviewed: Hajia Marwa, Shauntee, and Abena, all fictional names for security reasons.

³⁵ Interview with Yacham Surumba, accused woman residing in Gnani camp, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

Hajia Marwa illustrated how her reintegration story not only transformed her material life but also her social and moral status. After being relocated to Bimbilla, she described her life as “much better than in the camp [Kukuo]”³⁶ and highlighted a trajectory of profound religious devotion, where she was even able to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. She powerfully described this transition “from a witch to a pilgrim”³⁷, highlighting that she went from being perceived as a stigmatised person associated with danger to a respected religious pilgrim, so much so that upon her return to Ghana from her pilgrimage, she was warmly welcomed back, even by those who had once accused her of being a witch. Her opinion about her accusers is strikingly non-confrontational: “I am not angry with them. I only pray for them because they are ignorant. They don’t know what they are doing. I pray that God reveals the truth to them, and that is what God has done now”³⁸. Yet, before leaving for Mecca, she feared how others might perceive her: “I am an alleged witch, how will people see me going from an alleged witch to a pilgrim?”³⁹. Eventually, she went on pilgrimage thanks to her family's encouragement, despite stigma, both external and internalised, continuing to shape self-perception even after reintegration.

Despite reintegration, the physical and health consequences of life in the camp remain a challenge: Hajia Marwa explained that her heart problems first began in the camp, where she lacked adequate medical assistance. These health conditions later appeared before and during her pilgrimage, when she experienced symptoms of a heart attack and doubted she could continue with her sacred pilgrimage to Mecca. Similarly, Shauntee’s health remains one of her main concerns, together with her business: she suffers from goiter, and despite having a health insurance card, she is worried about not being able to access proper treatment. Abena, too, struggles with health insecurity, having misplaced her health insurance card and therefore not being able to currently access health services. As Mustapha put it, “without the card, you are doomed”⁴⁰.

Reintegration does not automatically guarantee access to care, because of structural reasons and limited national resources, and illness and health insecurity are another form of vulnerability after displacement.

³⁶ Interview with Hajia Marwa, reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

³⁷ Interview with Hajia Marwa, reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

³⁸ Interview with Hajia Marwa, reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

³⁹ Interview with Hajia Marwa, reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

⁴⁰ Interview with Abena, reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

Family as the core enabling factor

Across all three narratives, family support emerged as a decisive and game-changing factor in successful reintegration. Hajia Marwa, for instance, stressed that her family had to plead with her uncle and ask for his acceptance to have her cleansed and reintegrated. When he finally agreed, her children, especially her son, supported her throughout the whole reintegrating process and in building her new house, the one where the interview took place. Shauntee similarly deepened on her kin network and support: as part of her reintegration, which lasted four months, with multiple visits from Songtaba, she first stayed with her brother, but she felt like a burden and did not want to stress him too much. As a consequence, she was then relocated to a new community where she spent some years. Later, her daughter managed to build her a small house where she now lives with her eight grandchildren. Her family, she said, fully accepted her back, and she was not mistreated in any way after reintegration. Abena's reintegration process was long, lasted around three years, and was emotionally complex. As in many experiences, at first she resisted reintegration out of fear of being reaccused. Her children repeatedly visited her in Kukuo camp, where she was banished for eleven years, to persuade her and convince her to accept reintegration. Once she did, and after her brothers accepted her back, she was reintegrated into her original community and lived in one of her brothers' houses. Although the brother was happy to have her there, the transition was difficult for Abena because so many things had changed. Therefore, after one month, her children arranged to move her to a new compound with them, through relocation in a new community, where she currently lives. Although she described her reintegration as "perfect"⁴¹, she also recounted the process as being difficult because she was being pulled between her brother's house and her children's community, as "everyone wanted [her] to stay with them"⁴².

Even after successful reintegration, fear of renewed accusation does not fully disappear, as well as lingering fear of stigmatisation. Hajia Marwa's internal struggle before the pilgrimage, "how will people see me"⁴³, depicted the fear of stigma continuing to shape self-image long after reintegration. Shauntee admitted that she worried she might be accused again, but "one accusation is enough for me?"⁴⁴, she said with a light laugh. Abena also worried about the possibility of being accused within the community, even though she feels

⁴¹ Interview with Abena, reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

⁴² Interview with Abena, reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

⁴³ Interview with Hajia Marwa, reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

⁴⁴ Interview with Shauntee, reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

safe with her family.

Economic life after reintegration

Economic insecurity and the fear of it, after reintegration, were reported as a common challenge. In Hajia Marwa's case, she did not emphasise livelihood as a major problem, clearly stating that she has "no problems with food, clothing, or housing"⁴⁵. Her only current challenge is access to water, because in the dry season, water scarcity is severe, and the dam nearby her house becomes dirty, and the water is unsafe for consumption. Unlike other families, she can not afford to mechanise a water system herself; her strong appeal and necessity is to have a borehole constructed or for a piped water connection to be installed to secure constant water. For Shauntee, economic vulnerability is more central. As part of her reintegration, Songtaba supported her with 1,400 Ghana cedis (as of mid-January 2026, around 109 euros), which she used to buy goats and start her small business. This support was central in enabling her to move beyond dependency at first; however, her income later declined because "market days have been poor recently"⁴⁶, and with her business struggling, she now worries about not being able to support her grandchildren's education, as she can not afford to buy school uniforms, shoes, and school supplies. Although she is enrolled in LEAP, she stressed that the transfers are not sufficient to support her needs or strengthen her business. Generally, she was grateful to Songtaba for their support and expressed hope that it would grow into a larger organization able to help more women. In Abena's case, her economic trajectory was disrupted by an accident: after her reintegration, she received material support, for instance, house items and clothes, from ActionAid and Songtba, but later her house flooded, destroying all the support items she had received. She did not receive help after that, and now she is struggling to restart her business selling provisions because she needs capital and a permanent selling spot, given that she is too old to stand all day.

Views on government support and the Anti-Witchcraft Bill

Reintegrated women largely support stronger government involvement. As previously noted, Hajia Marwa mentioned a broader systemic failure by the state, citing its inability to guarantee water security and access. In addition, significant legal and protective gaps persist.

⁴⁵ Interview with Hajia Marwa, reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

⁴⁶ Interview with Shauntee, reintegrated woman, 29 November 2025, Bimbilla.

The absence of specific legislation addressing accusations of witchcraft, combined with limited police intervention, leaves victims highly vulnerable: only 6.7% of victims reported violence to the police, and officers themselves sometimes share the belief in witchcraft, which further discourages formal protection. Without state backing, families fear reprisals if they host a former witch (Amnesty International, 2025: 24–25).

Shauntee underlined the issues related to LEAP, specifically that the monthly transfers are insufficient to support her and her family. Abena believes the government should help them more and do more in general, and emphasised that education is necessary so that harmful practices against women will come to an end. For this reason, she strongly supports the Bill and the camps' closure, arguing that with a law in place, wrongfully accused individuals could report their accusers to the police and force them to face the consequences of their unsubstantiated accusations.

From these accounts, reintegration is not an endpoint but a delicate process, where vulnerabilities related to health, water, education, disasters, and economic instability are revealed. This process requires sustained family support, reliable institutional assistance, access to health care and infrastructure, and protection against renewed stigma. As Hajia Marwa's story of going from a witch to a pilgrim powerfully shows, reintegration can restore dignity and social value, but only when material conditions, emotional support, and social acceptance align.

5.3 Tindaamba and the community chief's perspectives

This subchapter analyses the perspectives of *tindaamba* and traditional authorities on reintegration, the Anti-Witchcraft Bill, and the closure of witch camps. Their views are marked by a consistent tension: even though they expressed support for reintegration in principle, they also regard the camps as indispensable safety nets in a social environment where stigma, fear, and violence remain persistent.

As presented in chapters 2 and 4, *tindaamba* frame reintegration as a ritual process of spiritual purification, where the alleged witch has to be cleansed from the spirit of witchcraft: reintegration is only socially imaginable once spiritual cleansing has taken place. However,

Kpatinga's *tindana*'s account highlighted the limits of ritual authority in defiance of social stigma. He stated that some women, even though they were cleansed, chose to stay in the camp because of victimisation and stigma; they did not feel safe returning to their communities. Kukuo's *tindana* stated that he had no objection to women being reintegrated, and even joked that he prayed for reintegration because it would "reduce [his] workload"⁴⁷. However, he believes that without camps, women would risk being killed or tortured, with nowhere safe to go. Similarly, Kukuo community chief frames his community as a place of refuge rather than a permanent residence. He acknowledged that belief in witchcraft is deeply rooted: "this particular mentality has come to stay with us, so we need to find a way to live peacefully and in harmony with it within our settlement"⁴⁸. From his perspective, reintegration is not about eradicating belief but managing coexistence between believers and non-believers. All of the *tindaamba* expressed openness to reintegration, while simultaneously depicting camps as indispensable spaces of protection.

All interlocutors expressed deep skepticism toward the Anti-Witchcraft Bill and the related closure of the camps and reintegration of women. Gnani's *tindana* used a striking metaphor: "just as hospitals are built for sick people, the camps exist for witchcraft accusations"⁴⁹. His experience with the closure of Bonyase camp in 2014 reinforced his views: although some women were accepted back in their communities, others were not, and they had to be relocated elsewhere. This is the reason why he argued that the Bill and the closure of the camps do not resolve accusations, their underlying causes, and the threats and stigma within communities: the Bill was perceived as treating symptoms rather than causes. Even if the Bill passes, he insisted he would continue hosting accused people because, in his view, they would have nowhere else to go due to persistent stigma.

Adam, Kpatinga's *tindana*, believed the Bill "would only create chaos because there is no education among the population"⁵⁰, and thus it would not work. He further questioned the state's ability to guarantee accused individuals' safety at the community level if camps are closed. In addition, his position is that camps should still exist, but if they were to close, he argued that the process should be gradual, not radical. Another key factor he mentioned was the importance of education, especially for girls and children, to address accusations and raise awareness, otherwise accusations of witchcraft would never stop. Adam further described his

⁴⁷ Interview with Kukuo's *tindana*, 26 November 2025, Kukuo camp.

⁴⁸ Interview with Kukuo's *tindana*, 26 November 2025, Kukuo camp.

⁴⁹ Interview with Alhassan Shei, Gnani's *tindana*, 25 November 2025, Gnani camp.

⁵⁰ Interview with Adam Musah, Kpatinga's *tindana*, 24 November 2025, Kpatinga camp.

collaboration with NGOs working on reintegration as a positive, extensive, long, and demanding process, involving several meetings with him and direct engagement with the accused women.

Kukuo's community chief, similarly, framed camps as life-saving institutions, hence advocating against their closure. Moreover, he argued that any attempt to close them must also provide alternative forms of protection, and questioned what would happen if camps were closed: "where would the women go, and would they be safe?"⁵¹. His insights suggested that legal reform alone would translate into further social abandonment.

Moreover, Kukuo's *tindana* strongly advocated for peacebuilding and community sensitisation. According to him, closing the camps without changing the minds of the people, thus without addressing the social norms behind accusations, would create more problems: "first of all, let's change the minds of the people. If there will be no more accusations, there will be no more punishment [and the camps will] definitely die"⁵².

To sum up, local authorities and *tindaamba*'s support and collaborate with NGOs for reintegration, yet they persist in considering the camps as safe havens for alleged witches. They rejected the Anti-Witchcraft Bill, even though their knowledge of the Bill was superficial, but they were realistic that if camps had to close, it should be a gradual closure associated with consistent education of communities.

5.4 The role of Songtaba NGO in reintegration practices

As previously emerged, Songtaba NGO, with sometimes support from ActionAid Ghana, implements reintegration projects, which are mainly funded by private donors through the crowdfunding platform Global Giving. From Songtaba's experience, reintegration emerges as a prolonged and resource-intensive social process that requires careful and sensitive negotiation with multiple actors, including the accused woman, her family, and the community chief.

Reintegration "is a process, not an event"⁵³: through a bottom-up approach, reintegration

⁵¹ Interview with Kukuo's community chief, 26 November 2025, Kukuo camp.

⁵² Interview with Kukuo's *tindana*, 26 November 2025, Kukuo camp.

⁵³ Interview with Mr Samadu Sayibu, Songtaba project manager, 01 December 2025, Tamale.

begins with the accused woman's willingness to return, her preferred destination, and her assessment of personal risk and needs. During Songtaba's visits to the camps, the women who wish to be reintegrated are profiled, their biographical data are gathered, potential family contact persons are identified, and the possibility of reintegration or relocation is assessed based on the safer option. Only after this stage does engagement with families and community authorities begin. Families can be resistant actors in the reintegration process, as Songtaba's project manager Mr Samadu Sayibu noted, it can take "five or six visits to convince the family to agree to accept the alleged witch back"⁵⁴. Resistance is frequently justified through claims of limited space, but these explanations often mask deeper conflicts. Importantly, accusations commonly originate within the family itself, making reintegration structurally more challenging, because when the family is the source of the accusation, the accused woman has no one to rely on. In such cases, these women may be relocated to an entirely new community.

Relocation, however, introduced significant financial challenges. Songtaba estimates that relocation can cost up to 30,000 Ghana cedis⁵⁵, including land acquisition and the construction of a basic two-room house. This financial hurdle highlights the limits of NGO-led interventions and reinforces Mr Sayibu's argument that reintegration can not be sustainably managed without structural state investment.

Tindaamba's role in the reintegration process is circumscribed to the purification ritual; they do not obstruct women who wish to leave the camps. Before a woman leaves the camp, she must undergo cleansing through the ordeal ritual. This ritual intervention serves both spiritual and social functions, marking a symbolic rupture with the accusation and signaling to the community that the woman no longer poses a threat. If the woman can not afford to pay for the fowl required for the ritual, Songtaba may pay for it. Moreover, Mr Sayibu illustrated a practice Gnani's *tindana* is accustomed to: he will give reintegrated women a bracelet of beads as protection and as a sign to the community that she has been cleansed and no longer possesses witchcraft. The bracelet must be returned once the woman dies, which underscores the enduring moral authority of the *tindana* over the accused person, even beyond reintegration.

⁵⁴ Interview with Mr Samadu Sayibu, Songtaba project manager, 01 December 2025, Tamale.

⁵⁵ As of the end of January 2026, this amounts to less than €2,300. However, it is important to note that the Ghanaian currency is subject to frequent fluctuations.

Songtaba's engagement is not limited to physical reintegration: post-reintegration support focuses on livelihood restoration and monitoring. The organization invests in skills training, such as soap making, shea butter processing, petty trading, and farming, to enhance women's economic autonomy. Moreover, monitoring visits aim to assess health and economic status, safety conditions within the family and the community, and monitor levels of stigma in the community. Monitoring is key in the reintegration process, reflecting on the awareness that reintegration, without sustained support, risks failure. Mr Sayibu reported a few cases where a reintegrated woman was reaccused and had to return to the camp, which calls attention to the fragility of the process and the underlying issues of social acceptance, which need to be tackled through education.

Improvements

Accounts presented foreground both practical efforts achieved through NGO intervention and the persistent limitations resulting from weak state engagement, legal gaps, and the profound trauma experienced by accused women. Reintegration is part of a wider strategy whose three pillars include legislation, education, and reintegration.

From Mr Sayibu's perspective, improving reintegration requires deeper community engagement, more diffused psychosocial support, and material investment. He argued that NGOs like Songtaba must "step up our efforts and let them [accused women] appreciate that they can still go home and can still be reintegrated". He stressed that many women are unable to envision reintegration because of the severity of their trauma. The study conducted in 2022 by Songtaba and Ghana Somubi Dwunadie, funded by UK Aid, further revealed that around 27% of the 277 people accused of witchcraft interviewed did not want to be reintegrated due to concerns about their safety in the community, fear of being attacked or lynched (Songtaba, 2022: 33). This calls for closer collaboration with psychological and mental health professionals, signalling an important need to shift from ad hoc assistance, enabled by one-off fundings, towards a systematic trauma-informed reintegration model. Psychological support remains one of the weakest components of current reintegration practices: Songtaba recognises it as essential, but lacks in-house capacity and depends on external professionals hired on a project basis and on the availability of funding. The aforementioned Somubi project was cited as an example of such temporary arrangements, yet still indispensable. However, this project-based approach undermines continuity of care and trust-building with

accused women, reinforcing the need for psychological and medical services to become systematic rather than one-off.

Material and financial sustainability emerged as other central concerns given the expensive nature of reintegration, and considering food insecurity and housing costs remaining critical barriers. Mr Sayibu explicitly linked the limitations of current social protection mechanisms to reintegration outcomes, suggesting that increasing the monthly LEAP money would significantly improve women's ability to sustain themselves both during their stay in the camps and after return.

This overreliance on NGOs' support in reintegration practices demonstrates the state's lack of structural engagement and reminds that civil society interventions should complement, not replace, state responsibility.

Songtaba is part of the Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusations (CAWA) and, alongside The Sanneh Institute and the other organizations, strongly advocates for the passing of the Bill. Legal reform is, indeed, identified as a foundational prerequisite for improving reintegration practices. Currently, the Domestic Violence Act serves as the primary legal mechanism through which accused women may be protected, yet it is an inadequate and partial legal instrument. A rights-based defence is required: in this context, the long-awaited Amendment Bill addressing witchcraft accusations is considered the cornerstone of reform of the CAWA's three pillars of intervention: law, education, and reintegration. Without a clear and secure legal basis, educational campaigns and reintegration efforts remain vulnerable, limited in scope and funds, and inconsistently enforced.

Community engagement and education were described as the most time-intensive yet indispensable components of reintegration. According to Mr Sayibu, communities often justify violence and exclusion by invoking long-standing traditions and belief systems, making the process of deconstruction long. Songtaba's approach seeks to address this by engaging diverse target groups, including youth, women, and traditional and religious authorities. Education efforts are explicitly context-sensitive, aiming to "appreciate where they come from"⁵⁶ rather than dismiss local cosmologies outright. This strategy reflects an attempt to work within existing moral frameworks while gradually reframing witchcraft accusations as forms of gender-based violence. Furthermore, particular attention is paid to

⁵⁶ Interview with Mr Samadu Sayibu, Songtaba project manager, 01 December 2025, Tamale.

intergenerational dynamics, noting that youth are frequently the primary accusers and that education must directly address this pattern. Youth are encouraged to understand that accusations are unjust and that “anyone could be a potential victim of witchcraft accusations”⁵⁷. Building on this, Mr Sayibu advocates for strengthening youth engagement through dedicated youth campaigns: young people should be trained as community campaigners who actively work to prevent violence, lynching, and expulsions. This focus on youth is framed as a long-term strategy for generational change: young people who grow up without seeing witchcraft-related violence as a social language will become adults who do not accuse, lynch, or kill someone because of accusations. Reintegration and education are thus imagined not only as an immediate corrective intervention, but as part of a broader cultural transformation from the roots.

Once again, Mr Sayibu reiterated the importance of structural, national-level investments, specific and targeted national reintegration programs with dedicated funding, arguing that the reintegration challenges identified would benefit from such investments that have the potential to support implementation on longer-term project cycles. At the advocacy level, coalitions such as CAWA remain crucial in maintaining political pressure on the government to pass the Bill. Continued advocacy by local NGOs together with international actors like Amnesty International is seen as essential to translating NGO-led initiatives into state-backed and durable reintegration frameworks.

⁵⁷ Interview with Mr Samadu Sayibu, Songtaba project manager, 01 December 2025, Tamale.

Chapter 6 - Policy recommendations and conclusions: strengthening protection and reintegration pathways

The findings from the field research demonstrate that witchcraft accusations and the subsequent exile of accused women to the camps are not an isolated cultural phenomenon, but structurally embedded expressions of gendered power, economic marginalisation, intergenerational conflict, and weak institutional protection (Amnesty International, 2025: 6-7). Therefore, reintegration initiatives that merely focus on the physical reintegration of accused individuals, without addressing the structural root causes of accusations, risk reproducing patterns of exclusion and renewed accusations. For this reason, the closure of the camps must not be considered the sole or primary focus of policy responses; it should be rather understood as the outcome of a multi-level prevention-oriented and rights-based framework that should simultaneously address structural vulnerabilities, strengthen institutional accountability, introduce education and sensitisation campaigns, and ensure sustainable reintegration pathways.

The findings presented in the previous chapters demonstrate unequivocally that reintegration can not be conceptualised as an event, the physical reallocation of an accused woman from a camp to a community; it is instead a prolonged and fragile process affected and hindered by structural vulnerabilities, community and family dynamics, economic precarity, health insecurity, and embedded belief systems. The experiences and accounts of the accused women in Kpatinga, Gnani, and Kukuo camps, as well as those who have been reintegrated, reveal that the primary violation lies in the accusation itself and in the absence of adequate state protection following the accusation.

This chapter seeks to elaborate relevant policy recommendations and advance a comprehensive policy framework grounded in a human security and survivor-centered approach and based on Ghana's legal responsibility under international human rights obligations. Reintegration must be structurally reformed and institutionalised as a state-led and multisectoral process; otherwise, the risk is for reintegration initiatives to remain temporary, reversible, NGO and fund-dependent.

6.1 Proposed National Reintegration Framework

Establishing a National Reintegration Framework

The Government of Ghana should adopt a formal National Reintegration Framework (NFR) for accused individuals to institutionalise reintegration as a state-led responsibility and a rights-based intervention. Currently, reintegration initiatives are implemented by civil society actors, particularly NGOs such as Songtaba. Despite their continued efforts and specialised officers, their initiatives are project-based and externally funded, which limits continual coverage and sustainability in the long-term. As Amnesty International (2025: 7) underlines, “[t]he state holds the primary responsibility for ensuring the right to health is fulfilled, although civil society organizations can play a supportive role”.

A National Reintegration Framework (NFR) would shift the responsibility from ad hoc humanitarian intervention to institutional governance: reintegration has to be treated as a state obligation grounded in constitutional guarantees of dignity, equality, and safety. The NFR would define reintegration as a phased process lasting a minimum of 24-36 months, including risk assessment prior to reintegration; structured community mediation, sensitisation, and education; livelihood support; housing assistance; health and psychosocial care; long-term monitoring and emergency re-protection. This framework should be enforced by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and locally coordinated with local governments and district assemblies.

Legal reform, enforcement, and protection mechanisms

The case study reveals a critical gap between Ghana’s formal legal protections and the lived experiences of accused individuals (Amnesty International, 2025: 7). In spite of the formal existence of constitutional guarantees that prohibit discrimination and violence, perpetrators of accusations rarely face legal accountability (Amnesty International, 2025: 6-7; Azumah, 2021: 4). The Anti-Witchcraft Bill represents an urgent and foundational step in the prevention of further accusations and forced displacement: the criminalisation of public accusations, incitement of violence against alleged witches, and their forced banishment would shift accountability from the victims to the perpetrators.

However, as the research illustrated, legislation alone can not guarantee the accused's safety. The legal reform, once signed into law, should be complemented by implementation mechanisms such as clear prosecutorial guidelines, including defined responsibilities for district-level authorities; witness protection measures; compensation for victims; protection orders against repeat accusers; and budget allocation for enforcement and monitoring.

One significant protection gap identified in previous chapters, and by Amnesty International (2025: 6-7), concerns the limited police intervention and the internalisation of witchcraft beliefs within law enforcement structures. Interviewed women consistently admitted not reporting accusations and violence to the authorities, either due to fear, lack of awareness, or distrust in enforcement mechanisms, revealing that the problem is not merely normative absence but enforcement failure and a systematic lack of protection. To tackle distrust and inaction and to achieve transformative legislation, enforcement capacity has to be decentralised and informed, hence it would be advisable to establish district-level units and protection desks trained in gender-based violence response, harmful traditional practices, trauma-informed interviewing, community mediation, and belief-neutral enforcement standards. Similarly, judges and prosecutors should undergo judicial training to ensure they treat witchcraft accusations as rights violations rather than cultural disputes. International human rights actors such as Amnesty International could support and inform curriculum development and monitoring.

Furthermore, any legal change must be communicated and disseminated through rural legal literacy campaigns to ensure that communities are aware and understand both the law and its consequences. Given the high illiteracy rates, especially in the northern rural areas, legal aid services should be proactively deployed to limit women's and vulnerable groups' access to justice.

Safety-centered reintegration and relocation

As the interviews clearly demonstrated, the majority of accused women prefer relocation to a new community, typically the one where their adult children live, over returning to their original communities that accused them. Policy must therefore recognise relocation as a type of reintegration and develop a structured relocation strategy including: host community

education and agreements, transitional housing subsidies, security monitoring during the first 12-24 months, rapid response mechanisms in case of renewed threats to safety.

Community sensitisation and education must, naturally, precede reintegration. Structured dialogues, facilitated by trained mediators, should be periodically held in the communities for chiefs, religious leaders, youth, and associations to participate and engage.

Economic support

Another challenge to reintegration was identified as economic and financial insecurity: “[d]espite the Ghanaian government’s initiative to provide some financial assistance to impoverished persons, it is insufficient and not regular enough to provide an adequate standard of living to accused persons in the camps” (Amnesty International, 2025: 42). Songtaba currently dispenses 1,400 Ghana cedis⁵⁸ to each reintegrated woman for initial support, however, one-time grants, while helpful, are insufficient to guarantee long-term economic independence. The National Reintegration Framework could implement a tiered livelihood model: in phase one the reintegrated person receives an immediate reintegration grant aimed at covering basic need during the initial transition months (3-6 months), in phase two seed capital is granted as livelihood stabilisation support for age-appropriate economic activities such as small livestock rearing, shea butter production, rice processing or petty trading. With phase three comes the integration into cooperatives to reduce isolation and improve market access, indeed, economic empowerment is not just a form of poverty alleviation but a protective infrastructure against social exclusion. Needless to say, this proposal has to be tailored to each person’s needs and take into account age and physical strength, given that many women are elderly and unable to resume labor-intensive activities such as farming.

LEAP Programme reform

The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Programme, the national principal cash-transfer programme, plays an important but insufficient and unreliable role in supporting vulnerable households. First and foremost, a census of accused women still residing in the

⁵⁸ Around 107 euros as of end of mid February 2026.

camps without being enrolled in the LEAP is required to allow district officers to conduct registration sessions in all camps. The programme was deemed insufficient for the specific vulnerabilities of accused women residing in the camps by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights (2018), who recommended to expand its coverage, increase payment levels and improve coordination and integration with other social welfare initiatives to transform the LEAP from a cash safety net into a livelihood-building platform (Amnesty International, 2025: 39-40). A revision of the programme is necessary to guarantee timely and predictable disbursements, and, upon the financial availability of funds, an increased transfer amount for elderly beneficiaries and a reintegration supplement during the first year of reintegration could benefit reintegrated women by reducing economic insecurity and dependency.

Additionally, LEAP could incorporate a shock-responsive mechanism to address natural disasters, such as flooding, which, as illustrated in Abena's case, complicated and set back her reintegration gains.

Housing, infrastructure, and basic services

Secure and independent housing is central to the dignity and safety of reintegrated women. Many of them fear living with relatives due to potential conflict and renewed accusations. Accordingly, as part of the National Reintegration Framework, a housing fund should be set up to assist reintegrated women to build basic single or double-room housing units and rental subsidies where construction is not feasible. Equally important is access to clean water, sanitation, and electricity, as shown by Hajia Marwa's case of water insecurity and how the infrastructure gaps and poor district development planning hindered otherwise successful reintegration.

Infrastructure expansion could benefit from national and international partnerships and support of agencies such as the UNDP or the World Bank, particularly under rural resilience and gender equity programs.

Health care and psychosocial protection

Health insecurity emerged as a recurring vulnerability among reintegrated women. The enrolment in the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) should be automatic upon access to the camps, and the replacement process of lost cards should be simplified.

Interviews and observations demonstrated that psychological trauma remains insufficiently addressed, yet the consequences of long-term displacement, abandonment, stigma, and fear of accusation create enduring mental health challenges. Amnesty International (2025: 35) interviewed Nanumba South District Police Commander, and he “noted that even though the Domestic Violence Act specifies that psycho-social support should be available to the victims, ‘on the ground it is non-existent’”. The reintegration framework should, therefore, consider dedicated funding for mental health professionals to conduct community-based counselling, facilitate peer-support groups, and organise voluntary faith-based reconciliation dialogues before, during, and after the reintegration process. This support approach should extend not only to the accused women but also to their families and broader communities to ensure that relationships can benefit from structured mediation and sustained psychosocial assistance.

Community education campaigns

As already mentioned, legal reform and reintegration initiatives require profound education efforts: “[r]eintegration will empty the camps. Education and legislation will help reduce numbers of victims; over time, they will end new accusations” (Azumah, 2021: 4). Within the National Reintegration Framework, a national education campaign must be implemented and ought to adopt a multi-layered and context-sensitive approach to engage different demographics.

Mr Sayibu highlighted that youth-targeted campaigns are essential preventative measures to reshape how younger generations, who are sometimes the primary accusers and instigators of witchcraft-related violence, understand misfortune, conflict, inequalities, and social blame. These educational efforts should be embedded within formal education to ensure that prevention becomes systemic and integrated into school curricula, introducing age-appropriate discussions on human rights, gender equality, conflict resolution, and the harmful consequences of accusations. Youth-led prevention intends to foster generational

change and to equip young agents of peace with skills in mediation and non-violent communication. Their engagement could help mediate disputes in their communities before they escalate into accusations, defuse violent incitement, or report threats of violence to the appropriate authorities, resulting in reduced conflicts and stigma. The role and influence of religious leaders has to be taken into account: sermons delivered by well-respected faith leaders could further reinforce the messages of compassion, justice, and nonviolence. All of these interventions do not aim to dismiss the belief in witchcraft itself, but they seek to reframe accusations and violence as unacceptable social practices and acts against the national law, working towards a generational transformation critical for the long-term eradication of witchcraft accusations.

Monitoring and accountability

Currently, reintegration outcomes remain poorly documented beyond NGO reports. A national database ought to track reintegrated women for a minimum of three to five years, monitoring eventual reaccusation rates, economic stability, access to services, housing security, and health outcomes. Furthermore, this kind of public reporting strengthens accountability and enables evidence-based policy refinements and adjustments in the long run to ensure that interventions are driven by local realities on the ground.

6.2 Targeted actions within the camps

Living standards in the camps

As recommended by Amnesty International (2025: 62), any type of national strategy should still “[a]llow people who want to remain in the camps to stay with adequate living conditions and do not close the camps as long as there are people currently there who wish to remain”. Therefore, as part of the National Reintegration Framework for accused individuals, particular attention has to be paid to the current living conditions in the camps: reintegration should not translate into abandonment or neglect for those who are unwilling or not yet able to leave the camps. Through the interviews, five immediate priorities have been identified,

which should be institutionalised as minimum standards of living under the state-led protection framework: food, water, housing, health care, and clothing.

First and second, food and water are non-negotiable and constitutional rights. Access to adequate nutrition should be guaranteed through regular state-supported food provision distributions and integration into national food security schemes. In each camp, boreholes or mechanised water systems should be installed or rehabilitated to eliminate reliance on seasonal and far water sources: safe and clean drinking water is both a public health necessity and a matter of dignity, especially when considering the advanced ages of many accused women who are unable to go fetch water over long distances.

Third, housing conditions in the camps require urgent structural improvement. Many shelters are constructed with mud walls and deteriorating thatched roofs. The state, in collaboration with the district assemblies, should invest in providing zinc or aluminum roofing sheets, cement reinforcement, and basic household items such as mattresses. During the interviews, concerns were raised about the possibility that improving the camps too much could act as a pull factor, attracting people who currently have very little. Although these concerns are legitimate, the improvements should not signal the institutionalisation of the camps, just the compliance with minimum human rights standards of living, while longer-term reintegration pathways are developed.

Fourth, access to health care must be strengthened through systematic, not ad hoc, interventions. Regular monthly visits by mobile clinics could be implemented, involving general practitioners, mental health professionals, and specialists addressing chronic illnesses common among elderly women. Medical students could also participate through structured collaborations with university curricula. Such interventions would enable the timely identification and treatment of health issues, thus preventing deterioration that may result in prolonged pain, debilitating conditions, or long-term disabilities. Early treatment not only facilitates faster recovery but also reduces the likelihood of more complex and costly interventions later, thereby alleviating long-term strain on the health system. Simultaneously, and more ambitiously, the national health infrastructure must be expanded in rural areas to reduce the distance between rural communities and clinics. Lastly, the National Health Insurance Scheme was reported not to cover all medical treatments and medications frequently needed by accused women: these gaps in coverage should be identified and addressed.

Fifth, clothing and personal items should be provided regularly, and not dependent on occasional donations, especially when it comes to sanitary products and personal hygiene materials.

Capacity-building for economic empowerment

Songtaba's experience in the camps has demonstrated how targeted capacity-building can increase women's autonomy and reduce dependency on external support. Within the camps' capacity-building trainings, for instance, skills training in sopa making, shea butter production, petty trading, seed banks, and farming need to be structurally implemented in order to build economic and livelihood capacities of the accused women.

This training will provide practical and marketable skills essential once reintegration happens, as well as mitigating the risk of returning to the camps due to economic insecurity, and improving resilience and mental well-being.

The implementation of modular training programs will be tailored to the women's age, physical ability, and interests. The training should be complemented with access to microgrants, toolkits, or starter packs, for instance, seeds, livestock, raw materials, to enable the participants to immediately apply their skills and reduce the risk of economic stagnation after reintegration. Monitoring and follow-up will track the participants' progress over time to identify challenges, opportunities for improvements, and provide support where necessary.

Protection of secondary victims

From the fieldwork, it has emerged that many young children, typically girls, live in the witch camps to support their grandmothers in their daily chores. They are the secondary victims of witchcraft accusations, hence reintegration initiatives must also protect them. Many of these children attend school; however their education and well-being are jeopardised by the economic deprivation of their accused grandmothers. Interviews highlighted that accused women lack the money necessary to afford school uniforms, supplies, shoes, and other basic necessities to ensure their grandchildren can attend school.

Through the National Reintegration Framework, dedicated scholarships or material support should be granted to the children residing in the camps, covering uniforms, shoes, books, stationery, and transportation costs if necessary. As already analysed, psychosocial support for these children should be implemented to address the impact of living in a stigmatised environment, although accounts from their grandmothers and *tindaamba* reassured that the children do not get discriminated and once the accused woman, either gets reintegrated or unfortunately dies, the grandchild can safely return to their original community without stigma.

Still, these children live in hardship, and the LEAP support as it is, is insufficient to cover both the grandmother's and the grandkid's basic needs, even less educational costs. Increasing the amount of disbursements could alleviate some difficulties. Monitoring the children's well-being and educational progress could be useful to inform adaptive interventions and ensure the state's accountability in protecting minors.

6.3 Conclusions

This thesis has examined witchcraft accusations in Northern Ghana as a historically and socially embedded phenomenon, and it has presented and analysed how reintegration initiatives operate in a complex moral, legal, and social context. The research has demonstrated how witchcraft belief functions as a dynamic social and political language through which communities interpret misfortune, negotiate inequality, and regulate belonging.

Firstly, the thesis traced the historical transformation of witchcraft accusations: in precolonial times, accusations were part of ritual systems of moral arbitration, the British colonial intervention disrupted these systems by introducing a foreign epistemology of justice and by banning and framing witchcraft as “dangerous superstitions” (Gray, 2001: 363). Missionary Christianity and later Pentecostal movements further transformed witchcraft discourse into a language of sin, demonic activity, and spiritual warfare. In post-independence Ghana, these layered epistemologies coexist with constitutional protections of religious belief and are challenged by emerging human rights frameworks.

The ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Kpatinga, Gnani, and Kukuo camps revealed that accusations remain deeply gendered and closely intertwined with socio-economic precarity, generational tensions, inheritance disputes, and anxieties around shifting moral economies. Accusations disproportionately target elderly, widowed, and vulnerable women, especially if they lack strong male kinship protection.

The study further demonstrated and analysed the ambivalent nature of the witch camps, considered by some accused women as protective sanctuaries that provide physical safety after banishment, whereas regarded by human rights advocates as spaces of spatial segregation, material deprivation, stigma, and prolonged social exclusion.

Reintegration has been framed as a fragile, negotiated social process that requires mediation between families, community members, traditional authorities, and NGO workers. Successful reintegration depends on interconnected conditions: assurance of safety, access to sustainable livelihoods, secure housing, family reconciliation, and community sensitisation. If these structural conditions are weak due to inconsistent state engagement, reintegration risks being precarious and complicated.

This thesis contributes to current debates by extending existing literature from the camps to the processes of return. In doing so, it directly responds to calls for more ethnographically grounded research on reintegration outcomes and locally defined notions of success and failure. Furthermore, it demonstrates that if reintegration efforts are solely based on rights-based frameworks, ignoring local spiritual epistemologies and dismissing them as irrational, they are less likely to succeed. Reintegration is therefore a process where different normative systems converge and are renegotiated.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that sustainable interventions require an integrated approach combining legal reform, structured reintegration programs, community education, and socio-economic support. Legal reform is underway, with the proposed amendment to the Criminal Offences Bill that aims to specifically criminalise witchcraft accusations by granting legal protection to victims of accusations and holding accusers and enablers of accusations accountable. Legal reform must be implemented jointly with education campaigns and a National Reintegration Framework to address those layered dimensions of tensions that reproduce accusations.

The proposed National Reintegration Framework focuses on strengthening livelihood support to reduce economic vulnerability; facilitating structured family mediation processes; investing in sustained community education to address gender norms and spiritual fears; incorporating long-term follow-up mechanisms; and improving minimum living standards and material conditions in the camps.

Given the relatively short duration of my fieldwork, further longitudinal research is needed to evaluate the long-term sustainability of reintegration outcomes. Future studies could follow returned women over several years to assess economic stability, social acceptance, levels of stigma, and risk of renewed accusations. Additionally, greater attention should be paid to the perspectives of the younger generations, male relatives, and community members who resist reintegration, in order to understand and address intergenerational oral transformations. Further research could also investigate how theological narratives, such as Pentecostal ministries and the wide-spread prophetic churches, influence both accusations and reconciliation processes.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Example of informed consent form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My name is Serena Garufo, and I am a master's student at the University of Torino, Italy, in the program *Area and Global Studies for International Cooperation*. I am conducting fieldwork as part of my final dissertation, which focuses on experiences of witchcraft accusations and the projects that help people reintegrate into society after these accusations.

The purpose of my research is to understand how these reintegration projects work, what challenges they face, what opportunities they create, and whether they have been successful. With this information, I hope to suggest improvements and policy recommendations.

I would like to have an interview-style conversation with you. I will ask you some questions about your experiences or knowledge on the topic. There are **no right or wrong answers**, and you are free to speak only about what you feel comfortable sharing.

If at any point a question makes you uncomfortable, you can tell me, and we will skip it. You can also stop the interview at any time, and you do not have to explain why. The conversation will take approximately 60-90 minutes.

Your participation is **completely voluntary**. You do not have to take part if you do not want to, and choosing not to participate will not have any negative consequences. Even if you agree now, you can change your mind later, withdraw from the interview, or ask that all information you gave be removed from the study.

Everything you share will be used **only for academic and research purposes**. In the final dissertation, I can either mention you by name (if you want to be identified), or I can keep your identity private.

Please choose one of the following options:

- ☒ I want my real name to be used in the research
- ☐ I prefer my identity to remain anonymous
- ☐ I want a pseudonym (fake name) to be used.

Only people involved in this research project will have access to the recordings and notes.

To help me remember correctly what was said, I would like to **audio-record** our conversation. I may also ask to take **photos or videos** for documentation. You can say yes to one and no to the other.

Please indicate your preferences:

Audio recording:

- ☒ I agree to be audio recorded
☐ I do NOT agree to be audio recorded

Photos / Videos:

- ☒ I agree to photos/videos being taken
☐ I do NOT agree to photos/videos being taken

You can ask me to stop recording or to delete any image or recording at any time.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating, although your contribution may help improve future policies or programs supporting people affected by accusations of witchcraft.

Some questions may bring up sensitive memories or emotions. If you feel uncomfortable, we can pause, skip questions, or stop entirely.

Before we begin, please feel free to ask **any questions** about the research, your participation, or how the information will be used. You can also contact me later if anything comes up at serena.garupo@edu.unito.it.

By signing below, you confirm that:

- You understand the purpose of the research
- You have had the chance to ask questions
- Your participation is voluntary
- You agree to take part in the interview

Participant name: Adam Mufah

Signature: _____

Date: 24/11/2025

Researcher name: SERENA GARUPO

Signature: SG

Date: 24/11/2025

PROPOSED INTERVIEW STRUCTURE AND QUESTIONS

Target 1: **ACCUSED WOMEN** (alleged witches living in the camps and already reintegrated women)

A. Introduction and consent

Introduce myself, my research, and its purpose

Explain confidentiality, voluntary participation, right to pause or stop

Ask for consent to take notes and record

B. Start with the person's story

Before the accusation

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
2. Where were you born, and where did you grow up?
3. What was your daily life like before the accusation?
4. How were you seen in your community before the accusation?
5. What relationships were most important to you at that time?
6. Were you facing any difficulties before the accusation (financial, family tensions, illness)?

The accusation

7. Can you tell me what happened leading up to the accusation?
8. Who first accused you? What did they say happened?
9. Was anyone else involved or supportive of the accusation?
10. What do you think influenced people to accuse you?
11. Did you report the accusation to anyone? Police/traditional authorities?

After the accusation

12. What happened immediately after you were accused?
13. Did anyone try to defend you?
14. Did the police, chiefs, or any neighbours intervene?
15. How did you feel during this time?

C. Life in the camp

Conditions and daily living

16. How would you describe life here in the camp?

17. What are your daily routines?
18. What kind of shelter or housing do you live in?
19. How do you find food to eat here?
20. Are you able to work or earn income?
21. How does the camp provide support?
22. What are external associations/actors that come to the camp? What do they do?

Social environment inside the camp

23. Who do you spend most of your time with?
24. How do women in the camp support each other?
25. Were there any conflicts inside the camp?

Safety, gatekeepers, authority

26. Do you feel safe here? Why or why not? (verbal/physical threats)
27. Who are the tindaamba of the camp? What is your relationship and how do you feel about them?
28. What roles do the tindaamba play in your daily life?

Family

29. Have your family members come to visit you? If yes, how often do they come?
30. If you have children/grandchildren, where are they? How do you stay connected with them?
31. How has being here affected your relationship with your family?

D. Reintegration experience (or hopes)

For women still in the camps:

32. Has anyone ever talked to you about going back to your community?
33. Would you want to return to your original community? Why or why not?
34. If you do not want to return, what would be a safe alternative for you?
35. What would make you feel safe enough to return?
36. Who would need to support your return? (Housing, economic support, job...)
37. What do you think life would look like if you were reintegrated?
38. How do you think your family would react to you coming back?
39. If you were 'cleansed' from witchcraft, why did you choose to stay in the camp?

For reintegrated women:

Before reintegration: preparation

40. Has anyone ever talked to you about going back to your community?
41. How did you feel about returning?

42. Did you receive any training, counseling, or material support before leaving the camp?

During reintegration: the return process

- 43. Can you describe what happened on the day you returned home?
- 44. Who was there to receive you?
- 45. Did chiefs or elders participate in the return ceremony?
- 46. Were there any rituals or traditional practices done before/after you returned?
- 47. How did your family react to your return?
- 48. How did the wider community receive you?
 - stigma or discrimination since returning?
- 49. Have your relationships changed since the accusation?

After reintegration: challenges and support received

- 50. What have been the biggest challenges since you returned?
 - economic, emotional, social, safety
- 51. Has anyone treated you differently because of the past accusation? If yes, how?
- 52. Do you feel safe now in your community?
- 53. What kind of support have you received since you returned by the reintegrating organizations?
- 54. Which organizations or people helped you the most?
- 55. What support did you expect but did not receive?

Hopes and future aspirations

- 56. What are your hopes for the future?
- 57. What would help make your life easier or safer?
- 58. What changes would you want your community or government to make?

E. Conclusions

- 59. Is there anything important that I haven't asked that you want to share?
- 60. Offer time for their questions

Appendix 3 - Example of fieldnotes: interview with Kpatinga's *tindana*

When	24/11/2025 h 10.30-11:15
Where	Kpatinga camp (16 women, 3 grandkids)
Who	Interview with Adam Musah
We were under the shadow of a tree, Samadu (Songtaba's project manager and my translator/mediator/supervisor during the fieldwork) and I seated on a wooden bench, with Adam on a plastic chair in front of us. He was complaining of being ill, and his ankles were swollen. The weather was hot but windy: the tree's shade and the wind made the temperature pleasant, though the wind is audible in some parts of the recordings. Four women came to sit near us as the interview unfolded: three sat behind the tindana on little stools with their backs against a hut, and one laid under the tree behind me. There were also about ten children under the tree. When I asked who they were, because I thought they were grandchildren or children of the accused women, Adam told me they were children from the nearby village who had come to fetch water, and he shouted at them to go away. Apparently, but I wasn't aware of this until I saw it, Samadu gave the tindana 50 Ghana cedis, a nice salmon-pink note that, worth less than 4 euros (3.90€ as of today, Wednesday 26 November 2025, when I am transcribing these notes). I am specifying this because I have noticed, and locals confirmed, that the currency is extremely weak and volatile, with big fluctuations from day to day. After the interview with the tindana and the accused women, we gave Adam a lift back to his village. It was a 10-15 minute drive from the camp. The camp can be reached via a path in the middle of the vegetation, really just a well-marked motorbike path, a single line. We were in a pickup, so we drove through waist-high grass and bushes. <u>His role, daily duties in the camp</u> He is the chief priest of the Kpatinga camp. His duties are to accept alleged witches banished from their communities: he does so because he has accommodation for them. He also checks on them daily, health-wise, and ensures their safety within the camp. He is open to women returning to and being reintegrated into their communities. <u>The reintegration process and the rituals he performs</u> Before a woman comes to the camp, the family brings a fowl as a sacrifice to the gods; he slaughters the fowl and offers it to the gods. When a woman wants to be reintegrated, the family must bring another fowl so the tindana can communicate to the gods that the woman wishes to return. The ritual aims to cleanse the woman, it is a purification from witchcraft. He has a couple of women who, even though they were cleansed, chose to stay in the camp because of victimisation and stigma; they do not feel safe returning to the communities that accused them. <u>Human rights violations and the anti-witchcraft bill</u> He disagrees with claims of human rights violations inside the camps. He speaks only for his camp, not the others, and highlights that the biggest challenges in his camp are food and water (his answer was somewhat evasive). He has heard of the anti-witchcraft bill and disagrees with it because he believes it would create chaos. From where he sits, it wouldn't work; in his opinion, "it would only create chaos because	

there is no education among the population”. He said that not even one woman brought to him spoke English or was literate.

He feels that the camps should still exist, but if they are too close, the closure should be gradual, not radical. He believes it is important to spotlight girls’ and children’s education and raise awareness on human rights issues; otherwise, accusations of witchcraft will never stop. Education is one of the key aspects to address in accusations.

He also added that government work is about laws, so if this closure is radical and women are sent back home, he asks whether the government can ensure their safety and security at the community level.

Government’s involvement and challenges (especially health-wise)

He made some recommendations for what the government should do for them: provide shelter, food, water, healthcare, and other things they cannot afford.

He made an appeal: every time a woman feels unwell, even at midnight or when the women are working on the farms harvesting, they have to call him to come, but he has no means of transportation, no car or bike, so he doesn’t know how to get there. He has made proposals to people to support him, but has not received a positive response. The health center is very far from the camp, so they are unable to walk there, and can only go if he is lucky enough that someone lent him a motorbike.

If the health center cannot manage the person’s condition, they must go to an even farther district-level health center.

Numbers in the camp and his background

There are 16 women and only 3 grandkids, because some have left to attend senior high school.

He says that the grandchildren of alleged witches do not face discrimination at school.

The senior high school is far, but the elementary school is not too far, and the children can walk there.

He says that some women have already been reintegrated.

His father was the tindana, and when he died, he said his father “handed to him” 222 women in the camp. He didn’t know the exact year he became tindana, but he remembered it was the year of the first military coup of Jerry John Rawlings, who later became president of Ghana (we retraced this to 1979).

He is 75 years old, became tindana at around 29, and has been tindana for 46 years.

Reintegration and collaboration with NGOs

He has worked for a long time with ActionAid and Amnesty International, and since 2005 with Songtaba. They support the camps with clothing, food, and work on the farms [ed: note from Samadu: the farm support project is over because there are no available funds]. He says he has worked extensively with them on reintegration projects and that working with these organizations has been positive because they support them a lot with basic needs. Collaboration with NGOs includes meetings with him, and then the NGOs engage the women for the reintegration process [ed: which is long].

The local government does not support them in any way, except sometimes with small food donations. He says the local assembly should support them, but doesn’t. When asked why, he says he has no idea, probably because of the stigma against the accused women. He also reports that some women went to the assembly to ask for protection, but it was not granted because if it were granted to one, then the assembly would have to grant it to all, so they simply do not engage in order not to acknowledge the problem.

Relationship with the accused women

He says there are no major issues; the relationships are positive and cordial. Maybe there are some

issues, but he doesn't know because he does not live in the camp and is not there all the time. He says that since this morning (Monday 24/11/2025), when he came to the camp, the women came to greet him, asked how he slept, and how he was.

He has a nearby farm; some of the women work on his farm during harvest, in exchange for food. He says many of the women have already been reintegrated. He does not force them to go back, due to security reasons. But he has an open-door policy [ed: funny, given that there are no walls or gates in the community] when family members want to bring the women back with them, as long as the women have been cleansed with the fowl ritual and money. When asked how much he charges, he says he does not charge a specific amount, it depends on how much the family can afford; he considers this money "a retirement benefit for keeping their woman for them".

Relation with the nearby village/farmers

The government assigned a borehole to him and the camp, but they share it with nearby community members.

He reports no issues with the surrounding communities and no problems with the presence of an alleged witches' camp.

The accused women are free to go to the community market on market days to sell farm produce and buy what they need.

Sometimes farmers come to the camp and ask for some of the women to help with harvesting, in exchange for food.

Relationship with the family of the accused women

Some relatives bring food.

Families can call the accused women. Some women have old keypad phones also used to receive mobile money from their families. Those without phones rely on the tindana, who keeps the family's numbers and manages their mobile money: the family sends him the money, and he gives it to the woman

But not all women are supported by their families, either because the families are too poor, or because they want nothing to do with the accused woman due to stigma, or because the accusation came from within the family, so the accusers have no interest in supporting her.

[ed: mobile money services are popular digital financial services in Ghana, operated by MTN Ghana or MoMo, the most popular service. These services allow people to receive and send money, pay bills, access loans and savings through their mobile phones, as well as buy internet gigabytes or minutes to call. These services are becoming increasingly important and widely available because they help drive financial inclusion by expanding access from informal cash systems to more formal financial services. You can even pay through your phone number at shops (kind of like PayPal). It works as follows: you give cash to one of the authorized stands that are all over the country, usually yellow wooden or sheet-metal stands with a roof and a stool for one person to sit and work. You give them your phone number and the cash, and they take note of this in a big notebook. They then transfer the money to your phone number through their phones, and the charge is immediate. After you have money in your account, you can pay in shops: almost every store I have been to offers mobile money as a means of payment. You just have to type the store's phone number and the amount to pay.]

Witchcraft belief

When asked if he believes that illnesses and deaths can be explained through witchcraft, he replied, "witchcraft is there for those who believe in it", and that witchcraft exists, but he does not believe in it [ed: it is a contradiction! Samadu as well was confused by this.

ed 2, 01/12/2025: after speaking with Prof. Azumah, he helped me make sense of this situation. First, he told me that Tindana Adam is the one who, over the years, has fathered children with the alleged witches after raping them. I then asked him how that could be possible: how could someone

who claims to believe in witchcraft, who considers these women dangerous and evil enough to be banished from their communities, still choose to rape them, touching them and even having children with them? That's when we connected the dots. It becomes clearer that his actions only make sense if he doesn't actually believe in witchcraft at all.]

Time for his questions / if there is anything important he wants to add that I haven't asked

He was expecting me to ask who the accusers are at the community level. I turned the question back to him, and he said accusations start from within the family or community, never from people they do not know.

He also expected me to ask whether he accepts all women and why he may refuse some. I replied that I had assumed from the beginning of our conversations that he accepts all women because he has shelter. He explained that if he does not know the woman or the people bringing her, he will not accept her for safety reasons. He does not want to be accused of luring her to the camp, and he also must know the family to have information about her background. He needs contact with the family in case the woman falls sick and needs money. If he does not know the family or the man bringing the woman, he will not accept her because he would not be able to properly take care of her.