

From Bondage to Economic Survival: Can Liberated Trokosi Make The Transition?

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Abstract

Trokosi, which is a form of slavery, is a significant issue in Ghana with over 5,000 women and 15,000 children affected. Starting 1991, International Needs Ghana (ING) have negotiated with Shrine priests for the liberation of trokosi. However, even after liberation, the trokosi, who are overwhelmingly females (young girls and women with children), remain vulnerable and trapped, unable to escape their psychological trauma as a result of the bondage to shrine priests. Their trauma is compounded by fear of the unknown and the anxiety of possible rejection by the wider society into which they must resettle. To assist the integration of the trokosi into society, ING provides them with livelihood skills, in the hope that they can utilise these skills to develop income generating activities. Nonetheless, the question posed by government officials, NGO representatives and researchers involved with trokosi remain whether the trokosi can make the transition from bondage to economic survival. This paper therefore investigates whether the trokosi can be economically successful when offered practical skills directly related to livelihood needs.

Introduction

Trokosi, is both a religious and a cultural practice of traditional adherents to the rituals of African Shrine worship. *trokosi* is a practice that represents atonement for transgressions such as theft or failure to repay a debt, committed by a family member. The practice calls for young girls, normally aged between 5 and 10 years, to be given to the Shrine as a 'wife to the gods'. The *trokosi* becomes a slave to the Shrine, bonded there to attend to Shrine rituals and maintenance. Most of the victims of *trokosi* are women and children. ING notes that out of a total of 51 shrines practicing *trokosi*, 43 are located in the Volta region in Ghana. The larger Shrines have been found to have from 30 to 300 women bonded to them, while the smaller shrines have 3 to 10 *trokosi* in residence. The total number of *trokosi* liberated between 1991 and 2003, the last year when a *trokosi* liberation was recorded, is 3,500 women, who came accompanied by 10,000 children. Thousands of women and children remain captives in shrines.

There has been various discussions on *trokosi*, including, Dovlo and Kufogbe (1997), Quashigah (1998), Dovlo (2004, 2005), Asamoah-Gyan (2004), Avoke (2004) and Deann (2005). In the main, these authors have

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discussed *trokosi*, as part of contemporary form of slavery, as an archaic traditional religion, within a Christian ritual context in which deliverance from *trokosi* would lead to Salvation in Christ, and from a statistical analysis perspective. Invariably, a significant theme that runs through these studies is that *trokosi* is inhuman and should be abolished thus liberating the victims. Despite the importance of the concerns that these authors raise, they have not examined the economic impact of liberation on the victims. In other words, are the women able to withstand the harsh realities of the economic world once liberated or is it the case that the several years of suppression at the shrines have deprived them of their economic survival instincts? Do these women have what it takes to become economic self-sufficient?

Objectives

Providing answers to the above question is the objective of this paper. Thus we examine the economic activities of a group of liberated *trokosi* and the income they generate. This study is significant because the Volta region, where the liberated *trokosi* are concentrated is one of the least developed areas in Ghana therefore any meaningful economic contribution forthcoming from any quarter of the region is highly valued. Should it transpire that the liberated *trokosi* are capable of economic self-sufficiency, it may force the Ghana government, donor institutions and NGOs to take a serious look at the practice of *trokosi*. Possibly, it may lead to official recognition of the potential role that liberated *trokosi* can play in the economic development of the Volta region in particular. Also, it may lend credence to the need to speed up the liberation of the thousands remaining in *trokosi* shrines, and the total abolishment of the practice. Currently, although *trokosi* is illegal in Ghana, there are hardly known cases of people who have been prosecuted for *trokosi* offences.

Methodology

A qualitative and quantitative approach was used and involved a document review, interviews with key stakeholders and a survey. The review began with a desk study of project documents and internet sources on *trokosi*. The primary focus of the study is the liberated *trokosi* who have graduated from the International Needs Vocational Training Centre (INVTC¹). These *trokosi* have been brought to the INVTC after liberation to acquire skills they need to resettle into village life and pursue income generation activities. The liberated *trokosi* were selected solely from the batch of graduates from the INVTC largely because there is no other known program in Ghana that focuses on liberating *trokosi*, much more offering them practical skills training as the INVTC program. As outlined in the ING 2000-2006 Annual Report, in the course of 2005 and 2006, the INVTC has graduated 606 students through its modular training program. The training takes place in

Adidome, one of the towns in the Volta region where the *trokosi* problem is concentrated.

The survey interviewed 121 INVTC graduates to examine the impact that their experiences at the centre have had on their livelihoods. As a result of lack of accessibility to the remote villages, where some of the *trokosi* live, the sample size was determined by considerations of proximity to the respondents. Consequently, it was difficult to predetermine the sample size since it was unclear how many respondents would be reached. Thus it was decided to select any *trokosi* who would respond to the call for attendance by the INVTC project managers. In the end, 121 respondents assembled, which therefore became the sample size. The sample size of 121 respondents was large enough to ensure an adequate representation of liberated *trokosi* engaged in income generating activities. Prior to the interviews, the women who had come to the nominated interview stations, located in villages where the liberated *trokosi* have resettled, were welcomed and the purposes of the interviews explained. The survey team members were introduced to the potential respondents, and respondents invited to indicate their willingness to participate.

There was no coercion or pressure to participate. All respondents were aware that the responses recorded would be kept anonymous and private. In addition to the desk study and the survey of graduates, a number of consultations were held with stakeholders in the area of *trokosi* abolition, including ING project staff, members of the Ghana Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice and the Ghana Ministry for Women and Children.

Results and Discussion

The demographic characteristics of the sample are summarized in Table 1. Eighty five of the 121 (about 70 percent) respondents were liberated *trokosi*, 14 of the 85 respondents (roughly 16 percent) were children of liberated *Trokosi*., and the remaining 36 (roughly 30 percent) are deemed *trokosi*, not as a result of having been held in a shrine, but through their participation in the training program at INVTC and association with groups formed by liberated *trokosi* to pursue their commercial production and business enterprises.

Table 1 also shows that 49 or 40 percent of the respondents were liberated after 2000, and also that 42, about 35 percent of the respondents were less than 10 years of age when given to the Shrine and a further 22 (18 percent) were between 10 and 20 years of age when committed to the shrine, suggesting that mainly young people are committed. Most (about 65 percent) of the respondents indicated that they are now married.

Table 1: Key Characteristics of Respondents

Age (years)	<20	20-39	40-49	50+	Child of Trokosi	Trokosi by Participation and Association	Total
Number	4	70	21	14	14	36	121*
Number now married	1	39	4	4	14	16	78
Number of live children	4	178	39	88	10	16	335
Age when committed to Shrine	<10	10-20	21-39	40+	Typically <4		
Number	42	22	6	1	14	36	121

Note: 12 of the 121 respondents indicated that they did not know their ages.

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

Economic activities undertaken

Table 2 presents the number of INVTC graduates by area of training undergone in 2005-06. The Table shows that baking is the most popular area of training, undertaken by 376 students or 62 percent of trainees. This preference for area of training is mirrored by the 121 respondents

Table 2: Distribution of Sample Respondents by economic activity

Economic Activity	No. of women involved in activity	
	Number	Percent
Baking	376	62.0
Soap making	123	20.3
Batik making	107	17.7
Total	606	100.0

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

Start up Equipment

Each respondent is provided with a set of tools and materials to enable her to start her preferred income generating activities after graduation. Details of these packages and the cost per person in 2006 prices are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Start up Packages Received by Each Graduate, 2006

Bread Baking & Confectionery Per Person Cost of Start Up Package Distributed to Graduates: ₵269,000		Batik, Tie & Dye Per Person Cost of Start Up Package Distributed to Graduates: ₵245,000		Soap, Powder And Pomade Making Per Person Cost of Start Up Package Distributed to Graduates: ₵121,000	
Item	Quantity	Item	Quantity	Item	Quantity
Flour	1Bag	Caustic Soda	1 kg	Coconut oil	2 Gal.
Sugar	1 Bag (25kg.)	Wax	1Bar	Hydrometer	1
Vegetable oil	10 Litres	Calico	24 yards	Caustic Soda	1 Bag
1 Bag	5 Kilograms	Wooden Stamp	5 Designs	Perfume	3 Bottles
Margarine	1 Sachet	Hand Gloves	1Pair	Gloves	1Pair
Yeast	1 Dozen	Plastic Bowls	2	Buckets	2
Baking sheets	1 Tin	Hydrosulphite	2 kg	Soda Ash	3 kg.
Baking Powder	1	Mackintosh	2 Yards	Chemical 1	3 Bottles
Large Bowl	1	Sheda Materials	24 Yards	Chemical 2	3 Bottles
Medium Bowl	1	Plastic Containers	5	Silicate	3 Bottles
Small Bowl	½ Sachet	Hydrometer	1	S Colour Y	1kg.
Nutmeg	1 Set	Table	1	S Colour Blue	1kg.
Swiss Oven & Accessories	1 Set	Plastic Spoons	2	Hydrogen Peroxide	2 Bottles
		Tape Measure	1	Nostril Cover	1 pair
		Brush	1	Petroleum Jelly	1 jar
		Box Iron	1	Petroleum Oil	1 Bottle
		Aluminium Pot	1	Olive Oil	1 Bottle
		Vat Violet	1/8 Kg	Pomade	1 Bottle
		Vat Green	1/8 Kg	Perfume	½ Bottle
		Vat Yellow	1/8 Kg	Kaolin	3 Kg
		Vat Blue	1/8 Kg	Plastic Spoon	2 pieces
		Vat Red	1/8 Kg	Mackintosh	2 yards
		Nostril Covers	1 pair	Plastic Bowl	1
		Polythene bags	1 packet	Palm Kernel Oil	2 Gallons
		Plastic Bowls	2 pieces	Plastic Bucket	1
		Scissors	1 pair	Stamping Box	1 piece
				Bleaching Powder	1 Kg.
				Cutting Table with accessories	1

₵ = The Ghanaian Cedi. The exchange rate in March 2007 was ₵10,000 = US\$1

Source: International Needs Ghana, Annual Report, 2006

Feedback from the 121 women interviewed suggests that these packages are greatly valued and, in the main, adequate to the task they have before them as nascent micro-enterprise operators. Not surprisingly, all respondents would welcome additions to the package, in whatever form this may come. For women with so little to begin with, more is always better than less. However, the area of greatest risk is at the outset of their enterprise production cycle. Failure of the bake, poor chemical curing, or loss of raw materials through theft are realities of life in villages where poverty and production conditions are rough. The addition of a small cash reserve to facilitate recovery and ensure adequate working capital for a second round of production can be considered a wise investment in follow-through impact and sustainability.

Sources of Sample Respondents' Livelihood

Consistent with livelihood realities of villagers in the Volta region, respondents did not rely on a single source of economic activity for their livelihood. Moreover, some of the sources of their income have nothing to do with the vocational training provided at INVTC. Nonetheless, on the basis of the sample it is clear that vocational training has generated important opportunities for the respondents to earn cash income on a regular basis.

Table 4 summarises the primary sources of cash income of respondents in order of importance. The list shows that only baking and soap making compete with the sale of farm output..

Table 4: Sources of cash income of respondents

Sources of Cash Earnings	(%)
Baking (bread & pastries)	36.2
Farming	14.5
Soap	14.5
Weaving (mat & baskets)	9.8
Batik (tie & die)	9.4
Sewing	4.2
Pomade (moisturizers)	4.0
Fried Foods	1.5
Alcohol, local	1.4
Hair dressing	1.2
Powder	1.2
Charcoal	1.1
Crab sales	1.0
Total	100.0

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

In addition to farming, which is common to all women interviewed, the typical respondent is engaged in at least two cash oriented economic activities. In addition to the skill learnt at the INVTC, the respondents complemented their enterprise by using skills traditional to the area, such as mat and basket weaving, alcohol making, charcoal making, vegetable growing and food preparation. Most respondents, however, also expressed the desire to train in yet another skill to augment further their income earning capacity. To avoid competing directly with each other so as to boost their incomes the respondents engaged in baking bread for the market have begun to schedule the days on which they bake to ensure that they take their bread to the market on sequential days and not on the same day.

The reasons why the respondents expressed a desire to learn additional vocational skills are likely to include the corrosive effects of poverty and the atomization of the market by competition. However, many of the same respondents who wanted to be trained in additional areas of income generation also complained of broken equipment and inability to set aside enough money to purchase adequate supplies of raw materials and maintain or replace worn equipment. Too often, the desire to retrain is really a hope that success will replace lost working capital and exhausted or broken equipment. In the main, however, respondents were unequivocal that their economic is the reason why they have been able to take care of themselves as effective heads of self-sufficient households, the presence of a husband or a male adult in their households notwithstanding.

Financial viability of the Enterprises

To establish the financial viability of the economic activities of these women, it is important to examine the average cost of production as well as the profit margins of each of the three major areas of economic activities - (baking, batik making and soap making) that the women are largely engaged in. The average cost and profit margins of each of the three economic activities are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Cost and profit margin per days production of baking, batik, and soap making

Activity	Total cost ₹	Gross revenue ₹	Net revenue ₹	Net revenue as % of Total cost
Baking	269,000	360,000	91,500	34
Batik making	245,000	300,000	55,000	22
Soap making	121,000	152,500	31,000	26

Source: Compiled by authors from data in International Needs Ghana, Annual Report, 2006

Table 5 shows that net revenue as a percentage of total cost for a baking session is 34 percent. This compares with 22 percent for a session of batik making and 26 percent for a session of soap making. These are remarkable entrepreneurial achievements of the respondents particularly considering that most of them have been engage in economic activities for less than a year. There are some constraints that hinder their ability to reach greater entrepreneurial heights. These include the survey finding that it takes long period for the batik cloths to be dried and for the soap to harden preventing the women from manufacturing their products as often as possible. This partly explains our finding that the women who engage in batik and soap making also engage in extra economic activities.

Other factors found by the survey which could adversely affect the survival of the enterprises include the following:

- The respondents tend to travel long distances in an attempt to get their products to the market. Consequently, valuable time that otherwise must be utilised towards the marketing of their products is lost.
- Occasionally, profit is spent on non-productive areas such as funerals and festivals. This may adversely affect the growth of the enterprise. Most of the respondents lack basic enterprise management skills. As a result, any desire that they may have towards the success of their operations is based on chance rather than on planning.
- The quality of the finish goods produced by the women is lower than similar products in nearby big towns, putting the women at a competitive disadvantage.
- Most of the respondents are engaged in the same enterprise activity, operating within a small area. Eventually, this may force the women to compete with each other.
- There are very few opportunities opened to the women to access credit towards the expansion of their enterprise operations.

Capacity to Save and Access to Credit

As Table 6 shows, 118 out of the 121 respondents (almost 98 percent) indicated that they save. Capacity to save and profitability are strongly positively correlated. Perhaps, the extra economic activities of the batik and soap-makers also explain why on average they save more than the bakers notwithstanding the fact that net revenue as a percentage of total cost is higher for the bakers. Another explanation for the low savings among the bakers is that the frequency with which they undertake their activities means they require regular investment of capital into their activities, with the result that less money is available for saving. Table 6 also suggest that the most successful savers are women in the below 30 years of age category.

One respondent told of how she had engaged a carpenter to make her a wooden box into which she would drop money and then hide it. Another described how she borrows from a local moneylender at 17% per month, putting aside €200,000 - 250,000^{2 3} to service the loan. Despite this burden, she managed to save €200,000, but needs twice this amount to replace her bread making equipment. A young 20 year old, a child of a *trokosi*, told of how her baking business had allowed her to save €600,000 in cash and accumulate €300,000 in production materials such as baking soda and flour. Even so, she estimated that she needs at least €1 million if she is to expand her business to service markets in surrounding villages. Her goal is to have her business grow so that she can give employment to the young women in her village.

On average, the surveyed women reported savings, typically between ₦200,000 and ₦400,000. A few women reported savings in excess of ₦2.5 million, but these are exceptions, associated with women who have shown significant entrepreneurial talent and diligence. In one instance, the respondent had altered her bread baking enterprise to incorporate doughnut making. Another respondent found success in sewing to specific tailoring needs of individual customers as opposed to generic tailoring for the popular market. Likewise in the market for soaps, powders, skin creams and cosmetics, innovation leads to higher levels of value-added, improved prices and better profits. However, only a very few of the respondents have managed to realize such heights of entrepreneurial success.

A significant number (approximately 25 percent), of respondents reported that they saved through local *susu* (rotational savings) groups. In the main, saving is an individual discipline driven by a variety of factors such as children's school fees and working capital. Some of the women keep the savings in a box and hidden in the home. This does not earn interest and is open to the possibility of theft. In fact, about 12 of the women reported that the whole of their savings had been lost to thieves in the course of the year.

Table 6: Average Savings by Age of Respondent and Type of Enterprise

AGE (years)													
<20 years	No.	Average Savings	No.	Average Savings	No.	Average Savings	No.	Average Savings	No.	Average Savings	Total	No	Average Savings
20-29 years		¢ '000		¢ '000		¢ '000		¢ '000		¢ '000			¢ '000
20-29 years	2	850	5	1300	6	230	4	160	13	195	30	425	
30-39 years			2	1000							2	500	
40-49 years													
50+ years	1	500	28	280	16	290	11	310	2	350	58	295	
Totals			8	570	8	440			2	550	18	510	
			3	135	5	260					8	215	
					2	250					2	125	
	3		46		37		15		17		118	355	

AGE	<20 years		20-29 years		30-39 years		40-49 years		50+ years		Totals	
Type of Enterprise	No.	Average Savings ¢ '000	No.	Average Savings ¢ '000	No.	Average Savings ¢ '000	No.	Average Savings ¢ '000	No.	Average Savings ¢ '000	Total No.	Average Savings ¢ '000
Soap - Making	2	850	5	1300	6	230	4	160	13	195	30	425
Sewing			2	1000							2	500
Bread - Baking	1	500	28	280	16	290	11	310	2	350	58	295
Batik			8	570	8	440			2	550	18	510
Frying - Sweets			3	135	5	260					8	215
Charcoal					2	250					2	125
Total	3		46		37		15		17		118	355

Source: Computed by authors from survey data

Another insight into capacity to save is the ability to borrow and service loans. Only a minority of survey respondents indicated that they have borrowed money, from any source, to use either as working capital or to expand the enterprise. The main reasons for this are the high cost of borrowing and the fear of being trapped in debt. Even where opportunities existed to borrow from family or friends, respondents were very reluctant to borrow. The very few women who did borrow reported that the cost of borrowing was between 12 percent and 20 percent per month, but frequently above 20 percent per month.

Concluding Comments

The analysis presented in this paper suggests that the years of oppression that these women have been subjected to in the shrines has not dimmed their fervour for economic success. The findings on the financial viability of the operations and the capacity to save in particular, indicates that participants have used the skills acquired at INVTC to establish viable and sustainable livelihoods. In the Volta region, subsistence income per person is near the international poverty level. Village-based vendors indicated in discussions that cash income among villagers is very low: less than US\$1 per week per household. Graduates from INVTC confirmed this observation. In contrast, the respondents have been able to establish livelihoods that enable them to have cash saving more than many regular households in those same villages are able to earn in cash and subsistence production. This is powerful evidence of the enterprise activities of the respondents providing a positive economic impact in the villages.

Despite the success of the economic activities of the respondents, certain constraints must be overcome if the women are to achieve their full entrepreneurial potential. A mobile mentoring team, visiting the enterprises of the women on regular basis, to identify possible gaps and to advise them on best practice methods would be helpful in improving small enterprise management skills of these women. A training program that provides the women with ways of improving the quality of their finish products would help in making them competitive on the bigger markets. Finally, the expansion of the training program to include new areas such as ceramics, fruit-juice making, gari and tapioca processing, basket weaving, candle making and snail farming would open up wider opportunities for these women.

End notes

- 1 INVTC is managed by International Needs Ghana
- 2 ¢ = Ghanaian Cedi
- 3 Exchange rate in March 2007, ¢10,000 equal to US\$1

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Appendix 1. Distribution of the average cost and profit level of a day's production of baking, batik and soap making

Activity	Materials Required	Quantity	Unit Cost (₵)	Total Cost (₵)
Baking	A. Cost Component			
	Flour	1 bag	150,000.00	150,000.00
	Sugar	2 tins	25,000.00	50,000.00
	Nutmeg	10 pieces	1,000.00	10,000.00
	Margarine	4 Sachet	3,000.00	12,000.00
	Yeast	1 desert sp	1,000.00	1,000.00
	Baking powder	4 desert sp	1,000.00	4,000.00
	Egg	4	1,500.00	6,000.00
	Salt	¼ sachet	500.00	500.00
	Milk	1 tin	5,500.00	5,500.00
	Milling & kneading	1 bag	12,000.00	12,000.00
	T & T			10,000.00
	Firewood	1 bundle	10,000.00	10,000.00
	Total Cost			269,000.00
	B. Revenue			
	Gross revenue	72 Loaves	5,000.00	360,000.00
	Net revenue	72 Loaves	5,000.00	91,000.00
	Return on Investment	72 Loaves	5,000.00	34%
Batik making	A. Cost Component			
	Full piece calico	12 yards	12,000.00	150,000.00
	Colour/dye	5 desert sp	12,000.00	60,000.00
	Hydro-sulphate	2 desert sp	3,000.00	6,000.00
	Soda	1 desert sp	4,000.00	4,000.00
	Charcoal	2 bowls	5,000.00	10,000.00
	Water	10 buckets	500.00	5,000.00
	T & T			10,000.00
	Total Cost			245,000.00
	B. Revenue			
	Gross revenue	12 yards	25,000.00	300,000.00
	Net revenue	12 yards	25,000.00	55,000.00
	Return on Investment	12	25,000.00	22.4%
Soap making	A. Cost Component			
	Chemical 1	1bottle	4,000.00	4,000.00
	Chemical 2	2bottle	4,000.00	8,000.00
	Perfume	1bottle	50,000.00	50,000.00
	Silicate	1kg	20,000.00	20,000.00
	Soda	1kg	10,000.00	10,000.00
	Soda Ash	2 tins	5,000.00	10,000.00
	Charcoal	2bowls	4,000.00	8,000.00
	Water	2 buckets	500.00	1,000.00
	T & T			10,000.00
	Total Cost			121,000.00
	B. Revenue			
	Gross revenue	61cakes	2,500.00	152,500.00
	Net revenue	61 cakes	2,500.00	31,500.00
	Return on Investment	61 cakes	2,500.00	26%

Source: International Needs Ghana, Annual Report, 2006



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