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# Dipo Rites and Women's Health: Tradition Empowering Krobo Female Identity and Reproductive Health in Manya-Krobo

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School for International Training  
Study Abroad-Ghana  
Social Transformation and Cultural Expression  
Spring 2013

***Dipo* Rites and Women's Health: Tradition Empowering Krobo Female  
Identity and Reproductive Health in Manya-Krobo**

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## Abstract

Title: *Dipo* Rites and Women's Health: Tradition Empowering Krobo Female Identity and Reproductive Health in Manya-Krobo

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Objective: To understand the meaning and process of *dipo* rites and the correlation (if any) to the reproductive health of women in Manya-Krobo. This led to the research being aimed at answering three major questions.

- i. What are *dipo* rites? This is taking into consideration the history of the rites, meaning of the rites, the process of the rites, and who practices the rites.
- ii. What is the status of women's reproductive health in Manya-Krobo?
- iii. How are the *dipo* rites and the reproductive health of the women who practice them interconnected?

Methodology: I lived in Manya Krobo for most of April, 2013 studying the *dipo* rites from the Krobo men and women. The research is largely interview based and built on collecting the experiences and opinions of men and women spoken to. A span of age and gender is taken into consideration as well as a varying amount of experience with the rites. To gain participation experience the traditional *dipo* dance was taught to me as well as some songs. Additionally I visited women's clinics and youth centers as well as interviewed the founders to gain an on-site opinion on the status of women's reproductive health. To supplement this knowledge, texts on *dipo* and reports on women's health concerning the Krobo provided valuable secondary source information. Together these research elements illuminated the lives of the Krobo women and through them demonstrated the meaning of *dipo* and the relationship to reproductive health

Findings: The *dipo* rites remain a pivotal aspect of Krobo women's identities. The rites are empowering and teach lessons that develop self-respect within young women. The *dipo* rites expose that Krobo tradition is inherently female empowering. Today HIV/AIDS and teen pregnancy are the major issues young Krobo women are facing when it comes to their health. Poverty is a substantial problem in the area due to decline in the economy of the area because of land loss and lack of education. Some believe that *dipo* is causation for these problems; others feel it can prevent them. Today education and *dipo* are collaborating on supporting the young women of Manya-Krobo and their health.

Conclusions: While there is argument suggesting that *dipo* is detrimental to women's health, it is apparent that poverty is what has caused much of the struggles women face in Manya Krobo.

*Dipo*, in fact, through the self respect and lessons on protecting oneself, is in the best interest of young women's reproductive health and should be embraced as an old tool in combating many of today's challenges concerning reproductive health.

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## Introduction

Ghana is a country rich in culture and tradition that live on in the core of the people's identities. While the western world has been a powerful influence on the country (and continues to be so) you can still find places full of pride in their native tradition. The Krobo people, who mostly reside in the Eastern Region of Ghana to this day, practice many of their traditional rituals and celebrations with commitment to preserving the rich culture. One ceremony that continues with perhaps with the most perseverance is the *dipo* rite.

*Dipo* is an initiation performed for girls to signify an entrance into womanhood. It is an intricate process of lessons and rituals that have spanned over the course of three years in the past to even as short as a few days presently. Though *dipo* has changed and faced protest, the Krobo still practice *dipo* and most see it as mandatory for all Krobo girls to go through in order to be fully accepted by their community. It became my goal as a researcher to submerge myself into the lives of Krobo women and understand what *dipo* means to them especially in a world ever encroaching on Ghanaian practice.

However, to study *dipo* and the intricacies of Krobo female identity I would need much more time to do them justice. With less than a month of time on the field I decided to focus in on one specific aspect of the lives of Krobo women that I thought perhaps could have some interrelationship with the *dipo* rite.

The reproductive health of women worldwide is a persistent issue and can point to deeper social constructs and meaning. By examining the relationship between the *dipo* rites ceremony with the status of young women's reproductive health today, a glimpse into the lives of the Krobo woman can be understood.

The welfare of women's reproductive health amongst the Krobo of the Eastern region deserves to be explored. While the Krobo are a patrilineal society the power of women family members greatly prevails. I am curious to see how this empowerment may be related to *dipo* and how it may also correlate to the women's reproductive health in the area.

Changes in education and early menarche have led to more pre-marital sex. According to the National Health Council of Ghana's (NPC) Adolescent Reproductive Health Policy of 2000 "The change in bio-social conditions due to early menarche and increasing age at first marriage has resulted in a longer period between physical maturity and marriage, than existed in the traditional system," (NPC 4). Additionally, in many communities there has been an existing gap in the education of adolescent reproductive health and the practice of it (NPC 5). Girls are especially more at risk because less are in school and poverty can lead to forming sexual relationships with men at younger age because of interest in gaining financial support from them (Interview with Samuel Atter 18 APR 13).

Girls in Manya-Krobo have in the past been at the highest risk for contracting HIV/AIDS in the whole of Ghana. The Ghana AIDS Commission's "National AIDS Spending Assessment 2010" reveals that prevention is where most funding is going. However it is difficult for adolescent girls to receive this support because most prevention efforts for their age are occurring in schools, which has a lower girl attendance rate in poor areas compared to their male peers (Ghana AIDS Commission 39). It became evident that something compelling is happening in Manya-Krobo concerning the reproductive health of young women in particular.

Through collecting secondary information from different global and historical perspectives I was able to capture different aspects of *dipo* yet certainly the most informative data came from speaking with Krobo women who themselves have gone through or are



preparing to go through *dipo* and who's health position I am trying to comprehend. It became evident that at the core of *dipo* rites was a deep conviction in the power of women within Krobo culture. By revitalizing value in *dipo* there can be a simultaneous boost in the status and of women's health that draws from the values inherent to Krobo culture untouched by globalization.

#### *Literature review*

Marijke Steegstra's book *Dipo and the Politics of Ghana* was extremely useful as a supplementary aspect of my research. Her work also acted as an exemplary study of *dipo* in Krobo-Odumase. She delves into the history of the Krobos and *dipo* as well as describing her experience in studying the ceremony over the course of a year and a half in the late 1990's. Steegstra's text was a valuable prerequisite reading to my research as it gave me an objective foundation of knowledge on the ceremony that prompted me to create more in depth questions upon my arrival on the field. Steegstra also acted like an encyclopedia of other sources. Her presentation of works benefited my research in giving me an in-depth historical reflection on *dipo*.

Another more recent work By Steegstra has also provided information on the topic. Her article "A 'License to Indulge in Premarital Sexual Activities'? *Dipo* and the Image of Krobo Women" written in 2003, provides a compelling analysis on the *dipo* and stigma around the reproductive health of Krobo women. This work opened up ideas that helped me further understand different arguments concerning the topic of this paper.

Help in understanding the status of HIV/AIDS in Ghana and statistics regarding at risk groups and funding came from to works. *Adolescent Reproductive Health Policy* By the Government of Ghana and the *Ghana National AIDS Spending Assessment 2010: Level of*

*Resources and Expenditure to Confront HIV and AIDS* put out by the Ghana AIDS Commission. These two works helped me to develop an understanding of Ghana's history with HIV/AIDS.

### Methodology

Dipo rites are unique to the Eastern Region and are practiced by the Krobo people who have resided there for centuries. To best understand *dipo* and Krobo life I moved to the Eastern Region for the majority of April 2013. During my stay I lived in a small community at the base of a mountain in Nuaso, a suburb of Odumase, from the eleventh to the twenty-third of April 2013. Then from the twenty-fourth to the 28<sup>th</sup> I stayed with my fieldwork advisor Juliana Baidoo at her home within the town of Odumase, adjacent from the royal family's palace.

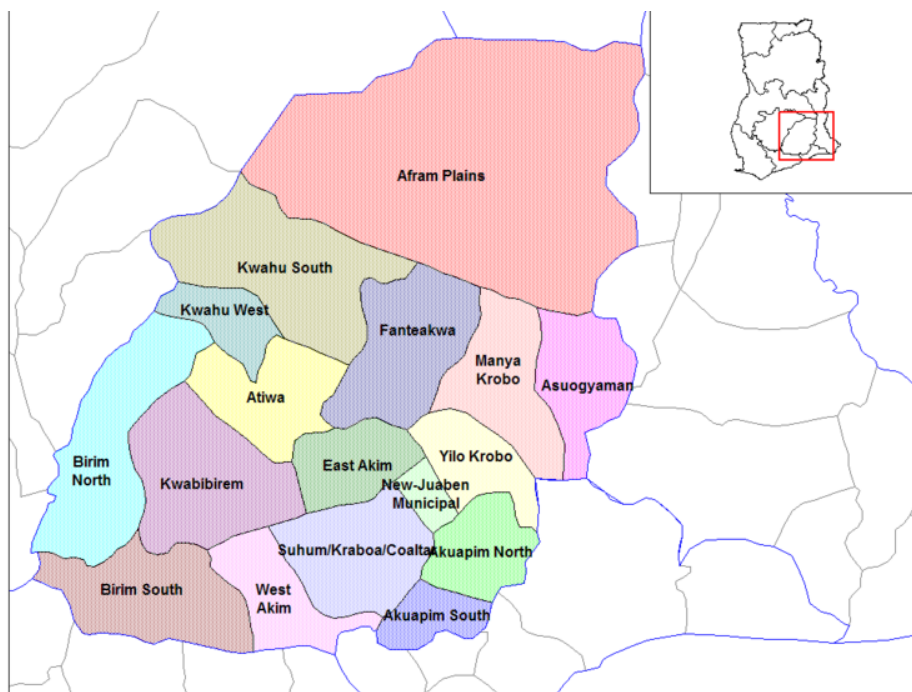


Figure 1: Map of the Eastern Region, Ghana.

My aim during my research was not only to understand the *dipo* rites as a process and history but also form a comprehensive knowledge of the women of the region particularly in Odumase and the nearby areas. The first European accounts and studies of *dipo* are largely

misunderstandings of the practice and interpret it as a representation of a culture that demeans women. Part of my goal as a researcher was to reevaluate these assumptions and truly understand the position of women in this community and specifically how *dipo* establishes that.

However, I found that comprehending the way *dipo* reflects on what makes a Krobo woman was too ambitious a question to research within one month's time. Using my roots in medical sociology I decided to examine the association between *dipo* rites and the empowerment of women's sexual health in the area. During a visit to Odumase in Early April I observed an abundance of women's clinics and billboards giving tips on safe sex. Something that was unique to these signs was that they were geared towards women. Through this observation and learning about *dipo* from the Queen Mothers and young *dipo* girls during that visit I was able to formulate my research questions.

To enact this research I felt interviews would be the most effective as a core source of information. By interviewing people I could have several different accounts of *dipo* from people who have been a part of as an aspect of their culture. I have collected interviews across age ranges, gender, economic status, and education. Each of their unique interpretation of the ceremony plays into my development of what *dipo* means in the community. Additionally, I spoke with *dipo* priestesses, and girls currently going through *dipo*. This gives me the perspective of those who are currently engaged in the tradition. Some participants were minors as *dipo* concerns girls in their teens. To assure their permission and privacy I acquired the permission of their parents or headmaster in order to speak with them. However, their last names are not used.

Following discussion on *dipo* I used interviews to ask people their opinion on the sexual health challenges of young women in the community. Through this dialogue we were able to

discuss the connection, if any, between the status of adolescent female sexual health in the area and *dipo* rites. I also talked to regional experts on this subject. I asked for guidance from a nurse midwife/psychologist who is the founder of a women's clinic and maternity home and a man who runs a peer education center that aims to educate young people in the area on HIV/AIDS and teen pregnancy. Their help was greatly appreciated and assisted me in understanding why these issues they confront threaten young women of *dipo* age in particular. This acted as a bridge between my two areas of study in the region.

In addition to interview based research, I did both non-participant observation and participant observation of *dipo* rites. In my initial visit to Krobo Odumase I attended a small *dipo* rites ceremony. At the end of my stay I was invited by a *dipo* Priestess in Odumase to learn some *dipo* songs as well as the traditional *klama* dance performed. While I was unfortunately not able to attend a *dipo* ceremony because of there not being any during my stay I was able to form a good picture of the ceremonies through stories, readings, and demonstration. Through all these perspectives I feel I am able to come to some understanding of the lives of Krobo women and the way *dipo* has affected them specifically in their reproductive health.

## **Findings**

### **The Krobo People**

The Krobo are the largest of the seven Dangme Ethnic Groups. They are a patrilineal society that to this day practices an intricate hierarchy of Chieftaincy as well as Queen Motherhood (Interview with Baidoo 15 APR 13). Today the Krobos of the Eastern Region have seventy-one Queen Mothers and one paramount Queen Mother located in Odumase. According to the Oral history of Akro-Muase, Krobo Mountain was discovered by a hunter who deemed it a

fit place to live and farm (Huber 15). This sparked a migration to the area estimated to have occurred during the fourteenth century. The name “Krobo” actually originated from the Akan’s Twi language, meaning “mountain dwellers” (Steggstra 33). The Krobo people and the surrounding mountain terrain are intertwined with one another as it symbolizes the origins of the people in the area and the old traditions practiced there before Europeans set foot on Ghanaian soil.



Figure 2: View from the top of one of the Krobo mountain tops looking down Manya-Krobo

Today the Krobo reside at the base of the Akwapem mountain range where they had resided up to 1892 when the British forcibly evicted them from the mountains during colonization. Between the eighteenth and nineteenth century the Krobo split into two different factions the Yilo-Krobo and the Manya-Krobo. The two major cities of Kroboland are Odumase and Somanya, both located in the Manya-Krobo area. They are the epicenters of Krobo trade and culture. Manya Krobo also includes the smaller townships of Kodjonya, Agomanya, and Nuaso. Today, many of the Krobo in Manya-Krobo identify as Presbyterians. The presence of this Presbyterian influence in the area is difficult not to notice as many of the schools, hospitals, and religious centers are Presbyterian in denomination (Interview with Baidoo 15 APR 13). However, while driving down the main road from Somanya to Odumase, despite the saturation

of Christian presence, the Krobo are known to practice African tradition more so than any other groups in Ghana.

Commitment to tradition is apparent amongst the people. In a conversation with Dangme teacher Tetteh Abraham at Kodjonya Presbyterian Millennium school he commented “A culture is part of you. So when you refuse your culture then you are supposed to not exist. I teach it as a positive aspect of life and that it should be practiced and that we should return to the old ways” (Interview with Tetteh Abraham 16 APR 13). In Krobo Odumase being faithful to tradition is an aspect of preserving one’s social respect in the community. However, throughout much of Ghana the trend is leaning towards improving ones social interest by denying tradition and conforming to western culture.

### *Dipo*

*Dipo* is the puberty rite practiced by the Krobos. The *dipo* ceremony is done within the community officiated by *dipo* Priests and Priestesses, female elders, and the young woman’s female family members. *Dipo* mostly occurs during the teenage years but accounts of it happening in early childhood and during the women’s twenties are not unheard of (Interview with Janet Sackity 19 APR 13). However, the average age of most *dipo* girls is between fifteen and seventeen.

*Dipo* consists of different steps and ceremonies as a process signifying the girl’s transition. Different lessons are learned that have been thought necessary to form the “ideal Krobo woman.” It is a taboo for girls to become sexually active before *dipo* is performed. If a pregnancy is detected banishment from the Krobo community will ensue. Due to fear of being disowned as well as a recent trend of parents putting their daughters through *dipo* at very young

ages, this exile rarely occurs anymore. While *dipo* is one of the most firmly maintained traditions in Ghanaian culture today *dipo* isn't identical to the *dipo* ceremonies done by the foremothers of the past. Yet, many of the same core values and steps are maintained.

### *History of Dipo*

Much knowledge on the origins of *dipo* is unknown. "It is a mystery to us and that is fine" (Interview with Juliana Baidoo) my research assistant and *dipo* completer, Juliana Baidoo told me. Evidence suggests that it most probably pre-dates the Krobo's settlement on Krobo Mountain because similar puberty rites are performed across West Africa<sup>1</sup>. This is especially true to the other Dangme groups the Shai and the Osudoku who practice a rite they themselves call *dipo*, however the Krobo's *dipo* is unique because of its connection to *dipo* priestess Nana Klow□ki (Steegstra 77). According to Krobo oral history, *dipo* was established, and to this day is presided over, by deity Nana Klow□ki. The *dipo* high Priestess is called the Priestess of Klow□ki and she herself communicates with the deity of her title. This woman must remain celibate and may not have any interaction with a male. She is always a respected woman in the community and seen as very powerful by both men and women.

In order to understand some of the earliest recorded accounts of *dipo* one has to keep in mind their subjective perspective and interest in removing the tradition and replacing it with Christian practices. Marijke Steegstra notes that these initial "documents about *dipo* were produced by those who intended to replace and destroy it" (Steegstra 86). However, their observation can add as a small window of knowledge into the old practices. Additionally, their presence reveals detest for traditional Krobo practices, an influence that still has power today.

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<sup>1</sup>The Akan of the Asante region practice *brago* (meaning first blood) that occurs after a girl reaches her first menses. During this time girls are also taken into a confinement stage where lessons taught by queen mothers on topics such as sex, family planning, and motherhood.

Upon the arrival of the Protestant Basel missionaries from Germany, Christianity arrived at the foothills of the Akwapem Mountains. Attempts to convert the Krobo proved difficult simply because the missionaries were not fit enough to take on the mountain's terrain. The mountain became an enemy to both the missionaries and the British too who could not access the people on the mountain for taxation. It was viewed as the "Devils' bulwark" (Steegstra 31) as it was also the home of traditional priests and their shrines.

It is an old national custom among the tribe of the Krobo Negroes that girls are sent away from their home and family to the holy Krobo Mountain, when they are about twelve years old. This mountain, which rises firmly up from the plains, is the national sanctuary of the Krobo. Up here, they celebrate their feasts and bury the deceased. This is also the site where they seek refuge in case of war. And finally it is up here that their daughters have to spend their *Otufo* [Ga word for *dipo*] year and perform customs (that is, festive tradition). In groups they are placed under the supervision of old women, mostly priestesses, and spend their time with processions, singing and dancing, learning the old anthems and customs. In this way, the young Krobo women are initiated into heathendom with all its sinful traditions and immoral terrors. That is the way the Krobo want it; and every girl who does not take part in the *Otufo* custom will surely be banned from her home and family and country. Since they have started to evangelize among the Krobo in 1856, our missionaries have to a great extent experienced the mighty obstacle to the introduction of the gospel that resides in this pagan custom. They have had so many girls in their Christian care and education! But then came the time for the *Otufo* custom. Nobody dared to miss it. And when girls came back from the mountain they once again became a prey to heathendom. (*Deutsches Kollekte Blatt*, August 1877 qte from Steegstra 71)

The *dipo* rites were viewed as a central cause of the continued "heathendom" on the mountain that prevented a successful conversion of the people. In the years leading up to the expulsion, the Krobo were beginning to migrate down from the mountains to the towns in the valleys to engage in trade, however, Priests and Priestesses were able to maintain their shrines. "The mountain settlements remained the spiritual centre where the population gathered for religious festivals and funerals" (Steegstra 87). This placement of spiritual activity suggests that the mountain was viewed as a sacred place.



The *dipo* rites would take place on the mountain, which were considered to have a deep connection with the spiritual world as well as with women. Early accounts on *dipo* report that the period of confinement may have taken one to three years. This would take place on the mountain at the shrines that thrived there ruled by the Priestess of Nana Klow□ki. While many of the male *dipo* Priests had moved down to the valleys before 1892 the women remained practicing there (Steegstra 132).

Alongside the *dipo* Priestesses were female artisans, some of whom were widows and Priestesses themselves. These women constructed special clay pots with clay found within the mountain's soil (it was forbidden for men to make pots). They assisted in the bringing up of the *dipo* girls and took care of the Klow□ki Priestess. The potters were too viewed by colonial officials as individuals who stood in the way of conversion; labeled "fetish women" by the Colonial Secretary (Steegstra 131). It is evident that the mountain was a symbol of Krobo spirituality and even more so a hub of female spiritualism.

In 1892 the Priestess of Nana Klow□ki had held strong to her shrine on the mountain despite threats of displacement. Upon the Governor's orders, soldiers arrived at her home and forcibly removed her and destroyed her house. This account by a missionary named K□lle reported, "When she refused to leave the sanctuary, the soldiers gently forced her out. This touch made her unclean, therefore the *Otufo* custom has been deserted from that day on" "(K□lle 1936: 15 qte from Steegstra 133). With this treatment of the Krobo's land, tradition, and the *dipo* Priestess, the British had severely disrespected the culture and made them to feel powerless.

Shortly after expulsion from the mountain a new Christian chief was put on the stool by the colonial authorities. This act was followed by the abolishment of *dipo* making it a criminal offense (Steegstra 129). While *dipo* was outlawed it continued in secret. Without *dipo* many

young women were not able to marry because their fiancé's family would not accept them since they hadn't gone through *dipo*. A Ga Basel Missionary, pastor Quartey, reflected on the ineffectiveness of abolishing *dipo* and other Krobo rituals.

I thought the heathens would – after they had plainly seen that their fetishes have neither power to save nor might to help on a day of disappointment, and affliction – flock to the Church of Christ, but things had not been so smooth as I thought, and the heathens around us are still kept in fetters of intoxication, superstition, polygamy, fornication, adultery and many other Satanical powers. (Quartey, 1894, Odumase 'Yearly Report for 1893' qte from Steegstra 140)

It has been suggested that *dipo* was going on under the knowing of the new chief. It is probable that he maintained *dipo* without British permission because he knew he would lose his subjects and people if the law was enforced.

Slowly *dipo* reemerged, revised at first to solely the outdooring and then returning in full. But the effect colonization and the introduction of Christianity still has left a powerful effect on the *dipo* rites done today



Figure 3: Juliana Baidoo at age six during her *dipo*



Figure 4: Baidoo and her elder sisters during their *dipo*.

### *The Meaning of the Dipo Rite*

*Dipo* is significant in many ways to the Krobo women, the Krobo people, and Ghanaian culture. One of the principal meanings of *dipo* today is the joy and importance of celebrating tradition. Most people I encountered reflected on this being one of the primary implications the rite held for them. *Dipo* is still taken very seriously by the Krobos and the custom defines whether your family will accept you and whether you will be able to marry. Stephen Maunger , father of daughters who have completed *dipo* told me, “If you do not complete the rite you will not be able to drink or eat in your family house. Maybe your father will allow it in his. But you are not to step in the family house, you are not pure” (Interview With Stephen Maunger 16 APR 13). The rite holds a wait in society that still defines if your culture and your family will accept you.

Fifteen-year-old Elizabeth, who had just completed the rite in April of 2013, commented, “We do it because it is our culture” (Interview with Elizabeth on 16 APR 13). Sixteen year old Gladys similarly stated, “We feel happy because it is the rite performed by our forefathers” (Interview with Gladys on 16 APR 13). Additionally, *dipo* celebrates the women and prepares them for adulthood. During *dipo* the girls dance the *klama* dance which includes the shuffling of feet and movement of left hand gently in a brushing up movement. “It’s very simple. *Dipo* girls don’t jump around showing their legs” (Interview with Maami Hluayo Adoteii 26 APR 13).

*Dipo* teaches lessons on household chores, cooking and washing correctly. It also teaches girls how to speak well in front of people and how they should act around men. “It teaches you to be confident to speak in front of a large group. It is expected of you during funerals and other events” (Lako 14 APR 13) commented Lako who looks forward to completing *dipo* next spring.

Additionally, *dipo* provides lessons to girls who wish to learn effective ways of trading and how to handle finances. “I am a trader and my sister is a headmistress. That is a Krobo woman. We learned how to succeed from *dipo*” (Interview with Janet Sakity 19 APR 13). *Dipo* provides women with some foundation to be financially stable independently, Janet Sackity learned methods of profitable trading during her *dipo*.

Many of the women I spoke to said it was celebrated to make the “girl-child” feel special in her home. Queen Mother Makutsu summed up how girls are meant to feel during *dipo* “Every woman is a queen. Every girl-child should believe that she is becoming a queen and we treat her that way” (Interview with Manye Makutsu 26 APR 13). *Dipo* is an initiation ritual, yet it symbolizes to the young girls, as well as the whole community, the respect for women inherent to Krobo tradition. Most of the core values taught during *dipo* are the lessons taught to Krobo women over the centuries, so it is certainly a way of staying in touch with the past and the women on the mountain.

To the girls going through *dipo* it is a momentous occasion that signifies their entrance into adulthood and acceptance by society. Elizabeth, a Junior High School (JHS) form two student who recently completed her *dipo*, described the change she experienced before and after the ceremony.

The things you would be doing would be different from when you were a child... Like when you were a child you would be playing all around, always you would be dirty. But when you are an adult you know how to keep to yourself, always bath and do what needs to be done. (Interview with Elizabeth 16 APR 13)

The lessons of keeping the house, cooking, and pleasing one’s husband were recurring themes, especially cleanliness, when discussing the meaning of *dipo*. Some outside analysis would interpret these lessons in housework to be oppressive, even subordinating, to women. However, while it may be read this way by some it became evident the level of pride and respect these

duties have for Krobo women. “The most important lesson we learn – above all – is respect. Respect for yourself. That respect becomes respect for others and respect for your family’s home” (Interview with Juliana Baidoo 16 APR 13). Krobo women take these duties as a mark of strength and command in the community. Krobo women are not confined to the chores they learn in *dipo* and are in fact encouraged to pursue education and careers outside the home. However, it is seen as knowledge that should be passed down and maintained in the *dipo* tradition.

Another trend in what I found was meaningful to the Krobo about *dipo* was the purity of the girls. When comparing Krobo girls to other girls in Ghana, JHS form two student Abigail remarked, “Our virginity makes us special from all the girls in Ghana” (Interview with Abigail on 16 APR 13). *Dipo* allows for a definitive entrance into sex and is a celebration of this transition. However, today most girls do not take *dipo* as a license to have sex. Queen Mother Makutsu explained some recent adjustments in the *dipo* rites considering the meaning of the transition.

*Dipo* changed because we saw how well it can prevent teenage pregnancy. And we’ve changed the idea that when you’ve gone through *dipo* you still know you have more to learn instead of just going to marry. You are not fit to marry! The boy too cannot marry you. So you continue schooling and one day you will get something to chop because you’ve learned a lot. (Interview with Manye Makutsu 26 APR 13)

In the past the marrying age was much younger for Krobo girls because there wasn’t formal education. Many girls would go through *dipo* and marry soon after; some would even have fiancés who were paying their *dipo* fees instead of their fathers<sup>2</sup>. The introduction of education for girls has made the marrying age on average older. Today the meaning of *dipo* is to prepare girls for marriage and womanhood but also ensure that they achieve education so that they can

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<sup>2</sup> *Dipo* girls receive financial support ideally from their father throughout the rites. They must pay the *dipo* Priestess as well as purchase or rent beads and cloth for their daughters. *Dipo* is an economic contributor because it makes plenty of money for vendors who choose to sell or rent out their materials during the season (Interview with Emmanuel Kpabitey 14 APR 13)

mesh with the continuously westernization of the Ghanaian economy that requires education to be successful.

Above all, the most encompassing theme I found that ties into much of what *dipo* means is the change in how girls perceive themselves. It is a period of introspective development reflecting on their identity and who they want to become. “Before, and especially during *dipo*, Krobo girls are surrounded by women who are role models. *Dipo* gives them belief and confidence in themselves that they too can be like that role model who once went through *dipo*” (Interview with Manye Makutsu 26 APR 13). Makutsu went on to say “It’s important for women in particular to go through something that reminds them of the important responsibility of women” (Interview with Manye Makutsu 26 APR 13). *Dipo* reminds everyone of a long existing pride in the Krobo female. The *dipo* rites have gone through revision to preserve the strength of the women in the ever-changing society, yet the respect for women is still maintained as tradition. She is treasured, “A mother to the whole community.”



Figure 5: Manye Makutsu with her beads, which she makes.

## *The Process of Dipo*

*Dipo* is intricate in practice and has many phases the girl must complete in order to successfully pass the rite. Before entry into the *dipo* process the girl must prove that she is a virgin. By an examination of the girl's body by a female relative or female elder it is decided whether or not she can pass this first part of the test. Throughout the rite women keep an eye on the development of the girl's breasts and stomach to be wary of a potential pregnancy.<sup>3</sup> It is seen as a blessing when the girl's menses occur during *dipo* because it further proves her chastity. "We paint her in white calico so everyone knows it is certain that she has remained pure" (Interview with Maami Hluayo Adoteii on 26 APR 13).

Another way of showing that you are not with child during *dipo* is the way in which the girls are mostly nude during the ceremonies. Besides being covered in beads and by the *subue*<sup>4</sup> (a traditional red loin cloth), girls will be mostly uncovered during the initial steps of the rite. However this is dwindling due to western influence and Christians frowning upon the girl's "lack of modesty."

Today you must also pass through the approval of the Queen Mother in your area or kin. This new aspect of *dipo* approval was presented to me as the Queen Mothers watching out for the best interest of the girl's education. If it is apparent that the participant is not mature enough to understand the *dipo* lessons or is not receiving an education she will suggest that they wait

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<sup>3</sup> "In the olden days" small girls who had not gone through *dipo* would go topless. This made it easy for the older women to keep an eye on development. It was also a way of being sure the girl was not becoming sexually active or pregnant. Women I encountered would refer to the size of breasts being a gauge for stages of a woman's, life like a counter for age. Steegstra also encountered this in her research, as old Krobo women who could not recall their age at the time of *dipo* would consider the development of their breasts as a reference. *Nyo-tso* meaning "stick like breasts" *Kpaku-nyo* as in "like calabashes." If a girl seems to be developing too early *nyo-kpami* will be performed for her. Usually it is the girl's mother who will massage the breasts with a stone every morning till they appear to have gone down (Steegstra 206)

<sup>4</sup> The *subue* is worn to symbolize fertility and womanhood. The *dipo-yi* will wear it long in front and the back to symbolize their near arrival at womanhood. While today European underpants are used by most, especially recent generations, the *subue* is still prized within Krobo culture and often viewed as superior. It is known to attract men and make sex more pleasurable. It also is known to have more mystical healing powers. The *subue* is known to cure children's convulsions once rubbed on their face and tied to their heads. Steegstra remarked on witnessing a mom take off her western style panties and rubbing in on the face of her convulsing child "Apparently it is not so much about the *subue* itself, but the contact with female genitals or its secretion that gives it its power" (Steegstra 207).

sometime to complete the rite. “It’s not to be embarrassing” Baidoo explained to me. “She will take the mother aside and say ‘maybe wait another year or two, make sure she is completing her studies, then bring her for her rite’” (Interview with Juliana Baidoo 16 APR 13). Once you’ve been deemed ready by your family, female elders, *dipo* Priestesses, and the Queen Mother you are officially a *dipo-yi*: a *dipo* girl.

Before the *dipo-yis* begin the ceremonies their families will take part in preparing them individually. Families will take the girl to see a *gbalo* (meaning diviner) who will inquire with the girl’s *susuma* (or soul) about what they require to complete their *dipo*. This usually includes a certain amount of beads, cloth, and offerings to Nana Klow□ki and the ancestors. Then the steps will commence as the community prepares for the *dipo* festivities. The *dipo* festival takes about two months today with all preliminary steps and all the *dipo-yi*’s completion. Most correlate the beginning of *dipo* to the end of Christian Easter (Interview with Emmanuel Kpabitey 14 APR 13). As spring arrives it is apparent that the *dipo* rites will be performed for thousands of Krobo girls across Ghana from Late March to late May. Below I will describe the steps of *dipo* as they were related to me by my informants and textual accounts.

#### Selecting a Dede

In Krobo custom Dede is a common name for a first-born girl. A Dede must be selected in the Yilo-Krobo area. *Dipo-yi* there must go first and then the ceremony will move down the main road in a domino effect of initiation. Before the *dipo* rites can begin a young woman who intends to go through the rites that year must act as the Dede for all the other girls who are also preparing. This girl is usually also a Dede in her own house



and now must act as an older sister for all of the girls going through the rite that year. Dede<sup>5</sup> will go through every portion in the rite first. (Steegstra 178).

Putting the millet in the water

On a Thursday elderly women gather and prepare pots of millet and mix it with stream water. The millet symbolizes the fertility of Krobo women. (Steegra 180). They pour libations and pray to the Nana Klow□ki to guide the girls through the process. Then the millet is ritually thrown against the roof of the shrine as “*Kloyo jimo*” is repeated, “meaning you are a Krobo woman” (Steegstra 179). On the following Sunday they return to check the millet. If the millet has germinated or there is a presence of larva it is a bad omen suggesting that one of the *dipo-yi* may be pregnant. (Steegstra 179) There is a knowing that Nana Klow□ki is in touch with the girls and would make it known if the girls were not fit by sending a message through the millet, a symbol from nature of fertility.

*Blotsimi* Ceremony

The *blotsimi* or blocking of the road ceremony occurs before any *dipo* ceremonies begin. Priests, priestesses and anyone who wishes to attend goes to the major road entrances of town. A series of rituals are performed and a fowl is sacrificed. The blocking of the road is done to prevent any bad spirits from entering the shrines and disturbing the *dipo* process (Steegstra 180).

Cleansing and satisfying the *susuma*

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<sup>5</sup> Usually, families are reluctant to give up their daughter to be the years Dede because there is a superstition about the Dede becoming infertile. Often there is a hectic back and forth between families deciding who will give up their Dede for the ceremony. However, this superstition is often unfounded and Dede's go on to have children.

Ritual cleansing occurs at the family house<sup>6</sup>. Here different types of cleansing ceremonies are performed for the girls whose *susuma*, Dangme for souls, ask for certain offerings.<sup>7</sup> Water, clay, herbs, and millet are mixed in calabashes and then poured at the doorway and then on their hands and feet. Libations are poured and fowls have their throats slit so the blood may be dripped on the feet of the girls (Steedstra 248). During this phase the cutting of the bottom part of the *dipo-yi*'s hair takes place. This ritual cutting is called *yi sisi pomi* and is done in order to show the community that she is going through the rite and they should respect her and the rules of the rite (Amoatey 28).

### *Raffia*

Another beginning stage is the tying of the *raffia*. The *raffia* is a dried leaf that is tied around the neck of the girl. Like the *yi sisi pomi* tying the *raffia* is meant to signify a *dipo-yi*. *Dipo* Priestess Maami Hluayo Adoteii comments on these first stages.

The moment they mark you the whole community knows. And your family, they will start grooming you and teaching you. And through this the girl feels happy because she knows her mother went through this same thing to become a real woman. And today, here she is helping me to become somebody in the future. (Interview with Maami Hluayo Adoteii 26 APR 13).

Now the girl, her family, and community are prepared to support the *dipo-yi* through the process.

### Grinding of the Millet

The girls then are guided on how to grind the millet with the help of an older female of the house. At this point some girls are given a new string of waist beads and a *glo*, which

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<sup>6</sup> In Krobo tradition kin keep family houses that act as a congregating space and a symbol of roots in a hometown. Some people will move out of the family house, or never live in the family house at all, but it is still considered a sacred home amongst Krobo families. Family houses act as a hub for rituals and ceremonies; in particular, portions of *dipo* will take place in there (Steedstra 49).

<sup>7</sup> It is believed that the souls of the girls are ancestors living in them and that everyone is a reincarnation of some past family member. In Krobo history it is known that many tribes settled amongst the people. Some of the girl's *susuma* may be old ancestors from Krobo mountain yet some may be from the Volta Region, or are rooted in Ewe or Akan blood (Steedstra 248).

is a string made up of a pineapple leaf. Then the girls are dressed in the *subue* a traditional red loincloth. At the grinding stone they grind the millet in the customary way of pushing back and forth on it with a smaller stone. The millet is mixed with water and the girls are to drink it and have it smeared on parts of their bodies to further cleanse them. (Steedstra 245)

### Ritual Bath

Early in the morning on a Saturday following these preliminary steps the girls are lined up and walked to the stream as their female relatives sing and play music alongside them. At the river the girls wash their *subue* with locally made soap and then continue on to bathe themselves. For this they use the traditional sponges made from plants instead of the newer fishnet ones. They then cover themselves in a traditional powder. A new *subue* is prepared with new waist beads and the girls will put them on (Steedstra 258).

### Touching the Goat

The girls will stand on Antelope skin as they are wrapped in white calico. As a warning they are told that they will go mad if they step on the skin while pregnant. A black goat is brought in (traditionally purchased by the girls father) and is held by the *gbalo* as the girls line up and must push back at the goat. A *dipo* Priestess will touch the forehead of the goat and then the girls a number of times. This act removes the sins of the girls. The following day the goat is castrated and then sacrificed. The goats blood too is sprayed on the feet of the girls (Steedstra 263).

*A ya yomo o w*□

*A ya yomo o w*□ means “going to the old ladies house” in this case the old lady is Nana Klow□ki. Early in the morning the girls will go to the shrine of priestess Klow□ki. Clay

is smeared on their body to mark them as a blessing. Each area has a distinct mark to show where the girls are from. It is also at this point that the old ladies will check once more for a pregnancy in any of the *dipo-yi* (Steedstra 265).

#### The *T□gb□t□*

The *t□gb□t□* is a sacred stone from Krobo mountain said to have been broken up and given to some few special shrines in the area. Before going to the stones the girls must bathe in a water and clay mixture to cleanse themselves to meet the sacred artefact. The girls are then adorned with beads and calico by their mothers and clay is sprinkled on the face. The girls had leaves placed in their lips to prevent them from speaking at this point. They are taken from the bush to where the portion of the original stone is located. Then the girls are told to climb the stone. If they are able to climb and come down with grace they have proven themselves as pure and as not pregnant. After this the girls are not allowed to touch the ground and are carried by female relatives and then past on to young men who lift them on their shoulders. (Steedstra 268)

#### The Outdooring

This final stage is a celebration of the girls completion of the rites and official public entrance into womanhood. During the outdooring the girls take place in a ceremony called *bobum* or “dressing up.” They are adorned in kente and beads<sup>8</sup>. The more you have the “richer your mother will appear” (Informal interview with Janet Baidoo 27 APR 13) Janet Baidoo informed me. She added on that the accessories and cloth she used during *dipo* were passed onto her from older female generations in her family. The girls are

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<sup>8</sup> Krobo beads are famous throughout Ghana. The traditional bead making methods of constructing glass and powder beads has been around for centuries and like *dipo* has its origins on the mountains. Today beads provide a solid income for many Krobo people and are an essential aspect of the *dipo* dress throughout the process (Interview with Emmanuel Kpabitey 13 APR 13)

presented in their beautiful beads and cloth and join each other and families in song and dance. Today many pictures are taken at this stage.



Figure 6: *Dipo-yi* dance the *Klama* dance demonstrating their outdooring

### *Dipo Today*

Since it was first documented, *dipo* has gone through changes due to adjustments in society. According to elders in the community, as well as *dipo* Priestesses, the custom has gone through revisions due to western influence. Opinion varied on whether these changes were good but some core causes arose in virtually every interview. Those causes were Christianity and education.

Some changes in ceremonial practices have occurred. In the past to symbolize a family's wealth and investment in the girls purity goats would be slaughtered and their intestines removed and dried for wearing. There was also a practice of scarification of the hands. These small cuts, about twelve incisions, were to prove that you've past the sweeping test. Today because of

HIV/AIDS transmission as well as outside commentators criticizing the hurting of the girls it is rarely practiced. However, upon visiting with *dipo* Priestess Maami Hluayo Adoteii and speaking with her teenage daughter who went through *dipo* in the spring of 2012 I saw that she had been given the sweeping test marks.



Figure 7: *Dipo-yi* from left to right: Gladys, unknown name, Elizabeth, Rosemary, Abigal, Augustina

Today *dipo* last about five days for most girls. This shortening is due to promoting girls education. This abbreviated *dipo* period allows girls to continue on with their schooling missing only one to three days of school for their *dipo*. Fifteen-year-old Augustina reflected on the changes by discussing her mothers *dipo*. “*Dipo* was different for my mother then it was for me. Because, you know, back then there was no formal education for girls. You’d be in the *dipo* room for about one month before they would bring you out.” (Interview with Augustina 16 APR 13). Makutsu, emphasized the partnership of *dipo* and education together. “We need to make sure these *dipo* girls are doing their schooling because now education is the key” (Interview with Manye Makutsu on 26 APR 13). To her, the success of the Krobo girls and *dipo* are interconnected, “Because if you don’t listen and do well on your papers when you go into *dipo*

you won't know what we're trying to teach you there" (Interview with Manye Makutsu on 26 APR 13). Manye Makutsu described the interest her and the Association of Queen Mothers in Odumase had in preserving the *dipo* tradition while making the importance of their education known.



Figure: *dipo-yi* at school (From left to right: Abigal, Gladys, Rosemary, Elizabeth, Augustina)

Presently, in the opinion of many of the women and girls spoken to in Manya-Krobo education and *dipo* are equal in importance to their future and together cannot continue to exist without the other in preparing Krobo girls fully for adulthood. Recent *dipo* completer and JHS form two student Elizabeth spoke, "First when you go under the *dipo* rites it is there that they will teach you everything. But now school is teaching us part and *dipo* too is teaching us part" (Interview with Elizabeth on 16 APR 13).

Much of the companionship *dipo* has in the schools are in the Home Economics classroom. I spoke to Home Economics teacher Madame Koko Amano who said she tried to supplement and use *dipo* when she was teaching the girls in her classes. However, she critiqued the results of shortening *dipo* from a teaching perspective.

Formerly if they want to perform the rite for you, you live, for about one year, you will be going about before the ritual and they will be training you for about a year. And then it

would be a full month that they would perform the rite for you. Now, it takes a week, to go through the rite. It's just like learning a course, a special course. The syllabus has been given. And all that time they were using one year for all on the syllabus. Now they are given one week. So I don't think the intake would be so much. (Interview with Koko Amano 16 APR 13).

Amano's expressed concern for the integrity of the lessons *dipo* is intended to impart on young Krobo has been expressed by many. That is why there has been an effort to use school to make up for the time it has "taken" from *dipo*.

*Dipo* is preserved to provide the important lessons that have defined Krobo womanhood. Erasing this identity is viewed as a threat to Krobo culture. Tetteh Abraham, Dangme teacher at Kodjonya Presby Millenium school addressed on changes in *dipo*. "If you are traditional you say 'it's bad,' [changes in *dipo*] but when you are a Christian and look at old ways you will say the changing is okay. But at the end no one can stop from moving into the modern world" (Interview with Tetteh Abraham 16 APR13). Largely the movement has been to move towards a hybrid culture where tradition is not only preserved for the culture but helped to thrive in the modernizing society.

### *Dipo in Controversy*

*Dipo* has been at the center of much controversy since first textual recordings of it by missionaries appeared deeming it a "heathen" practice. Any debate about it previous to these writings is unknown; *dipo* was probably more widely accepted by other Ghanaian ethnic groups because many themselves practiced their own forms of puberty rites. Today the Missionaries first impressions of *dipo* and Krobo culture have had a lasting effect on continued disapproval by some within Krobo culture and outside of it concerning the ritual.



To this day, there is the criticism about *dipo* as some interpret the ceremony as an excuse for girls to have sexual relationships with men out of wedlock. This offended the morality of the missionaries when they first arrived, who upon seeing the girl's nakedness assumed they must have been selling themselves (Steedstra 96); in reports and articles back in Europe some missionaries referred to the *dipo-yi* as "harlots" and "cheap whores." Steedstra comments on this perception: "In this way girls 'devoted to the fetish' were portrayed according to the biblical image of temple prostitutes in the published version for a European audience" (Steedstra 97). The missionaries were referring to what they saw of the girls during confinement and interpreted their nudity in a sexual way, which originates from a European-centric perspective that associates nudity automatically with the occurrence of sex acts. This perception may have been highlighted upon arriving in Europe to coax more funding for the mission and arouse outrage.

To this day this stigma about Krobo women being more promiscuous than the women of other Ghanaian ethnic groups still exists. Words from colonial and missionary language origin remain strong as "pagan" and "fetish" are still used in reference to *dipo* and other rituals. Some fault *dipo* with increased rates of prostitution, teen pregnancy, and HIV/AIDS in the Eastern Region. In the Eastern region there have been recorded high rates of sex workers. The first AIDS case in Ghana actually started with a Krobo woman who had been prostituting in Côte d'Ivoire (Steedstra 61).

Some have correlated this with *dipo* being a "license to indulge in premarital sex" (Kumah 1998 qte from Steedstra 56). However, I found that most felt that labeling *dipo* at fault for struggles in the reproductive health of Krobo women today was a shallow pronouncement. Solely focusing on *dipo* as causation for an issue like prostitution fails to acknowledge other circumstances that may lead to turning to sex work anywhere in the world.

## **The Status of Women's Reproductive Health in Manya-Krobo**

The issue of women's health is one that is chronically underserved especially in impoverished communities where the overall population's health may be in crisis. Additionally, in some cultures the topic of women's health is a taboo in discussion. Because of this lack of dialogue, sometimes misconceptions about women arise. This cultural reluctance to discuss topics in reproductive health might be natural to the indigenous culture, but often its origins are of Christian import

In order to study the reproductive health of the women of Manya-Krobo I decided to take a sociological standpoint based in the Life Course Health Model (LCHM). This defines health not only physically but also emotionally and socially as well. For example, a woman's choice to use a condom doesn't only prevent pregnancy or the transmittance of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) but also protects you from the stress of an unwanted pregnancy or contracting a STD. It empowers your social health by claiming your right to control your sexual activity. Examining the status of women's sexual health in Manya-Krobo through the LCHM creates a bridge between the *dipo* custom, which is a cultural practice that can be examined through a sociological perspective, and the matter of women's reproductive health. By using the LCHM I was able to understand the effects of *dipo*, the status of reproductive health, and perhaps most importantly the lives of the women in the area.

*Major Problems in Women's Reproductive Health in Manya-Krobo*

For the women of Manya-Krobo many of the major health problems for them have to do with their reproductive health. The issues I most frequently came across were unwanted and teen pregnancies and HIV/AIDS. For many years the Eastern region had the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in Ghana. Only in the last two years has the Central Region taken the Eastern Region's place as leading in the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Ghana (refer to Figure 9). In 2000 the rate of HIV prevalence in Ghana overall stood at 3% of the population while occurrence of cases in the Eastern Region were comparatively much higher at 7.8% (Ghana AIDS Commission 2003).

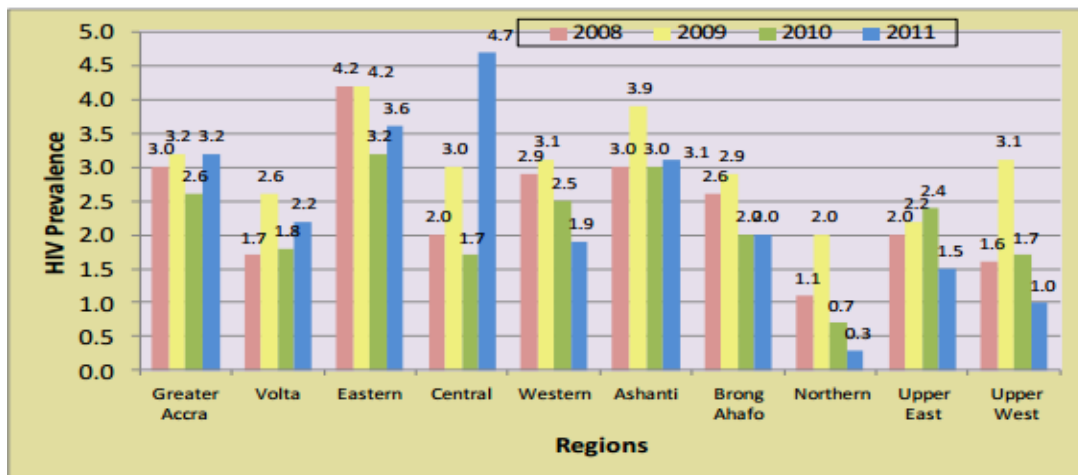


Figure 9: HIV Prevalence in Ghana by Year and Region (Ghana AIDS Commission)

Cases of HIV/AIDS in the Eastern Region continue to be predominantly found amongst the young women; in fact women worldwide are twice as more likely to contract AIDS purely based on their biology (Avert.org 2013). Additionally to being biologically at higher risk, women and girls are especially at risk socially because of gender roles. When it comes to sex, men typically are seen as the dominating figure in intercourse and women take a more passive role. This social construct puts females in jeopardy because they are not likely to negotiate the use of condoms with her partner and are more likely to find themselves in non-consensual sex acts (Avert.org 2013).

Prostitution has been a major issue in the Eastern Region increasing drastically around the 70's and 80's during an economic dip (Steedstra 61). During this time, Krobo sex workers were traveling around Ghana and to other West African nations seeking out work. Unfortunately, this led to some women bringing HIV/AIDS into Ghana making the Eastern Region an epicenter of the disease. This produced a stigma in Ghana making the face of HIV/AIDS a Krobo woman<sup>9</sup> (Steedstra 79). Almost automatically people began associating AIDS with women and the *dipo* rites of the Krobo. This Prostitution is a result of living in poverty and not receiving education as well as not being able to use protection because of not knowing about use or not being able to convince clients to wear one.

I received conflicting information on the matter of teen pregnancy in the area. Some discussed how teen pregnancy was at a high rate in the community in comparison to other areas. Some spoke on how it was very low due to the lessons communicated during *dipo*. Much of the arguments in *dipo*'s favor were from the people of Manya-Krobo who know teens becoming pregnant in their community. Arguments villainizing *dipo* often come from religious outsiders who see *dipo* as encouraging sex. No matter the opinions, it has been a concern of the area for years as indicated by resent efforts to police pregnancy in teens in Manya-Krobo. In 2009 the Lower Manya-Krobo District Assembly made it a rule that before girls could take their Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) they would have to take a pregnancy test. This resulted in "more than thirty-three female students failing to write the BECE" (Modern Ghana 2010). While this strategy seems to be punishing the girls, it does show an awareness that there is a problem.

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<sup>9</sup> According to Brigid M. Sackey's research on the image of AIDS in conjunction with Krobo women she discussed how women in Ghana became stigmatized as carriers of the disease. Sackey notes how some created a new acronym for AIDS claiming it stood for Akousa Is Dying Slowly. This shows how it was seen distinctively as a woman's burden in Ghana. (Sackey 7).

Gladys Maku Nyako is the founder and head midwife/psychologist at the Lydia Nyako Memorial Clinic and Maternity Home in Kodjonya. She spoke to me about how she works with many young girls who have become pregnant. “Every day you see them when you go to the hospital. Small small *small* girls, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen – they drop out. Some even in primary school” (Interview with Gladys Maku Nyako 17 APR 13). Teen pregnancy leads to many serious problems for the girls in Manya-Krobo such as dropping out of school and higher chances of being in a lower socio-economic-status.

Region	% who had sex in the last 4 weeks		Sex before aged 18 years (18-24 yrs)		% never married youth (15-24) sex in past 12 months	% never married youth (15-24) sex in past 12 months
	2008 DHS (Men)	2008 DHS (Women)	2008 DHS (Men)	2008 DHS (Women)	2008 DHS (Men)	2008 DHS (Women)
Western	41.1	42.8	26	39.4	22.3	24.3
Central	44.1	37	24.5	45.4	28.4	41.3
Greater Accra	44.2	37.6	26.7	32.1	31.7	33.1
Volta	32.9	41.6	31.6	44.7	20.4	22
Eastern	41.8	41.2	32.8	55.1	35.8	43.3
Ashanti	43.5	44.2	35.2	45.8	33.4	42.9
Brong Ahafo	46.1	46.4	46.9	51.7	47.9	39.9
Northern	26.9	29.9	7.2	41.8	16.8	19.7
Upper East	28.2	36.7	10.7	50.8	28.9	20.3
Upper West	27.4	32.2	18.2	51.1	19.8	32.6
National	41.4	39.9	27.7	43.9	29.5	34.2

Table 1: “Percentage of men and women who have had sex disaggregated by age” (Ghana AIDS Commission)

She also related to me the reoccurring issue of unsafe abortions being attempted by teenage girls. “It happens frequently, when they are in school and the pregnancy comes and they want to abort it. They go and take some herbs and they themselves know some drugs. They tell each other” (Interview with Gladys Maku Nyako 17 APR 13). Another founder of a reproductive health center, Samuel Atter of the Peer Education Center in Odumase, commented on the frequency of unsafe abortions done by teens in the area. “They hide themselves and try to abort the baby and this leads to death. It happens often. They don’t want the mother and father to see. So they ask their friends and before they know it they take some medicine that is not proper.” (Interview with Samuel Atter 18 APR 13). The likelihood of a teen pregnancy increases in low

income families as well. This is in addition to the health risks of being an impoverished pregnant woman such as mal-nutrition for the mother and fetus, unsafe environment, and inaccessibility to pre-natal care.

The pregnancy has some emotional effect on the woman as well, especially if she was depending on the father of the child to support her and he has abandon her and the unborn child.

I found this was a reoccurring scenario for pregnant teens in Manya-Krobo.

So when they come here as pregnant women I sit down and waist time, talk to them. Because some of them when they come to you, especially the teenagers, they start crying. 'Why?' they say when the pregnancy comes they won't see the man again. They have ran away. So money, even to take a taxi to the clinic, they don't have, they walk. (Interview with Gladys Maku Nyako 17 APR 13)

It is evident that teen pregnancy, and pregnancy for any woman who is financially unstable, leads to numerous physical, emotional, and social traumas to the health of the women of Manya-Krobo.

#### *Causation*

The Eastern Region has had some of the highest level of poverty throughout Ghana. However, this has not always been true as the Eastern Region thrived economically on their farm products for many years. However being displaced from the mountain and then the building of the Volta Dam in 1960 flooding much of the Krobo's crops significantly reduced the production (Steegstra). Samuel Atter a founder of a peer education center in Odumase noted how this has led to economic difficulties.

So in this Kroboland here, because the river has taken all their lands, they have put in the dam. During the time they put in the dam all their farm property, cocoa, timber, whatever, the water has collected all. So the Krobos here they have nothing to lead/live on, apart from the market, buy and sell. And then the few land that is left they farm. It's the resources. (Interview with Samuel Atter 18 APR 13)

Today most young people are unemployed and find it incredibly difficult to find work. This dip in the economy has had a tremendous effect on the Krobo people and the status of their health.

Poverty is a vicious cycle with many symptoms many of which I observed in Manya-Krobo. While numbers of children enrolled in school are mostly on the up-trend, there are still many cases of dropouts in Manya-Krobo. Two of the biggest causes for girls are teen pregnancy and needing to provide their families with extra income. Being out of school leaves girl's health particularly vulnerable in several ways. For one, by ceasing education you miss out on important information to remain healthy. School also contributes positively to girls emotional and social health by giving them confidence and hope for the future as well as substantially educating you to thrive in society. The insecurity in these three forms of health leave adolescent girls incredibly vulnerable to getting in risky situations.

Something that was related to me with concern by several people in Manya-Krobo was girls resorting to boyfriends at a young age to for financial support. Due to financial and educational struggling along with lack of support from adults, many Krobo girls end up turning to young men as a boyfriend figure.

The biggest problem for the adolescent girls is poverty. The mother might have died and the father has married another woman so sometimes you see this girl going up and down. No one's taking care of her. And that's when they engage in these 'boyfriends.' She knows he might have some small job and will give her some for food, clothes. So she will go around but before she realizes she will be having sex with him. (Interview with Samuel Atter 18 APR 13)

Atter argues that poverty is the cause for young girls going to men in order for financial support and thus contracting STDs or becoming pregnant. If the mother has past the girl loses a major role model. While she may have gone through *dipo* and is aware of the lessons taught about being weary of sex, poverty is a powerful force and is the major catalyst in deciding the status of women's reproductive health.

### *Efforts Being Made*

Fortunately many have identified the problems of women's health in Many-Krobo and seek to reach out to the girls in an effort to empower them through their health. Lining the roads of Yilo-Krobo and Manya-Krobo are health clinics searching for solutions. Two in particular stood out to me as being geared at supporting the reproductive health of young women. Both were started by individuals raised in Manya-Krobo who not only have experience working with the people of the area but they are their sisters, daughters, and friends.

The first establishment I visited was Lydia Nyako Memorial Clinic and Maternity Home in Kodjonya, just outside Odumase. On the walls are pictures and text for the women to read like a list that makes up "The Ideal Woman" and a promise for confidentiality. Founded and operated by now seventy-year-old Gladys Nyako a psychologist and midwife the clinic is powered by the force of women helping women. She now trains her own nurses after the government schools stopped sending nurses to do their residency in the area.



Figure 10: Gladys Maku Nyako (in blue) with some of her staff at the clinic



What stood out to me the most about Ms. Nyako and her clinic was her investment in not only the health of the women but in their lives. When I arrived many young women were sitting around and chatting amongst themselves and the nurses. Some were receiving treatment but others were just there to pass time.

At times they won't talk. I sit down with them and have some biscuits, you share with her, and both of you, you are taking, chewing and she will tell you everything. So when they come here as pregnant women I sit down and waste time, talk to them... I tell them they shouldn't cry. That next time they shouldn't make that mistake again. After delivery they should continue their education. Because the work is rather more help than a husband. So girls, before you started having baby you should be working, then *you* can support the man. (Interview with Gladys Maku Nyako 17 APR 13)

To Nyako the health of the less tangible aspects of women's lives – elements that couldn't necessarily be tested or prescribed medicine were just as pivotal.

Gladys works to educate the girls and has herself collaborated with the Association of Queen Mothers to lecture. These lectures supplement the *dipo* rites lessons as well as the things taught in school. "Much of what I teach the girls are learning in *dipo*. It has been taught like that since I was young" (Interview with Gladys Nyako on 17 APR 13). Gladys teaches the Queen Mothers what they need to know to help the girls empower their health. The Queen Mothers then translate that knowledge back to the girls using a pipe line of information that has existed for centuries in Ghanaian tradition: the Queen Mother advising the young women.

Another organization that has become a safe haven and central for young women's health is the Odumase Peer Education Center. Located on the market grounds it is easily accessible to all people, including the young women who may need the center most. "I see the girls who are selling, trying to make a cedis, pure water and little things. They are the ones I'm looking out for" (Interview with Samuel Atter 18 APR 13). In 1999 Samuel Atter started the center in reaction to the way HIV/AIDS was ravaging his community. "I was a driver at the time but I saw

what the disease was doing to people and I thought if something's not done now in ten years we'll all be gone. So I started this place” (Interview with Samuel Atter 18 APR 13).



Figure 11: Samuel Atter in front of his vehicle.

Moved by what he saw happening in his community, Atter began gathering the adolescents in groups counseling them and then teaching them how to counsel each other. “At the beginning we found that the best way to reach people was through drama. We dramatize the message in the communities so you could see it as if it was you ‘this lady’ or ‘this guy.’” (Interview with Samuel Atter 18 APR 13). He used methods of storytelling that are rooted deep in Ghanaian culture to reach the youth about protecting themselves from HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy.

Atter supports girls to continue their education even when their situation feels very difficult. “If they’re not going to school they will be selling. If they are selling they are seeing the young men, drivers, carpenters. He will be given you a small amount of money and before you realize you will be getting a disease. So we are engaged in education advocacy” (Interview with Samuel Atter 18 APR 13). In the last ten years the HIV/AIDS rate of new infection is going down. Atter explained to me that he felt that this was due to an influx in education not only in

schools by getting supplied to his center and provided to Queen Mothers. “They are women themselves. They are also doing good work with the young girls. We are doing a collaboration” (Interview with Samuel Atter 18 APR 13). He explained much like Nyako that he had a good relationship with the Queen Mothers when it came to supporting the girls of Manya-Krobo and their health.



Figure 12 : Posters promoting abstinence.

There is a presence of support for women’s health in the area that is working to combat the issues caused by poverty. Both places made me aware that their greatest problem in providing services is a lack of financial support to continue. While there is a force within Manya-Krobo working to improve the status of women’s health both Nyako and Atter as well as many others I spoke to felt that the rest of the world does not have enough compassion for the cause.

### **Connecting *Dipo* and Women’s Reproductive Health**

When I asked people if they thought there was a connection between the *dipo* rites and the reproductive health of Krobo girls. It was communicated to me that there is an ever present overlap. In much literature from outside the Eastern region there comes the inference that *dipo* leads to sexual activity. Some even suggest that immediately after *dipo* Krobo girls seek sex (Hampton qte from Steegstra 60). When I brought this up to the people I spoke to in Manya-Krobo they disagreed with these assumptions.

In fact, many people made the argument to me that *dipo* was actively protecting girls from teen pregnancy and contracting STDs. I met with Janet Sackity who was currently taking her granddaughters through *dipo* and had prepared many other girls in the past. She communicated how *dipo* has played a role in preventing teenage pregnancy.

The most important lesson *dipo* teaches our daughters today is about teenage pregnancy. We are trying to curtail teenage pregnancy. During *dipo* we talk to them. Tell them about *dipo* and what it means so the child knows if it is not done for them they will be out casted. So it prevents teenage pregnancy. tell her that if she listens someone will come and marry her, a good person will come in the future. You should not just be carrying about with any man. You should look for the ones who respect us women. (Interview with Janet Sackity).

To Sackity it also has to do with respect for ones self. The girls are taught during *dipo* that they should have the self-confidence to not just go with any man. That they should know that because they have gone through *dipo* a good man will come to them.

*Dipo* Priestess Maami Hluayo Adoteii felt as though the problem of teen pregnancy and promiscuity after *dipo* may be due to the introduction of western culture.

Every bad thing came is from you, the whites. You see, there were the old women on the mountain performing *dipo* and and there wasn't those churches calling them evil. There was nothing like teenage pregnancy before then. But when those things came in some parents told there children, 'well as for me, I will not perform this rite for you.' And that child doesn't learn and she goes off... *dipo protects* girls. (Interview with Maami Hluayo Adoteii 26 APR 13)

To her the introduction of Christianity stopped some people from doing *dipo* and began a trend of *dipo* as well as many aspect of Krobo tradition appearing inferior to the continued westernization of Ghanaian culture. This, she believes, has resulted, in a shortening of the rites and the lessons coming up against the power images of western sexuality that validate youth becoming sexually active. Adoteii also discussed how she felt improvements can be made to the state of reproductive health among Krobo girls. "The whites took away are tradition so you much

also bring it back and teach that it is the best way” (Interview with Maami Hluayo Adoteii 26 APR 13). To the *dipo* Priestess she felt the most effective way of improving young girls health was by the western people to reteach tradition.<sup>10</sup>

The lessons of *dipo* when it comes to women protecting themselves and respecting their bodies was related to me as having a lasting effect on the Krobo woman.

When girls come of age and they are starting to maybe see men intimately they remember what we taught them. *Dipo* helps a lot. Instead of just letting this man have you you know how to make good decisions, protect yourself. It is because of the respect and the lessons you learned at that younger age. *Dipo* doesn’t mean the end, oh now you will get married, no. We teach them in the group that sometime will pass, you will go to school, you will get a good husband. When you go into marriage your family will sit you down and say remember what we taught you years back. (Interview with Manye Makutsu 26 APR 13).

To the woman I spoke to *dipo* has a lasting effect on the Krobo female identity and reminds them that they should respect themselves and their culture. It was portrayed to me as not a license to engage in sex but a ceremony in which you are given the rights to your own sexuality and body. This is something inherent to Krobo tradition, a respect for woman that predates colonization or Christianity in Ghana. The connection between Krobo tradition and the way women have pride in their sexuality and health was made clear to me during a conversation with headmistress Juliana Baidoo “you won’t be going around with all those men who have diseases *because your culture expects more from you*”

## Conclusion

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<sup>10</sup> Maami Hluayo Adoteii was especially interested in the respect for menstruation western culture has removed from krobo tradition. She referenced the *sabue* as a sacred and effective tool to menses and that the western introduction of the pad has caused girls to forget the spiritual power a women’s menstruation. “They will not even know how to use it, the pad, this flimsy flimsy thing. It will fall off and then the dogs will bring it all around town. When you wash you do not throw the blood openly. You are supposed to be careful with it and show it respect” (Interview with Maami Hluayo Adoteii 26 APR 13)

Perceptions on *dipo* have been warped by a western perspective influenced by two of globalizations most mighty imports: religion and economics. Yet, by sifting through history it becomes evident that *dipo* is a vital part in formulating Krobo female identity. This identity is rooted in a long history of valuing women, their bodies, and their spirits. By accusing *dipo* as the cause for problems like teen pregnancy, STDs, and Prostitution one is blatantly ignoring the force of poverty and it's implications on women's health worldwide.

If this study is reimagined in the future or further developed I feel it is necessary that the researcher attends the *dipo* rites ceremony more. Additionally, further investigation of clinics in the area would be beneficial to understanding more about the what's occurring concerning reproductive health. Overall, more time on the field would be helpful in creating a deep comprehension of the topic.

During my time dancing and singing with the women and *dipo* Priestesses was an experience I will always carry with me. Taking part in that education solidified my knowing of the way women are meant to feel treasured in Krobo society. Through that experience I can only imagine how special it must be for a teenage girl to be treated like a queen by her community. This instills a sense of self and communal love in the Krobo girl that I believe transcends in to the way she approaches her health.

In order for girls to be empowered when it comes to their reproductive health education must be employed. This does not necessarily mean formal education and can include being informed by youth centers, nurses and doctors, family members, and even traditional rituals. This education should continue to be increasingly more woman powered, creating a cycle of role models, like as Queen Mother Makutsu discussed. It is necessary to reinvigorate this powerful female identity that still resides in Manya-Krobo.

The *Dipo* rites develop respect for women within the community but even more importantly encourage women to respect themselves. When a woman respects herself her health risk factors greatly decreases. *Dipo* should be embraced as an asset to improving women's lives, one that combats the effects of poverty. By preserving *dipo* and continuing to build the foundation between it an education Krobo girls can live out what their fore-mothers had intended for them. This preservation of *dipo* will continue to perpetuate the importance of tradition throughout Ghana making it clear that the nation's culture is vital in empowering Ghanaian identity and in some cases the betterment of their health.

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## Informants

Abraham, Tetteh (16 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion about teaching traditions and *dipo* in school and the importance of preserving Krobo culture” At Kodjonya Presby Millenium School where he is the Dangbe culture teacher at Kodjonya, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Abigail (16 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion about her recent *dipo* rites completion and what it means to her” At Kodjonya Presby Millenium School where she is a student in Kodjonya, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Adoteii, Maami Hluayo (26 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion about the life of a *dipo* Priestesses and the history and process of *dipo* as well as teaching *dipo* songs and *klama* dance” At her home behind the denbe grounds near the base of the mountains, Odumase, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Amano, Koko (16 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Her perspective on *dipo* as a JHS Home economics teacher and the affect *dipo* has on her students” At Kodjonya Presby Millenium School, Kodjonya, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Atter, Samuel (18 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion about founding Peer Education center and the status of young peoples reproductive health in the area” At the Peer Education Center of Odumase on the market grounds in Agomanya close to his main road signage Agomanya, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Augustina (16 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion about her recent *dipo* rites completion and what it means to her” At Kodjonya Presby Millenium School where she is a student in Kodjonya, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Baidoo, Juliana Maku (16 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion about *dipo* rites and the significance for young Krobo women’s identity as well as major problems concerning the health of teenage girls in Manya-Krobo today” in her office of the Head Mistress at Kodjonya Presby Millenium School Kodjonya, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Dina (19 APR 13). Informal Interview. “Why she won’t do *dipo*” at her father’s home across from the palace in Odumase, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Elizabeth (16 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion about her recent *dipo* rites completion and what it means to her” At Kodjonya Presby Millenium School where she is a student in Kodjonya, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Gladys (16 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion about her recent *dipo* rites completion and what it means to her” At Kodjonya Presby Millenium School where she is a student in Kodjonya, Easern Region, Ghana.

Kpabitey, Beatrice (23 APR 13). Informal Interview. “Brief discussion about plans for daughters *dipo* and how she learned about the rites when she arrived in the region from her home town in the north” At her home in Nuaso, Newtown up the main hill from Alinga filling station, Nuaso, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Kpabitey, Emmanuel (14 APR 13). Informal Interview. “Brief discussion about the role of father’s in the *dipo* rites, the use of beads in ceremony, and teen pregnancy in the community” At his home and bead workshop in Nuaso, New town up the main hill from Alinga filling station, Nuaso, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Lako (15 APR 13). Informal Interview. “Her feelings on *Dipo* and how she will prepare for it next year as well as what they teach about reproductive health in her school” At her Uncle’s home in Nuaso, Newtown up the main hill from Alinga filling station, Nuaso, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Makutsu, Manye (26 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion on the role of Queen Mothers in the lives of young women, Krobo female identity, and her perspective on *dipo* rites and the status women’s health” At her home on the main road south of the palace moving towards Agomanya, Odumase, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Maunger, Stephen (16 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Dission about the fathers role in *dipo* and his opinion on the ceremony and its importance” At Kodjonya Presby Millenium School located on the main road Kodjonya, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Nyako, Gladys Maku (17 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion on the founding of her clinic and the reproductive health of women, especially adolescent girls, in the area” At the Lydia Nyako Memorial Clinic and Maternity home on main road in Kodjonya across the street from Kodjonya Presby Millenium School Kodjonya, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Oppong, Margaret (22 APR 13). Informal Interview. “Brief discussion on the mission and current project of the Youth and Women’s Empowerment NGO in Nuaso” At the offices of the Youth and Women’s Empowerment NGO sign board on main road at start of Nuaso offices are behind tro tro repair shop Nuaso, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Rosemary (16 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion about her recent *dipo* rites completion and what it means to her” At Kodjonya Presby Millenium School where she is a student in Kodjonya, Easern Region, Ghana.

Sackity, Janet (19 APR 13). Formal Interview. “Discussion about preparing granddaughters for *dipo* today and comparing to her own *dipo* in addition to discussing the reproductive health of girls at *dipo* age” At her sisters home in Odumase down the road from Presby Guest house towards the main road Odumase, Eastern Region, Ghana.

## Appendices



An AIDS prevention Billboard in Odumase partially covered by church advertisements



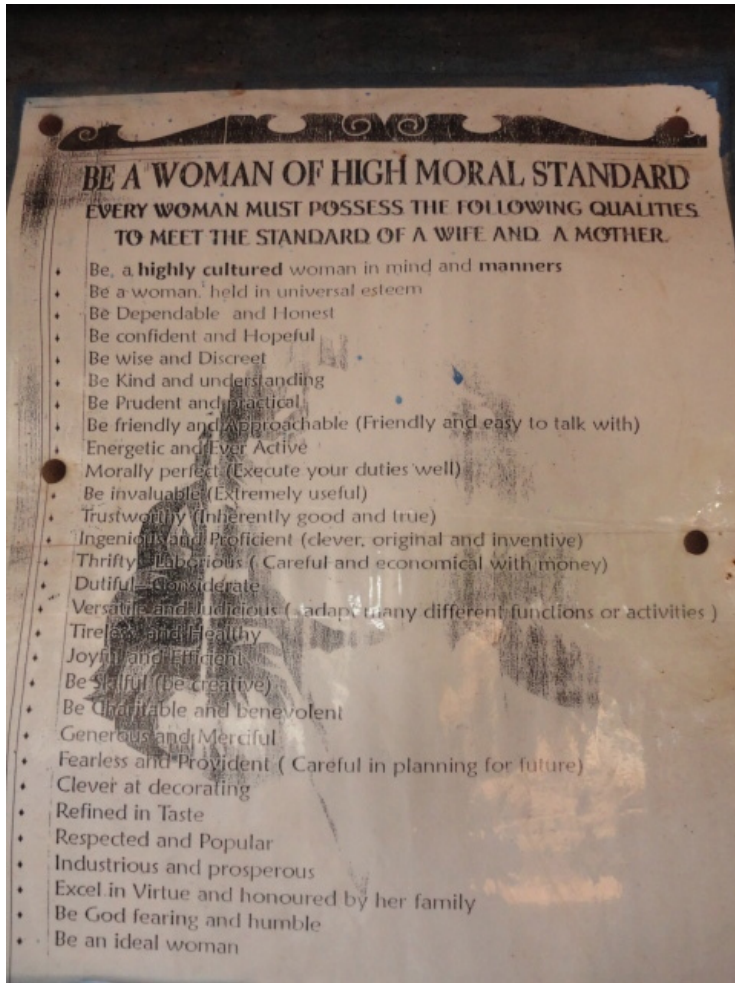
An AIDS prevention billboard demonstrating the use of the female condom



“The ideal family” at Lydia Nyako Memorial clinic and maternity home



“The Value of a good woman” at Lydia Nyako Memorial Clinic and maternity home



“Be a woman of high moral standard” at Lydia Nyako memorial clinic and maternity home



Peer education center signage on main road Signs to prevent violence against women at peer education center



Photos from dramas about HIV/AIDS in peer education center

## Songs

“Wrapping the white calico around the girls’ waists”

*O bo ji n̄ n̄, n̄ o ts̄ k̄ nḡ nḡ mo Kloyo pee. Ke o ya n̄ o b, o tsui n̄ ba o tsuim, o ko n̄ ba o ko nu; O d̄ n̄ ba o d̄ mi. Ke a ts̄ mo ̄ o de k̄ ee. O bo n̄ mo Klo yo pe n̄ ke o ya so n̄ o ba; ke o ya mī n̄ o ba. (Steegstra 333).*

“Touching the goat”

*O ts̄ T̄w̄ia ke e dem to kake ji n̄ n̄ n̄ e k̄ nḡ mo kloyo pee. Ke o ya so n̄ o ba; k̄ o ya mī n̄ o ba. Ke o ya ts̄loo. (Steegstra 333).*

