

Foreword

Even though Africa remains the poorest region of the world, there is every indication that the last three decades have seen tremendous change in societal development. The change is reflected in how African societies are governed and how economic activities are organised. It is now a lot more difficult to talk about ‘traditional African societies’ even if large parts of behaviour and lifestyle cannot always be described as modern. A number of key attributes of traditional societies, including chieftaincy, extended family relationships, land tenure arrangements and the organisation of markets, are generally seen differently. It was always inevitable that there would be tensions between the traditional and the modern. Ghana has a unique history. Most of the changes that have occurred in Africa, such as the attainment of independence in the region, the pursuit of comprehensive socio-economic reforms in the 1980s and finally, the trailblazer role in democratic reforms and political transitions in the last two decades, can be observed in Ghana more than anywhere else. It is therefore appropriate that Ghanaian social scientists should be interested in how the changes have been studied and document these.

The changes in the behaviour of society in Ghana and in Africa have been fuelled by both internal dynamics, including population growth and education, and also by external influences, including globalisation. While there have been many studies of these dynamics and how they have shaped African societies in the last three decades, there has been relatively little documentation of how the studies were motivated, and also how ideas for those studies were shaped and influenced by the internal and external dynamics. This book is intended to fill that gap.

There is a lot more information today about African societies, as a result of the fact that it is a lot easier to conduct large household and community studies. It is also more common for different social scientists to use the same research instruments in the same community for different purposes. For instance, surveys are conducted by university-based researchers, students, non-governmental organisations and several other institutions on a regular basis, thus generating data that could be used for a variety of research purposes. This leads to many more solid analytical works that could lead to generalizable conclusions for policy and other purposes. That is what makes a number of the disciplines represented in this book suggest that their relevance to policy is growing.

One of the most remarkable revolutions in the social sciences around the world has been in the development of analytical tools, largely aided by new technologies that allow researchers to do a lot more with data and other information. The use of quantitative methods in different social sciences has grown astronomically, even if this has not always been properly done. The search for ways in which researchers can combine qualitative and quantitative methods proceeds unabated. In the search for improved analytical methods one obvious observation is that many social science disciplines are borrowing from one another. The more dynamic disciplines have been those willing to borrow and adapt tools from other disciplines in order to advance their own discipline. The result is greater inter-disciplinarity and transdisciplinarity in social science research. This is a growing phenomenon around the world and often the outcome of clear thought within the disciplines as presented at conferences. However, inter- and trans- disciplinary borrowing has been less coordinated and organised in Africa. There is therefore room for more effective coordination of research tool development and research analyses to take place among African social science researchers, especially at universities. This book is clear evidence of Ghanaian social scientists wanting to share ideas on how they have done their work over the years. The next stage is to document how they work together.

This book is a bold initiative to show advances in the social sciences in Ghana, especially at the University of Ghana. It represents a new spirit of trying to change the discourse on social science teaching and research in the country by documenting themes that dominate discussions, teaching and research. Questions about the relevance of particular disciplines and how they impact Ghanaian society are discussed. The historical development of the disciplines clearly dominates the presentations. This is a significant first step in having a solid discussion on the approaches and processes that would enable the social sciences in Ghana to become a significant part of the global discourse on the evolution of the social sciences.

Ernest Aryeetey
Vice Chancellor, University of Ghana
Board Chair, Partnership for African Social
and Governance Research

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Agyei-Mensah, S.; Ayee, J.A.; Oduro, A.D. (Eds.)

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