

Wilfrid Laurier University

## Scholars Commons @ Laurier

---

Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)

---

2019

### "And now I'm able to fight for my future": A qualitative exploration of the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based NGOs in Ghana

Kevin Devotta  
devo2290@mylaurier.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Devotta, Kevin, "And now I'm able to fight for my future": A qualitative exploration of the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based NGOs in Ghana" (2019). *Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)*. 2144.

<https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd/2144>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

“And now I’m able to fight for my future”: A qualitative exploration of the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based NGOs in Ghana

By:  
Kevin Devotta

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Master of Social Work

Wilfrid Laurier University

© Kevin Devotta 2019

### **Abstract**

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have grown in their importance in the international development field over the past 30 years. As a result of their rapid expansion and growth in influence, questions about their accountability, including their accountability to their service users, are being raised by key stakeholders (donors, NGO staff, and the service users themselves). Faith-based organizations (FBOs) are an increasingly important sub-group of NGOs, yet few studies exist which examine the accountability of FBOs to their service users. This study aims to help fill the gap in the literature by exploring the perspectives and experiences of FBO service users in Ghana. Data for this study was obtained through individual interviews and focus groups with a total of 24 participants from four FBOs in Ghana. Field observations and conversations with staff complemented the interviews and focus groups. Using qualitative description with overtones of constructivist grounded theory within a framework of Critical Theory, the findings were analyzed, revealing six themes: appreciating what the FBO offers; being limited; dealing with challenges; wanting to learn more; accessing services; and, experiencing success. The results of this study show that the four FBOs are responding to some of the needs of their service users but there is a lack of “downward” accountability, that is, the service users are not able to hold the FBO accountable for their actions. A question that arises from this study is whether FBOs can be both partially downward accountable and still beneficial to the local community. Further study is encouraged to explore the links between downward accountability in FBOs and the experience of service users.

### **Land Acknowledgement**

Wilfrid Laurier University in Kitchener-Waterloo is located on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnawbe, and Haudenosaunee peoples. The Faculty of Social Work (and the entire Laurier University Waterloo campus) is located on the Haldimand Tract, which, on October 25, 1784, after the American Revolutionary War of Independence, was given to the Six Nations of the Grand River by the British as compensation for their role in the war and for the loss of their traditional lands in Upstate New York. Of the 950,000 acres given to the Haudenosaunee (six miles on either side of the Grand River, all the way along its length), only 46,000 acres (less than 5 per cent) remains Six Nations land.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Indigenous people who continue to care for this land, for the present and for future generations.

*source: <http://www.lspirg.org/knowtheland/>*

### **Acknowledgements**

I wish to acknowledge the consistent, thorough, and meaningful support of my thesis supervisor, Prof. Magnus Mfoafo-M'Carthy, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. He encouraged me from the beginning with a project that initially seemed beyond my abilities. Thanks to his support along every step of the process, I was able to accomplish more than I thought possible. Thank you, Magnus!

My deepest appreciation as well to Prof. Bree Akesson, Associate Professor, and Dr. Anh Ngo, Lecturer, my two thesis committee members from the Faculty of Social Work; and to Prof. Colleen Loomis, my external examiner from the Balsillie School of International Affairs. Thank you for all your feedback, support, and encouragement!

My sincere thanks as well to all the participants and FBOs that took part in this study. Thank you for allowing me into your lives by sharing your experiences and warmly welcoming me into your communities. Your generosity and hospitality will not be soon forgotten.

I would also like to extend my appreciation for the support I received from Prof. Nancy Freymond, Associate Dean; Ms. Yumna Al-Adeimi, MSW, Manager of Field Placement; Ms. Peggy Freymond, Administrative Coordinator; Ms. Zaida Leon; and, Ms. Helen Song, Ph.D.(c), all from the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. Combining an international field placement with a thesis was a daunting task and each of these wonderful people assisted me in some way along the journey. Thank you!

As well, I would like to say thank you to Ms. Phyllis Power, Manager of Laurier International, and Ms. Patricia Mensah, Visiting Students Admissions, University of Ghana, for assisting me with setting up my placement at the University of Ghana.

Five of my classmates in the MSW program at Laurier also went on international field

placements to different countries. It was a tremendous source of support to have prepared for my placement in Ghana alongside such wonderful friends and colleagues. For their support before, during, and after our shared international field placement experience, I want to thank Debra, Genevieve, Jagdeep, Kaitlyn, and Matt.

The Queen Elizabeth Scholars program, funded by the Rideau Hall Foundation, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of the Government of Canada provided me with financial assistance for my travel to Ghana for which I am very grateful.

Lastly, I would like to thank my Dad and Mom for their unending support for my educational pursuits and their unconditional love and encouragement in all that I do. They cooked the meals that fuelled my all-day thesis work at home and were there for me when I needed to share the challenges and joys of my research and international field placement. Love you so much, Dad and Mom!

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Land Acknowledgement .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Tables .....	x
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
A Brief Note on Terminology .....	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	5
Non-Governmental Organizations .....	5
History of NGOs .....	8
Colonization and development in Africa. ....	9
Growth of NGOs .....	11
Faith-Based NGOs .....	13
Characteristics of FBOs .....	17
Accountability .....	21
Problematizing “Partnerships” .....	25
Global North Funders and Global South NGOs. ....	26
Global South NGOs and their Intended Beneficiaries. ....	29
Downward Accountability .....	31

Faith-Based Organization Accountability.....	37
Limitations of Downward Accountability .....	38
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	40
Purpose of Study .....	40
Statement of the Problem.....	41
Ontological and Epistemological Paradigm.....	41
Theoretical Framework .....	43
Characteristics of Qualitative Research .....	44
Qualitative Description and Constructivist Grounded Theory .....	45
Positionality .....	48
Reflexivity.....	49
Power. ....	52
My influence on the participants.....	52
Insider-outsider challenges. ....	55
Why Ghana?.....	56
Gender Discrimination and the NGO/FBO Response .....	59
Determining “NGO” and “FBO” Status .....	60
Data Collection Procedures.....	61
Data collection procedure at FBO #1.....	66
Data collection procedure at FBO #2.....	67



Data collection procedure at FBO #3.....	70
Data collection procedure at FBO #4.....	74
A Note on the Diversity of the FBOs.....	76
Data Analysis Procedures .....	77
Rigour .....	79
Member checking.....	80
Ethical Issues .....	81
Chapter 4: Findings.....	83
A Qualitative Description of Being an FBO Service User in Ghana.....	83
Observations of each FBO .....	85
FBO #1.....	85
FBO #2.....	87
FBO #3.....	90
FBO #4.....	92
Themes .....	93
Appreciating what the FBO offers.....	94
Being limited.....	98
Dealing with challenges.....	103
Wanting to learn more. ....	108
Accessing services. ....	110

Experiencing success. ....	115
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	118
Meeting (Some) Needs Without Partnership .....	118
Being Close to the Community .....	121
Lacking Accountability to Service Users .....	123
Being Partially Downward Accountable?.....	126
Vulnerability and Faith .....	128
Implications for Social Work.....	130
Social workers as mediators.....	131
Social workers as information gatherers.....	131
Social workers as social justice advocates.....	132
Social workers as community organizers. ....	133
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	134
Limitations .....	135
Recommendations for Future Research .....	137
Epilogue: Reflections on Conducting International Social Work Research .....	140
References .....	147
Appendix A: Wilfrid Laurier University Informed Consent Statement .....	155
Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide .....	157
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide.....	158

Appendix D: Modified SSI and FGD Guide.....	159
Appendix E: Summary of FBOs .....	160
Appendix F: Themes and Codes .....	163

**List of Tables**

Table 1: Summary of FBOs.....	Appendix E
Table 2: Themes and Codes.....	Appendix F

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Every year for at least the past thirty years, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have channelled billions of dollars of aid money from wealthy donors – including governments, private foundations, and individuals, all typically based in the Global North – to people who are experiencing marginalization and the effects of structural injustices in the Global South (Watkins, Swidler, & Hannan, 2012). The “explosive” growth of NGOs in the development sector beginning in the 1980s (Watkins et al., 2012, p. 286) has led to NGOs becoming the preferred recipients of international aid money and deeply incorporated in the international development field (Arhin, 2016; Brass, Longhofer, Robinson, & Schnable, 2018; Mawdsley, Townsend, & Porter, 2005; Risal, 2014). Both in the eyes of the public as well as in the academic literature, NGOs are viewed as more efficient and effective at distributing international aid money than governments and state-sponsored organizations (Brass, 2016; Brass, 2012; Edwards & Hulme, 1996).

Collaboration and partnerships between donors and recipient NGOs are increasingly gaining importance in international development circles (Rhodes, 2014 as cited by Fee, Heizmann, & Gray, 2017, p. 2037) as peer regulation initiatives such as the International NGO Accountability Charter, established in 2008, promote greater transparency and accountability to key stakeholders (Crack, 2018). International development efforts have demonstrably helped reduce extreme poverty globally, with the percentage of people living in extreme poverty dropping from 36% in 1990 to 10% in 2015 (World Bank, 2018). Ongoing efforts to reform and refine humanitarian and development efforts abound, such as the Humanitarian Policy Group’s (2016) policy document, *Time to let go: Remaking humanitarian action for the modern era*, which critiques the Western basis of the current humanitarian ‘system’ and calls for systemic

changes to improve the global humanitarian response.

Yet, despite the progress being made and continuing efforts to improve the international development process, multiple studies have shown that NGOs, both small, local-based NGOs as well as larger national or international NGOs, are more often concerned with meeting the requirements of their funders than with meeting the needs of their service users (Andrews, 2014; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; O'Dwyer & Unerman, 2010; Walsh, 2016; Watkins et al., 2012). It appears that the professionalization of the development sector has contributed to NGOs' preference of meeting donors' requirements more than the needs of the communities in which they work (Arhin, 2016).

The same could be said about a subgroup of NGOs that are faith-based, commonly known as faith-based organizations or FBOs. Globally, the number of NGOs identifying as faith-based is increasing (Tønnessen, 2007) as is donor interest in specifically funding their work (James, 2011; Lister, 2003; Olarinmoye, 2014; Tomalin, 2012). Despite the increasing presence of FBOs in development work, there is a paucity of research on the ability of faith-based NGOs to meet the needs of their service users (Wellens & Jegers, 2014). There is a particular lack of research on the perspectives of the service users themselves – what is their opinion on the services provided by FBOs that claim to have the local community's interests in mind?

The reality is that serious questions surround both NGO and FBO effectiveness with critics arguing that international aid is not fulfilling its promise, resulting in doubts about the legitimacy and effectiveness of channelling donor money through NGOs, whether secular NGOs or faith-based NGOs (Elbers & Arts, 2011). These doubts have led to an NGO "crisis of accountability and transparency" (McGann & Johnstone, 2006 as cited by Burger & Owens, 2010, p. 1263). Stakeholders at multiple levels – funders, staff, and service users, in addition to

the general public – have been asking questions for decades about the apparent comparative advantages of NGOs over state-run organizations (Lister, 2003). Nevertheless, in spite of the criticisms, NGOs continue to be considered central to the concept of civil society, understood as the political space between the state and the household (Mohan, 2002).

The scrutiny and criticisms that are addressed to the broader group of NGOs extend as well to the subgroup of faith-based NGOs. The development literature acknowledges the growing importance and role of FBOs in international aid delivery and at the same time the limited research on their accountability and effectiveness (Olarinmoye, 2014; Tomalin, 2012). NGOs and FBOs alike have multiple stakeholders to whom they are accountable: their funders, their service users, and themselves in the form of their mission or identity (Ebrahim, 2003a; Ebrahim, 2003b; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Najam, 1996). One of the few studies on FBO accountability concluded that FBOs in general are less transparent and accountable than secular NGOs (Lipsky, 2011). However, the potential for FBOs to improve their transparency, accountability, and feedback mechanisms was also noted (Lipsky, 2011). My research aims to provide information to assist in improving a specific form of FBO accountability, namely downward accountability, which, as will be discussed below, encourages the FBO to prioritize the preferences of the service users over the requirements of the funders (Ebrahim, 2003a; Najam, 1996). I sought to assist with filling in a gap in the literature by exploring the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based organizations in Ghana.

Ghana is one of the most religious countries in the world, where the dominant religion, Christianity, affects nearly all aspects of daily life (Mpoke Bigg, 2017). Over 70% of the population is Christian, while a little over 17% are Muslim, with about 5% belonging to an indigenous religious group and 5% with no religious affiliation (“Ghana”, n.d.). Ghana is also

home to a large number of NGOs (Porter, 2003) and faith-based organizations play a key role in delivering social services, including operating a significant number of hospitals that are integrated in the public health system (Vogel et al., 2012). For these reasons, Ghana is an excellent location within which to conduct a qualitative study on the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based organizations.

### **A Brief Note on Terminology**

There is no consensus on the preferred terminology to use when describing countries with vastly different economic, social, and political (among other) identities (Lediard, 2016). For the sake of convenience and to reflect the terminology used in the literature, I will stick to the common understanding of the terms “Global North” and “Global South,” recognizing that these terms are problematic (Lediard, 2016). Global North countries are wealthier and generally considered more “developed” than Global South countries. This simplistic classification does not take into consideration any of the colonial practices that may have resulted in the differences in wealth, nor does it account for who determines what “developed” actually means. However, it is a commonly used classification system that will reduce reader confusion and allow for easier comparisons with the existing literature, and so these terms will be employed here.

I will also use “intended beneficiaries” interchangeably with “service users.” Both terms are common in the literature, though with different connotations. The former term suggests that the people who are meant to receive the benefits or services being offered may not, in fact, be receiving them, hence “intended.” The latter term does not have this connotation and instead focuses on the characteristic of being a client of an NGO or FBO. I use “intended beneficiaries” when it is not clear whether the funding or services are reaching the people for whose benefit they were earmarked.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this study, I explore the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based organizations in Ghana. The literature relevant to this study is primarily found among international development studies as well as literature specific to accountability in organizations.

### **Non-Governmental Organizations**

To understand the significance of accountability in faith-based organizations, it is important to first develop an understanding of the broader group under which they fall, non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While a straightforward definition of what constitutes an NGO would be helpful, the reality is that there are multiple definitions of the concept (Risal, 2014). Indeed, there are criticisms that suggest that most organizations that call themselves non-governmental are, in fact, linked to governments and should therefore not be labelling themselves as non-governmental (Sternberg, 2010). Defining what an “NGO” is and does, therefore, is not a simple task. However, a consideration of the history of the term will assist in developing a better understanding of what NGOs are and for which purposes they exist.

The history of international non-profit organizations, the precursors of what are today called ‘non-governmental organizations,’ dates back to the mid-1800s, when organizations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA, established in 1855) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (1863) first began operations (Berger, 2003). The earliest use of the term ‘non-governmental organization,’ however, was in the Soviet Union during the Stalin dictatorship. The Soviet government declared that labour unions, linked to the communist government, were ‘non-governmental organizations’ in a bid to officially distance them from the government and thus facilitate their acceptance into the International Labour Organization, an affiliation of organizations that were distinct from government-run groups (Sternberg, 2010).

The United Nations (UN) subsequently adopted the term in the UN Charter under Chapter X, Article 71 (Berger, 2003; Sternberg, 2010). According to Article 71, the Economic and Social Council of the UN may consult with NGOs on issues where the NGOs have competency (United Nations, 2018). Article 71 has thus created space for groups of individuals to actively work towards the promotion of common goals (Berger, 2003).

The current UN definition of an NGO is “any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on a local, national, or international level” (United Nations, n.d.). This is a broad definition that allows for a wide range of organizations to be included, from large NGOs with thousands of employees and budgets in the millions of US dollars that operate internationally to local NGOs that operate with one or two people on a barebones budget. The World Bank, on the other hand, approaches the definition of NGO from a social justice perspective, defining the concept as “private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development” (Schuller, 2007, p. 97). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), another key agency that, along with the UN and World Bank, provides significant funding for NGOs throughout the world, also has its own definition of NGOs, classifying them as local organizations that typically provide development activities in developing countries with support (financial, technical, and material) from wealthier countries (Schuller, 2007).

Within the umbrella grouping of NGOs, there are two primary sub-groups: operational/development NGOs and advocacy NGOs. Operational or development NGOs are focused on providing services whereas advocacy NGOs exist to promote specific causes (Leverty, 2018). To further complicate matters when attempting to derive a concise definition of NGOs, development NGOs are often divided into Global North and Global South NGOs. The

former are headquartered in a Global North country with their primary development services being delivered in another country, typically in the Global South (Banks & Hulme, 2012); however, there are also Global North NGOs that operate within Global North countries as well. Global South NGOs (sometimes referred to as Partner NGOs) are typically closer to the communities they serve in terms of geography, language, and culture (Banks & Hulme, 2012). Global South NGOs usually begin at the grassroots level in a community when one or more community members decide that there is a need to provide specific services or programs. The community members then organize themselves to create a locally-based non-governmental organization with specific aims in mind.

Generally speaking, Global North NGOs are based in wealthier countries with easy access to international funders such as the World Bank, the UN, or private foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which are also based in the same wealthier countries. Global North NGOs have easier access to international funders for myriad reasons, among them being geographical proximity, staff expertise in writing funding proposals, and higher visibility than Global South NGOs. A Global North NGO will typically seek out a Partner NGO in a Global South country with a particular goal or purpose in mind, often to provide a specific program or service in the Global South country (Lewis, 1998; Mohan, 2002). When a Global North NGO partners with a Global South NGO, funding (and oftentimes, as shall be discussed below, service priorities) flows from the Global North to the Global South (Mohan, 2002). The challenges related to so-called “partnerships” between Global North and Global South NGOs will be discussed in more detail below.

It should be noted that, although Global South NGOs are, by definition, based in lower income parts of the world, there are, nevertheless, large and financially robust Global South

NGOs. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), for example, has thousands of employees and a multi-million dollar budget (Lewis, 1998). The existence of Global South NGOs that are large and well-developed, such as BRAC, raises the question of whether partnering with a Global North NGO brings any benefit to the Global South NGO aside from increased access to funding (Lewis, 1998). In order to avoid racist or discriminatory biases, therefore, it is important not to conflate Global South NGOs with small size, a lack of capacity, or ineffectiveness. The Global North/Global South distinction for NGOs is primarily one of origin and access to donor funding, not one of size, capacity, or effectiveness.

This brief discussion does not result in an incontestable definition of “NGO,” yet it does assist by clarifying some of the key characteristics of NGOs: independence from the state; goal-oriented; and, dependent on donor funding. Moreover, NGOs are found throughout the world, in both the Global North as well as the Global South, though with varying degrees of access to international donor funding.

### **History of NGOs**

Regardless of the definition of NGO used or whether the focus is on Global North or Global South NGOs, the reality is that since the 1980s, there has been an “explosion” of NGOs in international development (Watkins et al., 2012, p. 286). Estimates on the global number of NGOs vary, ranging from approximately 40,000 international NGOs with several hundred thousand local NGOs (Leverty, 2018) to several million NGOs globally (Berger, 2003). Determining accurate NGO numbers and resources is “notoriously difficult” (Lewis, 1998, p. 502), due at least partly to the lack of a clear, internationally accepted standard for what defines an NGO, as discussed above. In any case, there is an astonishingly high number of NGOs working in the development sector given that organizations that meet the definitions of NGO

provided by the UN, the World Bank, or USAID only began to come into existence roughly 60 years ago. Before examining the rise of development NGOs, it is pertinent to first consider the legacy of colonization and its ongoing effect in Africa.

### **Colonization and development in Africa.**

After the signing of the Berlin Treaty in 1884, the African continent was divided up among seven colonizing European countries (Brenya & Adu-Gymafi, 2015). This division of land was exclusively for the benefit of the colonizers, allowing them to expand their respective empires (Brenya & Adu-Gyamfi, 2015). The colonial governments offered services and cared for the White colonizers while only providing minimal social services for the indigenous population, with the purpose of those limited services being to maintain order in the colony and ensure a labour force to continue exploiting the natural resources (Manji & O’Coill, 2002).

Among the rural population, however, there was a lack of even the limited social services provided by the colonial governments to indigenous people. European charity organizations and Christian missionary groups, therefore, took up the mantle of social service provider, while simultaneously assisting to implement colonial policies and suppressing anti-colonialist activities (Manji & O’Coill, 2002). During this period of colonialism, neither the charities nor the missionary societies described their activities as “development,” but rather as helping the poor (Manji & O’Coill, 2002). “Development” only came into broad use by these NGO-precursors when the UN and other international agencies and actors, including the US government, began distinguishing between “developed” and “underdeveloped” countries (Tucker, 1999 as cited by Manji & O’Coill, 2002, pp. 571-572); this change in terminology perpetuated the racist ideology between the distinction of “civilized” and “uncivilized” people (Manji & O’Coill, 2002).

During the initial period of post-independent Africa, resistance and distrust of Western organizations forced the charity organizations and Christian missionary societies to adapt: they became ‘indigenized’ by ensuring that their staff were primarily from the indigenous population and they became to adopt the discourse of ‘development’ (Manji & O’Coill, 2002). European war charities, such as Oxfam, Save the Children, and Plan International, who had all previously worked exclusively in Europe during the rebuilding following the Second World War, also entered Africa at this time as their original purpose in rebuilding Europe was no longer relevant (Manji & O’Coill, 2002). However, initially, NGOs were on the periphery as international organizations such as USAID, the UN, and the World Bank preferred to deal exclusively with state-run organizations (Manji & O’Coill, 2002).

Consequently, in the 1960s and 1970s, Global South NGOs tended to be staffed with ambitious local people but also faced with a lack of funding (Mawdsley et al., 2005). The lack of funding made it difficult for them to offer services and programs (such as healthcare clinics, leadership training, literacy programs, etc.) to the local communities from which they originated. Global South NGOs tended to be “organizations of opposition” with an emphasis on working with the poor as activists (Miraftab, 1997, p. 362). At the same time, Global North NGOs were actively implementing their own programs and services in Global South countries with their own Global North staff (Lewis, 1998).

Beginning in the 1980s, however, with Prime Minister Thatcher in the UK and President Reagan in the US pushing a neo-liberal agenda that emphasized minimizing government (Manji & O’Coill, 2002), international donor attention turned towards the work being done by NGOs and the potential comparative advantages they offered over state-run organizations. Funding from international donors as well as partnerships between Global North and Global South NGOs

took off (Banks & Hulme, 2012; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Harsh, Mbatia, & Shrum, 2010; Lewis, 1998; Mawdsley et al., 2005; Mirafat, 1997; Morfit, 2011; Nishimuko 2009; Tomalin, 2012; Watkins et al., 2012). Indeed, the active involvement of NGOs throughout the world has significantly expanded since the 1980s (Berger, 2003). Globalization and the structural adjustment programmes of the IMF and World Bank boosted the growth of NGOs during this period by creating debilitating debts among governments in Africa, thereby rendering them subject to the dictates of their international aid donors (Brenya & Adu-Gyamfi, 2015; Manji & O’Coill, 2002). Moreover, many donors view NGOs as being more “efficient, effective, flexible, and innovative” than state-run organizations (Brass, 2012, p. 387), while many official aid agencies view NGOs as replacements for state welfare programmes (Manji & O’Coill, 2002). The general public typically views NGOs in a similarly favourable light, believing that NGOs are more efficient and cost-effective service providers than those that are government-run (Edwards & Hulme, 1996).

### **Growth of NGOs.**

Growth in the number of NGOs globally took off in the 1980s, which has been described as the “NGO decade” (Hearn, 2007, p. 1095), a time that marked the beginning of the current era where NGOs in Global South countries deliver many of the social services typically reserved to governments in Global North countries. It is not clear whether international donor preference for funding NGOs over (perceived) corrupt state-run organizations contributes to the increasing role that NGOs play in social service delivery (Leurs, 2012), though the continuing high levels of poverty in many African nations serves to justify the ongoing presence of development NGOs (Manji & O’Coill, 2002).

Since at least the 1990s, the dominant discourse in the academic literature is that NGOs

are addressing areas of social need that are being neglected by governments (Tvedt, 2006a). This discourse, though widely accepted among those involved in the NGO field, has been criticized for lacking any empirical research to back it up (Tvedt, 2006a). Indeed, though the claim is that governments are failing to provide services, the reality on the ground is that many governments are, in fact, channelling funding to NGOs to provide the services that the governments themselves do not want to provide (Tvedt, 2006a). In light of that reality, it could be argued that governments are not neglecting areas of social need but are providing services through NGOs to address those needs. Regardless of the criticisms, NGOs are generally seen as filling in the gap between the needs of citizens and existing (inadequate) government services (Banks & Hulme, 2012).

NGOs, commonly understood to be part of the 'third sector' (with government and business occupying the first and second sectors, respectively) (Berger, 2003; Tvedt, 2006a), are also preferred over state-sponsored options in the Global South because of the perceived lack of bureaucracy within NGOs compared to state-run organizations (Kang, 2010). Moreover, Global South NGOs are believed to be closer to their intended beneficiaries than state-run organizations since they are often grassroots organizations, focused on development from the bottom up (Kang, 2010). This in theory should make it easier for NGOs to better hear the voices of people who are marginalized (Kang, 2010).

However, it should also be noted that although NGOs may compare favourably against government-run services in the eyes of the public, there remains public mistrust about the effectiveness of NGOs and what they stand for (Fowler, 2000). It seems that NGOs started off in high standing in the public eye, but scandals and closer involvement with (perceived) corrupt governments have deteriorated the reputation and trust of NGOs by the public (Fowler, 2000).



Even among researchers, the initial enthusiasm about NGOs has given way to disillusionment about their ability to fulfill their promises of effective aid delivery (Bebbington, 2005).

### **Faith-Based NGOs**

An increasingly important sub-group of NGOs is faith-based NGOs, commonly referred to as faith-based organizations (FBOs) or religious NGOs. As with secular NGOs, it is difficult to pin down a standard, universally-accepted definition for faith-based organizations (Leurs, 2012; Lipsky, 2011). In fact the term “faith-based organization” is relatively new (Leurs, 2012) and can be traced back to the US presidency of George W. Bush in the early 2000s, when the US government nearly doubled its funding for FBOs (Tomalin, 2012). One common and broad definition of an FBO is,

any organization that derives inspiration and guidance for its activities from the teaching and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within the faith (Clarke & Jennings, 2008, p. 6 as cited by Olarinmoye, 2014 and Tomalin, 2012).

Dicklitch and Rice (2004) offer a broader definition and state that

faith-based NGOs can be defined as non-state actors that have a central religious or faith core to their philosophy, membership, or programmatic approach, although they are not simply missionaries (p. 662).

It is important to recognize Dicklitch and Rice’s (2004) qualification that FBO staff “are not simply missionaries” (p. 662). Tønnessen (2007), in examining the role of Norwegian Church Aid, the largest FBO in Norway with an annual budget in the millions of Euros, is careful to distinguish between faith-based NGOs and missionary societies, noting that the former should be regarded as humanitarian agents and not as missionaries. While there are certainly FBOs, such as World Vision, a Christian NGO and one of the largest international FBOs, that include proselytization among their activities (Clarke, 2006), converting people to the faith is not a constitutive characteristic of a faith-based organization. The emphasis for FBOs, instead, is on

how faith inspires the staff and service delivery. Moreover, it is important to recognize that most faith-based NGOs provide services to people *regardless* of their faith tradition (Smock, 2001). Indeed, many faith-based NGOs will hire people from different faith traditions (Smock, 2001), although some, including World Vision, will require their staff to sign some sort of statement of faith regarding what they (the staff) are expected to believe (Clarke, 2006).

Criticisms of the distinction between FBOs and secular NGOs exist. For instance, the manner in which religion permeates all aspects of society in some parts of the world complicates efforts to provide a concise definition of a faith-based organization (Tomalin, 2012). The term ‘FBO’ is most commonly used in the United States of America, where there is a clear and legal separation of church and state (Tomalin, 2012). In other parts of the world, this legal separation does not exist. In Ghana, for instance, religion – specifically Christianity and Islam – is pervasive and can be found throughout society (Mpoke Bigg, 2017). In the Ghanaian context, therefore, the distinction between a secular NGO and a faith-based NGO might be seen as an imposition of the Western understanding of the distinction between church and state (Tomalin, 2012).

It should be noted at this point that, although the present discussion has primarily focused on Christian FBOs, there are a growing number of faith-based organizations from other religious traditions as well. De Cordier (2009) provides a thought-provoking analysis of Western-based Muslim FBOs and notes that part of the neglect of Muslim FBOs in both the development and academic communities is the negative association with Islam sometimes found in the Global North. However, as De Cordier (2009) concludes in his analysis, Muslim FBOs appear to have a comparative advantage when working within predominantly Muslim countries compared to either secular NGOs or other FBOs. Clarke (2006) also examines non-Christian FBOs and notes the similarities between some Christian and Muslim FBOs when it comes to integrating

proselytization within the FBO's activities. While acknowledging the existence and growth of non-Christian faith-based NGOs, I focus on Christian FBOs as they are the most prominent in the southern part of Ghana, where I directed my research focus. I think it is important, however, to note that many religious traditions offer social services either formally through registered NGOs or informally through their places of worship.

For some non-governmental organizations and their staff, it can sometimes be difficult to clearly state whether they are faith-based or secular. In Berger's (2003) exploratory study on religious NGOs connected to the UN, several participants, who were high-level staff at the selected NGOs, were unable to provide a clear response to the question "are you a religious NGO?" (p. 21). Some responses indicated that the staff believed the NGO was inspired by a faith tradition but was not necessarily a religious NGO, whereas others demonstrated that the staff saw the NGO as secular but connected to a specific faith tradition. Still others informed Berger (2003) that they had never contemplated the question of whether their NGO was a religious or secular NGO. Thus, even self-identifying as a faith-based NGO can be a challenging decision. Moreover, Tomalin (2012) argues that distinguishing between a religious organization and a faith-based NGO involves "artificial and arbitrary" criteria (p. 694). Many faith-based NGOs began as the work of a particular religious organization, such as a church group, that was then formalized and instituted as an NGO (Green, Shaw, Dimmock, & Conn, 2002). It can be at best difficult, if not, in Tomalin's (2012) assessment, arbitrary, to distinguish between a religious organization and a faith-based NGO.

In any case, for at least the past twenty years, international donors have taken a renewed interest in the role that FBOs can and do play in service delivery in developing nations (Berger, 2003; Leurs, 2012; Lipsky, 2011; Olarinmoye, 2014; Tomalin, 2012). Historically, faith-based

organizations have long been involved in providing social services both in the Global North and the Global South. Though they may not have used the term “faith-based organization,” there were certainly social service organizations with religious undertones operating in the United States as far back as the mid-nineteenth century that were filling in the service gaps left by inadequate government services (Hong, 2012). Indeed, an examination of the historical provision of social services in the United States reveals that faith-based organizations played a key role in both implementing these services as well as advocating for greater access to them (James, 2011). In the international aid arena, as well, religious organizations, though not specifically faith-based NGOs, have provided assistance to marginalized people for centuries (Tvedt, 2006b). In sub-Saharan Africa, faith-based organizations (not always using this label) have been at the forefront of providing healthcare services for at least the past century (Lipsky, 2011). Thus, whether the focus is on traditional religious organizations such as the Franciscan Friars or more contemporary faith-based NGOs such as Catholic Relief Services, faith-based groups have and continue to provide much needed social services throughout the world, and both the international community as well as the academic community are beginning to take notice (Clarke, 2006; Clarke, 2007).

In 2009, the United Kingdom government’s Department for International Development stated in a White Paper that the UK would be doubling its funding for faith-based NGOs over the coming years (James, 2011). In the US, funding for FBOs did, in fact, nearly double during the eight years of the George W. Bush presidency (Tomalin, 2012). Over the same past twenty-year timespan, the number of self-identifying faith-based NGOs has greatly increased, as has their prominence in the NGO field (Berger, 2003). While the increase in funding specifically being allocated to FBOs certainly must account in part for the rise in the number of FBOs globally,

another relevant factor may be the increase over the same period in religious adherence in developing parts of the world (James, 2011; Tomalin, 2012). In general, awareness of the role of religion in everyday life is growing (Tvedt, 2006b).

The largest transnational FBOs, such as the Salvation Army, World Vision, and Catholic Relief Services, have annual budgets in the hundreds of millions of US dollars (Dicklitch & Rice, 2004; Tvedt, 2006b). Some relatively smaller FBOs such as Trocaire (the overseas development arm of the Catholic Church in Ireland); the Mennonite Central Committee (an international ministry of Anabaptist churches); and, Norwegian Church Aid still command significant financial clout, with annual budgets of €60 million in 2007-2008, US\$63 million in 2001, and US\$110 million in 2006, respectively (Dicklitch & Rice, 2004; O'Dwyer & Unerman, 2010; Tønnessen, 2007). These international FBOs have the resources and personnel to commit to multiple projects simultaneously around the globe. Other, more local FBOs, such as the Pentecostal FBOs involved in HIV/AIDS work in South Africa studied by Burchardt (2013), may have a more limited focus on what services they are delivering and who receives those services. As noted above in the attempt to provide concise definitions for both 'NGO' and 'FBO,' there is a broad range of organizations that can fall under each category. Diversity, indeed, is one of the characteristics of the umbrella group 'NGO' (Ebrahim, 2003b), thus it should not be surprising that FBOs are likewise diverse in terms of their mandate and resources (Clarke, 2006). The four FBOs selected for this study are quite diverse in terms of geographical location, service user demographics, services offered, and program length, as can be seen in Table 1: Summary of FBOs (Appendix E).

### **Characteristics of FBOs**

The recent literature shows a growing focus on the apparent distinctiveness (and,

theoretically, comparative advantages) of faith-based organizations (James, 2011; Leurs, 2012; Lipsky, 2011; Tomalin, 2012). This reverses a trend that existed since the exponential growth of NGOs began in the early 1960s: religious NGOs were more-or-less completely ignored in the development literature from the 1960s to the 1990s (Clarke, 2006; Tvedt, 2006b). At least part of the reason for the neglect of religious or faith-based NGOs from the research literature in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s was the challenge of how to market faith-based NGOs (Tvedt, 2006b). As Tvedt (2006b) explores in his article on the history of religious NGOs and the international development aid system, the hegemonic discourse on NGOs was that they were flexible and progressive organizations. Religious NGOs, however, were seen to be inflexible on certain issues, with leaders who would not have considered themselves to be in charge of progressive organizations (Tvedt, 2006b). Since most of the literature on NGOs was being written at the time by "NGO activists" who were seeking to promote the use of NGOs in international development (Tvedt, 2006a, p. 678), it should not be surprising that little was written about FBOs as they were not seen to fit the universal mold of the NGO (Tvedt, 2006b).

Tvedt (2006b), indeed, argues that the term "faith-based organization" should be avoided because of problems surrounding the definition of "faith" and what defining an organization as "faith-based" means for an organization that is not considered "faith-based." He notes that faith-based NGOs have been receiving billions in funding since the 1960s, but he contends that there is no simple or clear way to distinguish between a secular NGO and a faith-based NGO (Tvedt, 2006b); recall the challenges faced by staff at NGOs when asked the question "are you a religious NGO?" discussed above (Berger, 2003). Nevertheless, the term, which began to come to the forefront with the election of Ronald Reagan as president of the United States in 1980 and later gained popularity during the presidency of George W. Bush, is in widespread use (Clarke,

2006; Tomalin, 2012) and will be adopted here as well as a way to distinguish an important subgroup of the NGO sector.

Indeed, there are several characteristics that distinguish faith-based NGOs from secular NGOs. Several studies in the African context have noted the distinctive characteristics of FBOs compared to secular NGOs. The former take a more duty-oriented approach to development whereas the latter tend to focus on a rights-based framework (Berger, 2003). Both types of NGOs receive funding from governments, however FBOs can also tap into potentially large religious memberships as an additional source of funding (Lipsky, 2011). Their local and international networks with religious groups, such as churches or other places of worship, also give them access to large numbers of people who can be more easily motivated to commit to a cause than if the organization were secular (Clarke, 2006). Since FBOs have alternate sources of funding distinct from those available to secular NGOs, they are seen to be less donor-dependant and consequently more autonomous (Leurs, 2012). Moreover, FBOs, which typically develop in the context of an established religious community, are seen to have deep and long-term rootedness in their communities (Nishimuko, 2009) and a better understanding of local conditions than secular NGOs (Lipsky, 2011).

Some of these distinct characteristics also appear to be comparative advantages of FBOs over secular NGOs. However, there is a lack of comprehensive, systematic research on the comparative advantages of FBOs over secular NGOs (Lipsky, 2011). Indeed, despite some of the apparent distinct advantages of FBOs over secular NGOs, criticisms in the literature exist that challenge the notion that FBOs offer something better than traditional secular NGOs.

Amirkhanyan, Kim, and Lambright (2009) and Lipsky (2011) state that there is a dearth of literature on the comparative benefits of FBOs over secular NGOs, and this despite the constant

chorus stating that there are distinctive benefits. Amirkhanyan et al. (2009) argue that, ironically, most of the literature that supports the comparative advantages of FBOs over secular NGOs derives its evidence from faith and not from empirical studies. In their study on the comparative advantages of faith-based nursing homes versus secular nursing homes in the US, Amirkhanyan et al. (2009) conclude that there is no discernible difference between the quality of service offered in the two types of nursing homes, thus challenging the notion that FBOs provide a distinctly advantageous service compared to secular NGOs. However, they note that their conclusions may be limited to the nursing home industry in the United States (Amirkhanyan et al., 2009).

Tomalin (2012), in her review of the literature on development FBOs, notes that even the dichotomy of faith-based versus secular NGOs may be false and misleading. She proposes that the distinction may be better labelled as between local, embedded NGOs versus more distant and formal NGOs, not between faith-based versus secular NGOs (Tomalin, 2012). This criticism can be seen as an update to Tvedt's (2006b) contention that there is no clear-cut distinction between a secular NGO and a faith-based NGO. Tomalin (2012) concludes from her review that there is little evidence to support the claim that FBOs have comparative advantages over secular NGOs.

Lipsky's (2011) analysis of the comparative advantages of FBOs in health services in sub-Saharan Africa reports that there have been, to date, few studies that have systematically examined the potential comparative benefits of FBOs over secular NGOs. She goes on to note in her study that FBOs apparently have several distinct comparative advantages over secular NGOs such as a better understanding of the local context, greater programming flexibility, and a better ability to mobilize people and skills (Lipsky, 2011). Lipsky (2011), however, also notes the comparative disadvantages of FBOs, which are that they may be less accountable and transparent



than secular NGOs and do not assist people in developing their own representative bodies (Lipsky, 2011). After describing the analytic framework she proposes to identify comparative advantages of FBOs over NGOs, Lipsky (2011) concludes that there are both advantages and disadvantages and further study is required.

### **Accountability**

Given the increasingly important role secular and faith-based NGOs play in the distribution of aid money and services around the world (Najam, 1996), a logical question arises regarding the effectiveness of the NGOs. What are the outcomes of the services being offered by local and international NGOs, secular or faith-based? In simple terms, is donor funding being put to good use? Questions are being put forward by both the public and development scholars who see aid money distributed through NGOs as not fulfilling the development promises once made (Elbers & Arts, 2011). Indeed, there is a pressing need to account for the vast amounts of money being spent by the 36 countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on development aid – US\$135 billion in 2008 – particularly since most of that funding is being spent through the services of NGOs (Agyemang, Awumbila, Unerman, & O'Dwyer, 2009).

Adding to the public and academic doubt about the effectiveness of what were previously thought of as “infallible” organizations (Najam, 1996), numerous NGO scandals over the years have added urgency to the discussion about NGO accountability (Bawole & Langnel, 2016; Ebrahim, 2003b). To whom are NGOs primarily accountable? What form does or should this accountability take? What does “accountability” in relation to development NGOs even mean? NGO and development scholars have been posing these and similar questions since at least the early 1980s, when NGOs began to grow in number and prominence (Najam, 1996). What has

resulted is the recognition that NGO (and, similarly, FBO) accountability is multi-faceted.

“Accountability” is, simply speaking, “the means by which individuals and organizations report to a recognized authority (or authorities) and are held responsible for their actions” (Edwards & Hulme, 1996, p. 967). Accountability should not be confused with simply “accounting” or financial accountability. NGO accountability encompasses a much broader sense of being held responsible by others for one’s actions including, as will be discussed below, an NGO’s accountability to their intended beneficiaries.

The level to which NGOs are held accountable can be either formal or informal (Edwards & Hulme, 1996); for example, an NGO reporting to their funder may have to fill out an elaborate report (an example of a formal method of tracking accountability) and also provide a verbal update to key community stakeholders (an example of an informal method of tracking accountability). As multiple scholars have pointed out, NGOs are faced with multiple accountabilities that need to be met at the same time (Ebrahim, 2003b; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Najam, 1996). To put it concisely, NGOs are accountable to their funders, to their service users, and to their own mission (Najam, 1996). These three types of accountability are known as *upward*, *downward*, and *inward/internal*, respectively (Najam, 1996). While NGOs have at least three sets of accountabilities, it has been argued that being able to meet each accountability standard to the same high degree may be impossible (Edwards & Hulme, 1996) and may, in fact, present a situation where there is “too much accountability” (Ebrahim, 2003b).

The reality is that, just as the non-governmental organization field has been largely donor-driven, NGO accountability has also focused primarily on donors – in other words, on upward accountability (Najam, 1996). Both the academic world as well as staff on the ground have tended to focus on upward accountability (O’Dwyer & Unerman, 2010). The focus on

donor accountability has often led NGO accountability to mean little more than program monitoring and evaluation (Najam, 1996). Agyemang et al. (2009) report that the NGOs in Ghana that participated in their study primarily used formal reports (i.e. annual reports, interim reports, performance assessment reports, and performance evaluation reports) to advise their funders about the program progress. Agyemang et al. (2009) found that the emphasis on upward accountability – reporting “up” to funders about the status of the program – seemed to imply that the funders, who were not based in Ghana, knew the best way to tackle the local issues. In other words, since the emphasis was on keeping the funders up-to-date on the progress of the program, it seemed to imply that if there was a problem, the funders would catch it in the reports and provide instructions for the appropriate modifications. This form of hierarchical accountability (Agyemang et al., 2009; O’Dwyer & Unerman, 2008) was seen by the Ghanaian NGO fieldworkers as inflexible and unable to properly communicate the perspectives of either the service users or the fieldworkers themselves (Agyemang et al., 2009).

Scholars are aware of the power imbalances inherent in these donor-recipient relationships (Elbers & Arts, 2011; Najam, 1996) and the negative effects they can have on the performance of development NGOs (O’Dwyer & Unerman, 2010). Elbers & Arts (2011), surveying 41 local NGOs in India and Ghana, report that one of the most common complaints among staff at the NGOs was that the demands from donors for accountability reduced the ability of the NGOs to provide value-added services. Najam (1996) refers to this excessive form of upward accountability as “over-accountability” and even the “puppetisation” of NGOs (p. 344). NGOs are forced – even coerced (Najam, 1996) – to meet the demands of their funders if they want to continue to receive funding. NGOs end up being manipulated like puppets by their powerful funders.

Ebrahim (2003a) likewise notes the power asymmetries between funders and NGOs and the “onerous” reporting requirements typically placed on NGOs working in the Global South by their funding partners in the Global North (p. 814). He reports that the European Commission, a major funder of both Global South governments and NGOs, requires highly detailed quarterly reports from recipients on how the funding is being spent and what outcomes are being produced. This reporting requirement places a heavy workload burden on Global South NGOs, particularly ones that are smaller and operate with fewer staff. Elsewhere, Ebrahim (2003b) questions whether there could be such a thing as “too much” accountability (p. 192) and argues that the reporting requirements of funders skew the funder-NGO relationship in favour of the funder, which opens the door for co-optation by the funder of the NGO’s priorities.

In a study of 33 NGOs operating in Ghana on various poverty-reduction projects, Porter (2003) found that some senior-level staff at the NGOs were critical of the relationship their NGO had to funders, particularly how the NGO spent more time being accountable to their funders than to the clients they served. A theme that developed from the interviews with staff at the local NGOs was “coping with the accounting procedures” of Global North funders (p. 134). The challenge for the Ghanaian NGO staff was meeting the strict reporting requirements of the funders while also continuing to provide the services they wanted to their clients (Porter, 2003). They were not always able to do the latter: as Porter (2003) notes, due to the limited availability of local funding, some NGOs were willing to change their service priorities to meet their Global North funders’ priorities in order to ensure they continued to receive funding. In these cases, partnership between Global North NGOs and Global South NGOs transforms into domination (Porter, 2003).

Bawole and Langnel (2016), in a recent study on NGO accountability in community

project planning in Ghana, also found an overreliance on upward accountability (that is, meeting the requirements of the donors often to the neglect of everything else). They report that this overdependence on upward accountability has encouraged a top-down model of service design and delivery. Despite efforts at moving away from the “expert-led enterprise” of development aid, many NGOs still rely on their own staff expertise to determine how to engage with the community (Flint & Meyer zu Natrup, 2014, p. 273). This reliance on in-house experts instead of engaging with local community members to understand their needs can impact the NGO’s ability to meet the needs of their intended beneficiaries as the services offered by the NGO may not ultimately address the real concerns of their intended beneficiaries (Bawole & Langnel, 2016).

### **Problematizing “Partnerships”**

A concept that repeatedly appears in the literature on NGOs and international development is that of “partnership” (Banks & Hulme, 2012; Dicklitch & Rice, 2004; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Fee, Heizmann, & Gray, 2017; Hoksbergen, 2005; Kang, 2010; Kapoor, 2005; Kilby, 2006; Lipsky, 2011; Olson, 2008; Porter, 2003). The concept is applied both to the relationship between Global North funders and Global South NGOs (for example, see Kapoor, 2005) and to the relationship between NGOs and their intended beneficiaries (for example, see Dicklitch & Rice, 2004). In both cases, however, a review of the literature reveals that there are considerable problems with the concept of partnership. A partnership between a Global North NGO and a Global South NGO is supposed to entail a relationship of equals, but equal relationships rarely occur in practice (Whitmore & Wilson, 1997). Despite the widespread use of the term ‘partnership,’ there is relatively little partnering going on in the field or between powerful funders and subservient NGOs (Porter, 2003), or between NGOs and their intended beneficiaries (Bawole & Langnel, 2016).

**Global North funders and Global South NGOs.**

In Porter's (2003) exploration of the situation of NGO accountability in Ghana, she describes how many senior staff at the local NGOs feel that 'partnership' is a term frequently used but often lacking in practice. Her study, which demonstrates that Global South NGOs are highly dependent on their Global North funders, reveals that many Global South NGO staff view the attempts at creating partnership to lead towards a form of "clientelism," whereby the local, smaller NGOs are focused primarily on meeting the needs of their international funders (Porter, 2003, p. 135). While Ghanaian NGOs compete fiercely to gain access to Global North NGO 'partners' (i.e. funders), they also tend to shift their focus from serving the people in their communities to meeting the requirements of their funder-partners (Porter, 2003). Porter (2003) describes the imperative to shift focus from the service users to the funders as a form of "domination" (p. 137).

Kapoor (2005), in a study that looks specifically at NGO partnerships in India, comes to a similar conclusion. In discussions with staff from eight local Indian NGOs, Kapoor (2005) reports that a common complaint is the dependency that smaller NGOs have on larger, national NGOs, who control access to international donors and thus are able to dictate to the local 'partners' what services should be offered. Participants in the discussions expressed their displeasure as they felt that the national NGOs were dominating and oppressing the local NGOs, leading to situations where local NGOs would partner with a national NGO simply to access funding, even if the local NGO was aware that the projects being promoted by the national NGO (and their international funders) were not relevant to the community (Kapoor, 2005). A criticism levelled at Indian NGOs is that at both the national and local levels, many NGOs are seen to be more intent on securing funding than on providing relevant services (Kapoor, 2005).

Drawing upon her experiences in the field working with NGOs in India, Subramaniam (2007) reports comparable findings regarding donor-NGO relationships. She notes that donors often pre-determine which programs and services to fund and thus exert significant control in their relationship with both national and local NGOs in India (Subramaniam, 2007).

Subramaniam (2007) labels the power that donors have over local NGOs as “hegemonic” and describes the donors as “owners” of the local NGOs’ activities (p. 556), echoing the sentiment that Najam (1996) references when he speaks about the “puppetisation” of local NGOs by foreign donors. From Subramaniam’s (2007) assessment of the situation in India, it is clear that there is a lack of genuine partnership between many international funders and Indian NGOs. As Subramaniam (2007) notes, the North-South power dynamic typically results in the priorities of the Global North funder taking precedence over the needs of the community. These priorities are reinforced by the funder-approved experts who evaluate and scrutinize the local NGOs and their performance (Subramaniam, 2007). These ‘experts’ may not have any knowledge of the local context, yet because they are appointed by the funders, they have the authority to determine whether the NGO is performing acceptably (Subramaniam, 2007).

Hoksbergen (2005) reports similar issues to Kapoor (2005), Porter (2003), and Subramaniam (2007). In his case study of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, he found that a common problem is that donors, not the community members themselves, tend to make the decision about what services should be provided in a community (Hoksbergen, 2005). Global South NGOs, dependent on the funding coming from their Global North partners, become “public service contractors” who exist to implement the vision of their international funders (Hoksbergen, 2005, p. 20). This is the same issue that Banks and Hulme (2012) reference seven years later when they describe Global South NGOs as ending up being little more than

“implementors or contractors of donor policy” (p. 13). Even though Global South NGOs are sometimes referred to as “Partner” organizations and are assumed to know more about the communities being served than their international funders, it is often the funder from the Global North who decides what services the Global South NGO should carry out in the Global South community (Banks & Hulme, 2012).

Global South NGOs, therefore, often do not have the ability to choose what programs and services they offer because of their domination by Global North funders. However, they are limited in other ways as well because they are often required to adhere to strict rules and regulations regarding the use of the funds and the implementation of the contracted services (Kang, 2010). NGOs who end up in these sorts of Global North-Global South ‘partnerships’ are at risk of losing the distinctive advantages typically enjoyed by NGOs, such as flexibility and responsiveness to community needs (Kang, 2010). Instead of being partners, NGOs are forced into being contractors (Edwards & Hulme, 1996). This change in mission, though perhaps not officially undertaken or even acknowledged, affects their ability to engage with the community members they serve: the NGO becomes donor-focused and may end up neglecting the people that it was created to serve (Kang, 2010). Instead of being “organizations of opposition” that work *with* the poor as activists, some NGOs may end up becoming “organizations of proposition” working *for* the poor as professional consultants (Miraftab, 1997, p. 362).

Morfit (2011) observes the same phenomenon of donor-focused NGOs in Malawi working on HIV/AIDS projects. NGOs that did not have any previous history with HIV/AIDS projects or staff who were experienced in working in that field began applying for AIDS-related international funding beginning in the mid-1990s (Morfit, 2011). This coincided with an increase in international donor funding of HIV/AIDS projects (Morfit, 2011). NGO staff interviewed by



Morfit report that in order to secure funding, they felt forced to redefine their NGO activities in terms of HIV/AIDS activities, even if they did not ultimately end up providing the services they spoke about in their applications for funding (Morfit, 2011). The priorities of the donors – in this case, offering HIV/AIDS-related activities – dictated what types of services would be offered to the community by local NGOs. Morfit (2011) describes this situation as one of “theatre and spectacle” where the value of the services offered were evaluated based on “visibility, presentation, and drama” (p. 73). The actual benefits to the community, therefore, are limited because of the nature of the dysfunctional relationship between the international donors and the NGOs on the ground.

### **Global South NGOs and their intended beneficiaries.**

This problematic understanding of partnership extends to the relationships between some NGOs and their service users. The World Bank includes partnership and its corollary of community ownership in its list of the three main components for international development: aid delivery mechanisms that are less intrusive, selectivity, and ownership and partnership (Dicklitch & Rice, 2004, p. 662). Working in partnership with local communities has elsewhere been described as a key element of capacity building for NGOs in international development (Fee et al., 2017). However, a review of the existing literature shows that many NGOs are not partnering in a meaningful way with the communities they serve. Instead, the relationship is less of partnership and more of patronage-client, with the NGOs holding all the power and the intended beneficiaries being little more than recipients and clients (Miraftab, 1997).

When examining the relationship between a local NGO and the community it was serving in Sri Lanka, Fernando (2003) found that community members were not involved in most aspects of the project planning and development stages. He observed that the information

gathered from a survey conducted by the NGO among villagers was not used in any meaningful way to plan the project (Fernando, 2003). Instead of a sense of partnership between the NGO and the community, the community saw the NGO as merely a source of income (Fernando, 2003). This view was not helped when an outside consultant, hired by the foreign donor, wrote a report on the projects without visiting any of the villages concerned (Fernando, 2003). Fernando's (2003) study illustrates that there was a lack of genuine partnership between the local NGO and the intended beneficiaries.

Bawole and Langnel (2016) document how so-called planning meetings and community dialogues carried out by an international NGO in northern Ghana were little more than information sessions where community participants did not have any chance to share their perspectives. Staff from the NGO came to the meetings already with an awareness that the projects had been pre-selected, thus their intention in holding the meetings was simply to inform the community about what was going to be done (Bawole & Langnel, 2016). There was, consequently, no sense of partnership between the international NGO and the community members. The vulnerability and powerlessness of the intended beneficiaries (Bawole & Langnel, 2016) was highlighted by the hierarchical nature of the so-called planning meetings.

Even in cases where a genuine partnership is sought and organizational mechanisms are in place to foster that partnership, achieving a meaningful partnership between NGOs and local community members is still challenging. ActionAid, a UK-based international development NGO with an annual budget in excess of 200 million Euros in 2014, has had an internal system in place – the Accountability, Learning, and Planning System (ALPS) – to foster better partnerships with local community members since 2000 (Walsh, 2016). However, in her ethnographic study of ActionAid Uganda, Walsh (2016) found that the NGO was failing to meet

its commitment to better include the local community in project planning, development, and evaluation.

One of the few studies I found that highlighted a positive partnership between an NGO – in this case, a Christian FBO, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) – and the community it serves was undertaken by Dicklitch and Rice (2004). They report that the MCC takes a bottom-up approach to community development, emphasizing the local expertise and knowledge of the situation on the ground (Dicklitch & Rice, 2004). The MCC, working in 20 African countries through local partner organizations, fosters grassroots participation and a sense of ownership by the community (Dicklitch & Rice, 2004). This emphasis on the needs and priorities of the intended beneficiaries is a concept known as downward accountability.

### **Downward Accountability**

As will be explored below, the concept of downward accountability offers the promise of more effective development aid. However, despite the potential benefits, there appears to be a dearth of empirical studies on NGO accountability towards their intended beneficiaries (Wellens & Jegers, 2014). A few recent studies that examine this issue do exist (see Andrews, 2014; Bawole & Langnel, 2016; Kilby, 2006; Risal, 2014; Wellens & Jegers, 2014), and they appear to reinforce the theoretical research on the positive effects of downward accountability. However, before examining the highlights from those studies, it is important to clarify what “downward accountability” means.

Najam (1996) produced a conceptual framework for NGO accountability that is meant to address the criticisms of focusing solely on upward accountability. He argues there are three ways for NGOs to be accountable: 1) to their donors/funders; 2) to their clients or service users; and, 3) to their own internal mission. These three forms of accountability are commonly referred

to as *upward*, *downward*, and *inward* or *internal*, respectively (Wellens & Jegers, 2014). Najam (1996) contends that while upward accountability – that is, a focus by NGOs on the priorities of their funders – was traditionally the only means by which NGOs were judged, both downward and inward accountability are equally important.

Najam (1996) argues that being accountable to the community being served – being downwardly accountable – should be an “obvious” responsibility for NGOs (p. 345). He states that meeting the needs of the community, as defined by the community members themselves, was one of the original primary goals of NGOs; however, the requirements placed on local NGOs by international donors make achieving that obvious goal much less likely (Najam, 1996). Moreover, most communities do not have the means to hold the NGO accountable for its actions, thus reducing the incentive for the NGO to be downwardly accountable (Najam, 1996). While the intent is often for the NGO to provide the services community members want, the intended beneficiaries typically have no say in what is provided. Implementing downward accountability in an NGO is only possible when appropriate processes and practices are being used (Sawandi & Thomson, 2014), but that is often not the case. What typically happens when unwanted or inadequate services are offered is that the intended beneficiary has two choices: refuse the services or complain about them (Ebrahim, 2003b). Najam (1996) reports that typically program goals are decided well before community participation is assured, thus reducing “participation” to a “sham ritual” (p. 346). Yet, the three key features of downward accountability are accountability, empowerment, and participation (O’Dwyer & Unerman, 2010). Without genuine participation from the intended beneficiaries in the development, delivery, and evaluation of the programs and services offered, an NGO cannot be fully downward accountable. (Some of the limitations of “participation” are detailed below.)

Bawole and Langnel (2016) offer a concise definition of downward accountability that assists with refocusing the NGO towards the service users: downward accountability is “answerability to beneficiaries [service users]” (p. 921). Their study on the downward accountability of an international NGO with over 10 years experience in northern Ghana is among the limited studies that consider the perspectives of intended beneficiaries on the downward accountability of an NGO. They note that many scholars and practitioners in the NGO field believe that downward accountability contains the promise of improved efficiency and effectiveness in aid delivery (Bawole & Langnel, 2016).

From the data gathered from focus groups conducted with service users, Bawole and Langnel (2016) determined that, despite the NGO’s explicit efforts to be downwardly accountable, the service users were ultimately treated as mere “end-users,” with no real say in what programs or services would be offered (p. 927). Specifically, Bawole and Langnel (2016) found that the needs assessment that was given out to community members was based on the strategic goal of implementing a water-resource project. In other words, the community members were not being asked what their needs were, but instead were being offered possible projects that the NGO had already decided it would be willing to implement. Bawole and Langnel (2016) conclude that “the findings presented above suggest that in spite of the effort to involve beneficiaries, the downward accountability of the NGO does not exist in any great depth” (p. 929).

Risal’s (2014) study of the downward accountability of eight development NGOs in Nepal draws a similar conclusion. In Nepal, a large percentage of international aid money is channelled through NGOs (Risal, 2014). A total of 87 villagers were asked their opinion on the development priorities for their village as well as whether the selected NGOs were meeting those

priorities. Risal (2014) found that across gender, castes, and ethnic communities, the villagers generally perceived the NGOs as not meeting the development priorities of their community; only a small minority of a specific caste that appeared to be privileged and prioritized by the NGOs felt that the development priorities were being met. By not meeting the needs of the community, the NGOs were failing to be adequately downward accountable, which in turn affects the community's perception of the work of the NGO.

Participants from a number of villages in Afghanistan provided similar sentiments of discontentment in a study on local NGO accountability. Rahmani (2012), who worked in Afghanistan as a gender and development consultant from 2004-2007, reports that the common perception among many Afghani villagers was that local NGOs are "self-serving, corrupt, and wasteful" (p. 296). Rahmani (2012) found that these sentiments were related to the villagers' perception that many projects run by the local NGOs were irrelevant and unhelpful. Staff at local NGOs interviewed by Rahmani (2012) reported that their hands were tied when it came to which programs and services were offered because of the priorities set by international funders. In this case, the local NGOs were practising upward accountability, meeting the needs and requirements of their funders over the needs and requirements of their intended beneficiaries, the people from the villages where they provided services. Subsequently, the local NGOs were looked down upon by members of the community, who felt that their needs were not being met.

As most of the funders did not have a grasp of the local context, programs were paid for that were not beneficial to the community (Rahmani, 2012). For example, Rahmani (2012) reports that one international funder sent playing cards with gender equality messages on them to distribute at schools; however, students are not allowed to play cards during class or their ten-minute break, nor is card playing seen as culturally appropriate (Rahmani, 2012). This is just one

example of how upward accountability and donor-disconnect with the local context can lead to wasteful, if not harmful, spending and programs. The local NGOs reported that they were aware of the needs of the community but were not able to convince donors to fund the projects they knew would be relevant and culturally sensitive (Rahmani, 2012).

A study by Andrews (2014), on NGO work with the Zapatistas of Mexico, highlights the tension between upward and downward accountability. When the Zapatistas demanded that NGOs operating in their areas give more power and say to the community, thus increasing the downward accountability of the NGOs, several NGOs made the decision to cease providing services and leave the community (Andrews, 2014). The NGOs that remained in the community were forced to make changes in how they operate, creating more opportunities for community members to be involved in the decision-making process (Andrews, 2014). One of the main challenges in achieving NGO downward accountability is the pressure to meet the demand of donors regarding strict reporting measures (Andrews, 2014). The requirement to report in detail to the donors restricted the NGOs' abilities to meet changing needs in the community (Andrews, 2014). It is important to note, however, that Andrews (2014) proposes that though there is tension between upward and downward accountability, the two are not mutually exclusive.

For their study on the quality and impact of beneficiary participation mechanisms in non-profit organizations in Belgium, Wellens and Jegers (2014) conducted 13 focus groups with intended beneficiaries as well as semi-structured interviews with NGO staff and government officials. The researchers noted several benefits found in the literature concerning beneficiary participation, which is closely linked to downward accountability:

... increased effectiveness of delivered services, facilitated achievement of organizational goals, increased legitimacy, improved affective commitment among board members (the Nonprofit Organization), feelings of usefulness, increased self-esteem, learning new things, increased social capital (beneficiaries involved in policy development), and

improved quality of received services (beneficiaries as a stakeholder group) (p. 2). Their own findings, including the perspectives of intended beneficiaries, reflect the positive effects of involving intended beneficiaries in decision-making processes. Beneficiaries spoke about feeling useful, which resonates with what Kilby (2006) argues is one of the main benefits of downward accountability: service user empowerment. In his case study of 15 NGOs in India, Kilby (2006) conducted five focus groups with 77 service users and found that formal mechanisms of being accountable to service users improved empowerment outcomes, which supports the belief that downward accountability benefits service users by creating better conditions for them to be empowered.

In Pakistan, Bano (2008) reports a stark contrast between organizations that call themselves NGOs and others that label themselves as Voluntary Organizations. In the former, there are typically no volunteers and a 100% reliance on international development money whereas the latter are run almost completely by volunteers with local funding sources (Bano, 2008). Among the 20 Voluntary Organizations surveyed, Bano (2008) reports that not a single one wanted to be labelled as an NGO, highlighting the negative perception among many people in Pakistan of NGOs and, consequently, the disconnect between NGOs and their intended beneficiaries. Bano (2008) notes that the 20 NGOs surveyed did not have a specific target population but simply changed from project to project according to the demands of their international donors. According to one NGO staff member interviewed, “the NGO system is over, it is all contractorship now” (Bano, 2008, p. 2308). The results of Bano’s (2008) research clearly indicates the disconnect between the priorities of many Pakistani NGOs and the needs of their intended beneficiaries.

The criticism of the current form of NGO accountability can be summed up by Srinivas’



(2009) findings:

Whom NGOs serve may be less determined by the needs of clients and those they are meant to serve, and more by who funds them, to whom they are financially accountable, and who ensures the resources needed for their activities (p. 619).

Koch, Dreher, Nunnekamp, and Thiele (2009) report similar findings: the preferences of European donor governments influence the allocation of development aid money distributed through NGOs. They point out, however, that there is a lack of data on where specifically the NGO aid money is spent and whether the aid money is effective (Koch et al., 2009). Koch et al.'s (2009) and Srinivas' (2009) conclusions reflect what was described above, that the results of multiple studies illustrate the tendency of nongovernmental organizations to give priority to the demands of their financial backers over the needs of the people who are their intended beneficiaries.

### **Faith-Based Organization Accountability**

Since faith-based organizations are a subset of the broader nongovernmental organization grouping, it is logical to conclude that downward accountability in FBOs would produce the same favourable results that are expected to be seen in NGOs that practice downward accountability. Lipsky (2011) notes in her review of the literature, however, that there appeared to be less transparency and accountability among FBOs than secular NGOs, for reasons which she could not discern. Citing Gill and Carlough (2008), Lipsky (2011, p. 33) reports that many faith-based organizations consider themselves more accountable to God than to either their service users or their funders. Lipsky (2011) concludes that there is great room for improvement when it comes to FBO accountability.

Though the current trend towards greater NGO accountability and the recent emphasis on the potential benefits of downward accountability would suggest that FBOs should also be

heading in that direction, there appears to be a lack of literature that examines FBO downward accountability practices (Olarinmoye, 2014). Dicklitch and Rice (2004) is one of the few studies that specifically examines faith-based organizations and downward accountability. Dicklitch and Rice (2004), in their evaluation of the downward accountability practices of the Mennonite Central Committee in Africa, note that many NGOs are criticized for their lack of transparency, accountability, service user participation, and overall effectiveness. According to the researchers, the Mennonite Central Committee bucks the trend and consciously puts emphasis on “supporting local initiatives rather than introducing their own preplanned programmes” (Dicklitch & Rice, 2004, p. 666). Just as it appears rare to find a study on downward accountability and FBOs, it appears to be equally rare to find an FBO that implements downwardly accountable practices in a meaningful way.

While Dicklitch and Rice (2004) examine FBO downward accountability, they focus only on one large, international faith-based organization. Narrowly focusing on one particular case is a common pitfall of literature on NGO or FBO downward accountability (Agyemang et al., 2009). There is a significant dearth of research on Global South faith-based organizations and their attempts at downward accountability, including whether downward accountability is even a stated goal of the organization. Olarinmoye (2014) examines FBOs in Nigeria but focuses on their upward accountability practices, which reflects the persistent trend of NGOs emphasizing the importance of upward accountability despite the growing awareness of the importance of NGO downward accountability (Agyemang et al., 2009).

### **Limitations of Downward Accountability**

While the potential benefits of downward accountability seem clear, downward accountability is not without its limitations. Assuming that downward accountability practices

such as participation will be beneficial without critically examining real-world results has been described as an “act of faith” (Cleaver, 2001 as cited by Flint & Meyer zu Natrup, 2014, p. 280). When NGOs/FBOs seek input from community members in Global South countries, local elites, typically men, will usually be the ones to share their opinions and speak on behalf of the community; this can reinforce local top-down and patriarchal structures (Cleaver, 2001 as cited by Flint & Meyer zu Natrup, 2014, p. 281). It can be ironic that an NGO or FBO, seeking to empower local women in a Global South country, ends up strengthening the patriarchal structures already in place due to a lack of careful planning concerning who will be consulted.

Similarly, just as the voices of women can be left unheard, other dissenting views may not be taken into consideration when an NGO engages with local elites (Cleaver, 2001 as cited by Flint & Meyer zu Natrup, 2014, p. 281). As Cleaver (2001) notes, communities, regardless of their size, are not homogenous in terms of opinions and viewpoints (as cited by Flint & Meyer zu Natrup, 2014, p. 281). NGOs need to be careful how to gather information from the community in order to ensure that multiple viewpoints are taken into consideration.

Moreover, when service users are heavily dependent on an NGO, their willingness to share critical feedback may be diminished out of a fear of losing access to the services provided (Wellens & Jegers, 2014). Consequently, even if an NGO is initially successful in engaging with their intended beneficiaries and receives honest feedback, there is the potential that the level of honest feedback may reduce over time as the service users become more dependent on the services and programs offered.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **Purpose of Study**

A review of the literature on nongovernmental organization and faith-based organization accountability reveals that, while the topic of downward accountability has grown in prominence over the past three decades, there remains a lack of studies on the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based organizations, particularly in regards to the concept of downward accountability. In order to assist with filling in the gap in the literature, this study explores the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based organizations in Ghana. Since one of the goals of downward accountability is to have NGOs and FBOs be “answerab[le] to beneficiaries” (Bawole & Langnel, 2016, p. 921), it is logical to seek the opinions of beneficiaries (i.e. service users) about whether they believe the FBO from which they receive services is answerable to them (the service users) and whether they are benefitting from the services provided. Up to this point, however, there have been few studies that have sought out these crucial perspectives, particularly in regards to FBOs. This study aims to help close this gap.

As many researchers have already pointed out (Agyemang et al., 2009; Andrews, 2014; Bawole & Langnel, 2016), there are multiple benefits when NGOs (and likewise FBOs) practise downward accountability. One of the purposes of this study, therefore, is to provide an important perspective (i.e. that of service users) on downward accountability in order to provide more information for NGOs to use to improve their services to their intended beneficiaries.

This study does not attempt to be a comprehensive account of the perspectives and experiences of FBO service users, but rather provides an initial insight into the thoughts and opinions of the intended beneficiaries of FBOs in Ghana. It adds to the existing limited literature and encourages further study on the subject matter.

**Statement of the Problem**

The two main research questions that guided this study are:

- 1) What are the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based organizations in Ghana?
- 2) What are the perspectives and experiences of services users of the FBO's engagement with the community in service development, delivery, and evaluation?

With these questions, the intention was to provide space for service users to share their personal experience with receiving services as well as their understanding of how the faith-based organization engages with the community. Does the FBO meet the expectations and needs of the service user? Are the services being offered relevant to the service user? Do the staff at the FBO seek input from the community in regards to the services being offered? Are there ways for service users to provide feedback on the quality and type of services offered, and if so, what are the service users' perspectives on how the FBO uses the feedback?

**Ontological and Epistemological Paradigm**

Constructivism, sometimes known as Interpretivism (Wahyuni, 2012), views knowledge and truth as the products of one's perspective, not as something that can be objectively known (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Social constructivism, in particular, is the belief that reality is socially constructed, meaning there is no objective social reality that can be known in an absolute way. Using an interpretive qualitative method for a study requires the researcher to "enter research participants' worlds" (Charmaz, 2007, p. 19).

The ontological belief of social constructivism is that there are multiple social realities that exist (Bailey, 2007). What exists in the world makes sense and has meaning only when looked at from the perspective of the knower, taken in conjunction with the perspective of the

researcher (Bailey, 2007). In other words, in order to understand the reality of a situation, it is necessary to consider the situation from the perspective of those involved in the situation (Wahyuni, 2012), while also acknowledging that the researcher, from their own social location, will necessarily interpret and re-produce the perspectives of those involved in a manner unique to the researcher. Simply put, human phenomena are not objectively “real” but only gain their reality from the social construction given to them (Charmaz, 2007). The goal of the researcher, therefore, is to engage with the phenomenon from multiple perspectives and locate it within its contextual relationships (Charmaz, 2007).

According to the Constructivist or Interpretivist paradigm, the epistemological belief is that knowledge does not exist objectively (Bailey, 2007). Similar to the ontological understanding that there are multiple factors that affect the way reality is received, the epistemological belief of Constructivism contends that the characteristics, values, and behaviours of the researcher will affect what the researcher learns from the participants (Bailey, 2007). As the researcher’s social location (broadly speaking to include their intersectional identity along with their values, beliefs, and assumptions) affects what is learned, Constructivism takes the axiological stance that knowledge acquired through research cannot be value neutral (Bailey, 2007). Research involves viewing the data from a particular perspective (that of the researcher), therefore the knowledge gained from the research is not objective but is informed by the researcher’s social location (Bailey, 2007).

I conducted my research and analysis using a Social Constructivist framework. Within this framework, I acknowledged that the experiences of service users of faith-based organizations in Ghana cannot be studied objectively but must be looked at from the perspective of the service users themselves, critically aware throughout the process that my own social

location was impacting the way I understood the verbal and non-verbal communication of the participants. In exploring the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based organizations, I relied primarily on the participants' views to come to an understanding of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). The resulting analysis (as with the data itself) is contextually situated, being influenced not only by the culture and situation of the participants, but also by my own social location as researcher (Bailey, 2007; Charmaz, 2007). I acknowledge that the data presented herein, as well as the analysis of that data, is filtered through my own personal interpretive lens and frame of reference. My interpretation of the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based NGOs in Accra is, in itself, a construction (Charmaz, 2007).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The main guiding theory employed in this paper is Critical Theory, which Padgett (2008) describes as being "compatible" with grounded theory informed by a constructivist epistemology (p. 38). Critical Theory considers the effects of race, class, and gender on the participants as well as the power and privilege of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). It derives its origins from the work of Karl Marx, from which it was further developed in Germany and thus was given the name of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School (Haugaard, 2010; Warkentin & Sawatsky, 2018).

Critical Theory aims "to raise the consciousness of people in order for them to be able to liberate themselves by providing the intellectual tools (i.e. ideas) to do so" (Warkentin & Sawatsky, 2018, p. 59). It allows for a critical examination of social structures and social institutions and how they contribute to the oppression of individuals (Haugaard, 2010). Critical Theory assisted me in examining the power dynamics that exist between the service users and the service providers, as well as the power dynamics that existed between the interviewees and myself, the researcher. (I explain my positionality and the way my power and privilege may have

affected the study below.) Moreover, in employing Critical Theory to the data analysis, I examined my own assumptions and preconceived biases, which assisted me in avoiding the pitfall of unintentionally allowing my unexamined biases to infiltrate my work, a potential harm noted by constructivist grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2007).

Employing critical theory in this study also provided me with the opportunity to examine the larger structural issues that might be at play in the lives of service users of faith-based NGOs in Ghana. Research using critical theory takes a stand against inequality and other forms of oppression (Padgett, 2008). Thus, in my analysis of the data, I was able to speak to issues of marginalization, inequality, and oppression that I may not have others been able to address had I not chosen to use critical theory as my guiding theoretical framework.

As Warkentin and Sawatsky (2018) point out, proceeding within a Critical Theory framework can help to ensure the voices of people who are marginalized are heard more than the voice of the researcher. I firmly believe in the importance of amplifying the voices of people who are marginalized and allowing them to speak for themselves (Warkentin & Sawatsky, 2018), thus I sought to incorporate as many direct quotes from the participants as possible in my Findings section.

### **Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research involves different methods including interviews, text analysis, surveys, and participant observation (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). It begins within a worldview (Creswell, 2007), often the theoretical framework of constructivism (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). This fits with the understanding that qualitative research attempts to collect data within the natural environment of the participants and conduct inductive data analysis to determine themes and patterns (Creswell, 2007).



### **Qualitative Description and Constructivist Grounded Theory**

This qualitative study of the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based organizations in Ghana utilized the framework of qualitative description as outlined by Sandelowski (2000) with overtones of constructivist grounded theory as detailed by Charmaz (2007). Qualitative description is often not cited as the methodology employed in a study, however it remains one of the most frequently employed methodological approaches in qualitative research (Sandelowski, 2000). Qualitative description often has “hues, tones, and textures” from the more commonly cited qualitative approaches such as grounded theory, phenomenology, and ethnography (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 337).

Qualitative description typically describes the phenomenon being explored in everyday language, being less interpretive than other qualitative methodologies while still involving a degree of interpretation (Sandelowski, 2010). The intention of a qualitative descriptive study is to produce an accurate description of the phenomenon being studied such that the researcher and the participants could agree on how the phenomenon was described (Sandelowski, 2000).

Despite the extensive literature on qualitative research methods, there is a shortage of research on qualitative description as a methodology (Sandelowski, 2000). Nevertheless, qualitative description is a distinct form of qualitative research (Sandelowski, 2010). However, Sandelowski (2010), the foremost advocate for the methodology, also noted that in practice, different qualitative methods overlap and thus it is not always easy to either stick to one specific method or to be able to label a method as belonging to one tradition or another. What makes it further challenging to accurately label a method is that “methods are re-invented every time they are used” (Sandelowski, 2010, p. 78). This is because one qualitative approach can and often does take on elements from other qualitative approaches – there is no such thing as a “pure” use

of a method (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 337). As Sandelowski (2010) notes, research methods often “bleed” into each other in real-world applications (p. 81). Consequently, while I am labelling my research as “qualitative description with overtones of constructivist grounded theory,” the label could be challenged as inaccurate. Nevertheless, I believe I faithfully interpreted the use of the methods described by Sandelowski (2000) and Charmaz (2007) and can thus use the label accurately.

As constructivist grounded theory is more of a “set of principles and practices, not... prescriptions or packages” it can complement other qualitative methods (Charmaz, 2007, p. 9). Indeed, one of the main benefits of using constructivist grounded theory methods in conjunction with qualitative description is that it allows for the use of the powerful coding and data analysis methods of grounded theory without having to produce a theory (Sandelowski, 2000). The requirement to develop a grounded theory, particularly at the graduate thesis level, has been described as “an excessive and unrealistic burden” (Flick, 2004 as cited by Padgett, 2008, p. 151).

Grounded theory and its related coding and data analysis methods originated in the work of the sociologists Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s (Charmaz, 2007). Charmaz (2017a), a pioneer of the constructivist version of grounded theory, explained that the process of developing a grounded theory begins with data from the participants and then involves a process of comparative analysis, where data collection and analysis are done simultaneously. By beginning the analysis process as soon as the initial data is collected, the researcher has the ability to refine the emerging analytical categories, which can then influence the interviewing and data collection process (Charmaz, 2017a). Though grounded theory is its own separate research methodology, Charmaz (2017a) acknowledged that many qualitative researchers use the grounded theory

methods of coding and memo-writing to help analyze the data without necessarily producing a theory at the end.

Significantly, constructivist grounded theory emphasizes critical questioning, not only of the data but also of the researcher and the research process itself (Charmaz, 2017b). The researcher and the research process are located within their historical, social, and situational conditions (Charmaz, 2017b). Thus, the researcher is led to ask questions about their own social location, including the power and privilege that comes with being a researcher and inviting people to partake in the study as participants (Charmaz, 2017b). Utilizing constructivist grounded theory is thus a way to engage in critical inquiry, to address questions of power, inequality, justice, oppression, and marginalization (Charmaz, 2017b).

Constructivist grounded theory relies heavily on critical reflexivity as the researcher is called on repeatedly to examine their understanding and interpretation of the data, their relationship to the participants, and the way power and privilege come into play in the research process (Charmaz, 2017b). The values, assumptions, and beliefs of the researcher are as important as those of the participants and need to be taken into consideration when analyzing the data (Charmaz, 2017a). As Charmaz (2017b) is careful to explain, the social, historical, and situational locations of the researcher and the participants matter in how data is collected, analyzed, interpreted, and presented. Reflexivity and awareness of intersectional identities as well as the dynamics of power and privilege are integral to constructivist grounded theory because social justice and transformative action are ultimately some of the intended goals of constructivist grounded theorists.

Since I am interested in pursuing social justice and engaging in research that provides support for transformative action, I wanted to incorporate methods derived from constructivist

grounded theory. At the same time, I was mindful of the criticism leveled against researchers who call themselves grounded theorists, namely that most studies that take that label are descriptive and not theoretical as they should be if they are to be accurately labelled as grounded theory (Charmaz, 2007). I wanted to be careful to avoid this common shortcoming, where “grounded theory is often invoked as a methodological strategy [but] ironically too little grounded theory is actually done” (Miller, 2000 as cited by Charmaz, 2007, p. 135). Therefore, I adopted the coding and analysis strategies of constructivist grounded theory and incorporated them into the qualitative descriptive methodology.

These two methodologies complement each other and were appropriate for the type of study undertaken. As the primary purposes of this study was to explore the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based organizations in Ghana, qualitative description was relevant as it allows the researcher to stay close to the data (Sandelowski, 2000), in a similar way that constructivist grounded theory allows the researcher to “get as close to the inside of the experience as we can” (Charmaz, 2007, p. 130). The use of qualitative description with overtones (i.e. using the methods) of constructivist grounded theory therefore allowed this study to foreground the perspectives and experiences of the service users. Foregrounding the experience of a marginalized community allows this study to not only employ critical theory in the data analysis, but also incorporate it into the research methods.

### **Positionality**

It is important for me to speak about my positionality, to acknowledge who I am and what I know and do not know in order to allow my readers to judge for themselves what they will accept from me (Absolon, 2010). As I do this, I acknowledge that this manner of self-identification comes from the Canadian Indigenous tradition of the researcher identifying

themselves to “the Spirit, the people and the Spirit of the work you intend on doing” as “this act establishes the beginning of respectful practice” (Absolon, 2010, p. 75).

Moreover, since I am working within a social constructivist framework and employing the coding methods of constructivist grounded theory, I need to ensure I examine my social location in order to avoid unknowingly allowing my values and biases to influence my interpretation (Bailey, 2007; Charmaz, 2017b). Being aware of my preconceived notions and my intersectional identity is also important if I will be using critical theory to analyze my findings (Creswell, 2007; Warkentin & Sawatsky, 2018). Therefore, there are significant methodological considerations that require me to engage in critical reflexivity.

Indeed, in a review of social work dissertations from 2008-2010, Gringeri, Barusch, and Cambron (2013) critique the lack of reflections on reflexivity and power made by social work PhD students. They suggest that four elements are necessary in a social work thesis or dissertation: paradigm, theory, reflexivity, and power (Gringeri et al., 2013). I have already discussed the paradigm I am using (social constructivism) as well as the theory (critical theory); below, I engage in reflexive self-analysis and then briefly discuss some questions related to my power as a person with an intersectional identity that falls mainly on the dominant side of the spectrum.

### **Reflexivity.**

My parents were born in Sri Lanka and immigrated to Canada before getting married and having four children – my two older sisters, myself, and my younger sister. Having been born in Canada, I am a member of a dominant, privileged society. I am a racialized male but I also have light-coloured skin that, in my experience in a number of African countries, often leads local people to mistake me for being White. Therefore, though I am a racialized individual and live

with the oppressions associated with that identity, while in Ghana I was typically seen as being a White man from Canada, a person with significant privilege and power. I am aware that I was perceived this way because of comments made to me by several people, both participants and others whom I interacted with in Ghana, that indicated to me that they perceived me to be White. In fact, while staying at the University of Ghana's International Student Hostel, I was told by a staff member at the International Programmes Office that regardless of my ethnic background (Sri Lankan), the majority of the people in Ghana would perceive me to be White.

I am also a Roman Catholic and would describe myself as both a "cradle Catholic" and a "practising" Catholic. I was raised Catholic and have always actively engaged with my religious tradition, including attending weekly mass, spending time in personal prayer on a daily basis, being involved in different service ministries at my church, and generally trying to allow my spirituality to influence who I am and what I do in my life. In fact, one of the main reasons I began the Master of Social Work program was because of a feeling of being "called" to work with people who are oppressed or marginalized by society, a calling that finds its roots in the Catholic tradition of helping others as if one were helping Jesus Himself.

I believe strongly in the value of religion and spirituality in everyday life. While I am fiercely loyal to my Catholic beliefs, I also have a deep respect for other people's religious and spiritual beliefs. I do not believe in trying to convert people to my beliefs. My opinion on conversion is that if I live my faith in a genuine manner, someone may feel inspired to know what it is that motivates me in my life, and when I inform them that it is my faith, they may be curious to find out more about it. In other words, I believe that if conversion is going to take place, it should be a natural process that begins with living one's faith in a genuine, authentic manner. I do not think people should be coerced or even persuaded to believe something. The

person should be free to make a choice based on what they see followers of a particular tradition doing. Thus, when engaging in research, I allow my Catholic spirituality to inform my decisions but I do not attempt to influence others to adopt my beliefs.

I also believe that faith-based organizations have contributed in many positive ways to societal development and that they will continue to do so. I have personally volunteered with a Catholic FBO in Kenya as well as a Catholic FBO in Bolivia. In Kenya, I volunteered with a pan-African Catholic FBO called the African Jesuit AIDS Network. My work involved assisting the Canadian director (a Jesuit priest) with office tasks, including preparing for presentations to other Catholic groups in Nairobi, as well as making connections with local, grassroots FBOs that work directly with people living with HIV/AIDS. In Bolivia, I volunteered at a group home for children run by the Salesian Sisters, a Catholic religious congregation. The residence houses over 100 children who are either orphans or come from low-income families. I provided day-to-day support to the children, including mentoring and tutoring.

My volunteer time in Kenya spanned 10 ½ months over three separate occasions (2007, 2008, and 2012). During those three periods, I also visited Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda. In 2016, I spent two weeks in Mozambique living with three Catholic priests in a remote village in the northern part of the country. After those two weeks, I subsequently travelled by bus through South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, and Namibia for three weeks. Therefore, in total I have roughly 12 months' experience living, travelling, and volunteering in various parts of East and Southern Africa. In addition, I spent 8 days in Accra in June 2018, where I started to make contacts with professors, staff, and students at the University of Ghana. I thus entered into this research project with some personal knowledge of communication styles and cultural practices commonly found throughout Africa, including in Ghana.

**Power.**

After several reflexive assignments in my Master of Social Work program, I came to realize prior to beginning my research in Ghana that my Canadian identity would undoubtedly have an effect on the research process as well as my own perception of myself within the context of Ghanaian society (Hiranandani, 2011). For example, I had to ask myself how it is that as a Canadian Master of Social Work student I was able to, relatively easily, travel to Ghana and conduct research for my thesis, whereas a Ghanaian graduate social work student would have considerably more difficulty in coming to Canada to do the same (Hiranandani, 2011)? Am I, as a member of a dominant society, re-creating structures of oppression by travelling to a developing, marginalized country to conduct research (Hiranandani, 2011)?

These questions and others like them were important for me not only because of the methodological requirements (Bailey, 2007; Charmaz, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Warkentin & Sawatsky, 2018), but they also affected me personally. I did not want to unknowingly and unwittingly contribute to neo-imperialism. I spent considerable time and effort reflecting before, during, and after my four months in Ghana on my social location and my values, beliefs, and biases. The reflections on my positionality informed the way I approached potential participants, how I interacted with them and sought to build a relationship and trust with them prior to the interviews (Dixon et al., 2006), and later how I analyzed the data.

***My influence on the participants.***

Both the theoretical framework of Critical Theory and the methodology of Constructivist Grounded Theory require me to consider what influence I may have had on the research participants (Charmaz, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Warkentin & Sawatsky, 2018). After returning from Ghana, I analyzed the interactions I had with participants through the lens of Critical



Theory, paying special attention to how my power and privilege (both real and perceived) may have affected the responses I got from the participants.

Several significant factors stand out when considering how I may have influenced the research participants: my gender, my education level, my ability to speak English fluently, and my Canadian origins. Twenty-three out of the twenty-four respondents were female (I discuss the reasons for this below) and in a strongly patriarchal society like Ghana, there is little doubt that my maleness affected the interactions. I was in a position of significant power simply by being a male interviewing females (Charmaz, 2007).

The intersection of my gender with my higher education level (only one participant, a principal at a local school, had any kind of comparable education level with my own) and my fluent, Canadian English resulted in a significant power imbalance between the participants and myself. Being able to speak English is a sign of education (and thus of status and power) in Ghana as it is in many Global South countries, and only a few of the participants could speak English fluently. Since the participants could not speak as fluently as me, they may have felt discouraged or shy about answering questions they could not understand. Indeed, I had to explain all of the questions in different ways to the participants because most of them did not seem to understand the meaning of what I was asking the first time I asked it. On several occasions, I received blank stares from the participants after asking a question; there were a few instances where I had to rephrase the question two or even three times before the participants appeared to understand what I was trying to say. I tried to balance ensuring the participants understood my questions with the participants' right to choose not to respond a question they were not comfortable with addressing (Charmaz, 2007).

The issues with the language gap were further complicated by the way that the

participants were recruited: in each FBO, the gatekeeper who allowed me access to the organization (the manager or local FBO leader) nominated the participants they thought should take part in the study. When I spoke with the potential participants, I gave them the choice of participating, but since they were pre-selected by an authority figure in the FBO, there seemed to be little chance they would decline taking part. When considering the hierarchical structure of Ghanaian society and the vulnerability of the participants (see the Discussion section for more on participant vulnerability), it is clear the participants were not in a position to decline the invitation, since they were nominated by an authority figure and the interviewer was a foreigner from a wealthy country. Thus, though participation was nominally voluntary, the participants may have felt some coercion to take part. Three out of the four participants in the focus group for FBO #1 did not know me prior to the meeting and seemed to be there only because one of the supervisors at the FBO told them they should take part. I gave them the option to choose not to take part, but, as already mentioned, they did not have a realistic opportunity to decline.

Both the individual interview and focus group participants from FBO #1 also expressed concerns about whether I would be relaying any information to the FBO supervisors. Despite my repeated assurances that their responses would be confidential and only shared as anonymized data, they expressed doubts throughout the discussions. Though I do not have evidence, I suspect that other participants at the other three FBOs likewise had doubts about whether I would share their responses with those in authority at the FBO, a common concern of interview participants (Charmaz, 2007). If they did, there is a good chance they sanitized their responses and purposely shared mainly positive stories with me.

At the same time, some of the participants, particularly from FBOs #3 and #4, seemed to be under the impression that I had the means to influence the FBO staff and have the programs

and services changed. I repeatedly informed them that I was there expressly to gather data and did not have any means to or intention of directly affecting the services and programs at the FBO. Whether I was understood or not, especially because at FBOs #3 and #4 I was using a translator, is unclear. If the participants thought I had the power to effect change at the FBO, they may have been more inclined to express their needs and preferences with the hope that I would be able to bring about change.

***Insider-outsider challenges.***

Though the dichotomy of “insider-outsider” is sometimes considered problematic, the distinctions between insiders and outsiders in research can nevertheless have an impact on both the individuals involved (the researcher and the participants) as well as the data obtained and the findings that flow from that data (Collet, 2008). “Outsiders” are generally considered to be non-“members” of the group or community that is being researched, while “insiders” are those people who can claim membership in the group or community (Collet, 2008).

As I noted above, I was an outsider in several respects: non-Ghanaian, male, and native English speaker. Researchers who are outsiders can sometimes be rejected by groups or communities, even when the researchers have the stated goal of amplifying the voices of people who are marginalized, because the group or community may not want someone else to represent their voices (Collet, 2008).

I went into this research with the keen awareness of my status as an outsider and a strong desire to avoid even unintentionally transgressing cultural norms, particularly because I was aware of how little I understood about Ghanaian culture. Consequently, I was careful to defer to the “insider” knowledge and experience of the gatekeepers when it came to recruiting participants. I had read about participant recruitment, but I did not feel adequately prepared as a

male student from Canada to recruit, in a culturally sensitive manner, Ghanaian women who were economically and socially marginalized.

My limited knowledge about Ghanaian cultural norms also made it challenging for me to discern whether any participants may have felt coerced by the gatekeepers to take part in the study. All of the participants seemed, from my perspective, to voluntarily agree to take part; however, as an outsider of Ghanaian culture, I was unsure whether there may have been feelings of coercion or simply humble obedience to an authority figure when the participants agreed to the gatekeepers' requests for them to take part. Of course, I tried my best to seek informed consent and gave the participants multiple opportunities to decline to participate without penalty, but as an outsider, I cannot say with complete certainty that there was not a small element of coercion that took place. I simply did not and do not have enough of an understanding of Ghanaian cultural norms to know whether the recruitment by the gatekeepers may have reduced the voluntary consent of the participants.

### **Why Ghana?**

In addition to reflecting on my own social location, intersectional identity, and resulting power and privileges, I also want to note why I chose Ghana as the location for my field work and what difference the history, politics, and sociocultural makeup of the country and its people may have made in the research process.

The current territory known as the Republic of Ghana has been inhabited for at least 6,000 years, with various kingdoms developing and disappearing over the centuries (Ghanaweb, 1994-2018). When European colonizers arrived in Ghana (Portuguese, Dutch, and British, in that order), bringing Christianity with them (Addai-Mununkum, 2014), the area became known as the Gold Coast due to the abundance of the precious mineral in the territory (Ghanaweb, 1994-

2018). While gold and cocoa were major exports of what became a British colony, the coastal region also gained prominence as one of the major shipping ports for Africans who were being sold as slaves (Ghanaweb, 1994-2018).

Ghana was the first African country to gain independence, in 1957, and, after a series of military coups and a period under a military ruler, Ghana became a multi-party democratic state in 1992 (“Ghana”, n.d.). Since 1992, Ghana has held peaceful and fair elections that have seen smooth transitions between governments. The current president, Nana Akufo-Addo, took up office in January 2017 and has made the slogan “Ghana beyond aid” one of the central goals of his government (Jotie, n.d.). The president’s goal of “free[ing the] people from a mindset of dependence, aid, charity, and handouts” (“*Africa beyond aid*”, n.d.) contrasts with the 60 years of dependence that Ghana has had on international aid (Jotie, n.d.), though it must be noted that Ghana, along with every other colonized African country, has depended on aid since their respective independence due to the negative ongoing effects of colonization (Moyo, 2009).

In the early 1980s, when Ghana was run by a military government known as the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), NGOs were not particularly welcomed in the country and were seen with suspicion by the PNDC (Kraus, 1987 as cited by Mohan, 2002, p. 139). However, by the mid-1980s, the government had softened its position on NGOs and the number of NGOs began to increase in the country, due at least in part because of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) that were being implemented (Mohan, 2002). SAPs resulted in governments spending less on social welfare, which created opportunities for NGOs that provided social services (Mohan, 2002). Since the mid-80s, the number of NGOs has grown significantly in Ghana as the country remains in the focus of the international development community (Mohan, 2002; Porter, 2003).

Today, Ghana is a country of nearly 28 million people who are generally highly religious (Takyi, Opoku-Agyeman, & Kutin-Mensah, 2010). The population is divided into roughly 70% Christian (mainly in the south); 17% Muslim (mainly in the north); 5% traditional beliefs; 5% no religious beliefs; and, 1% other (“Ghana”, n.d.). Christianity dominates in the country, with frequent references to biblical passages found in the media – including popular music (Collins, 2004) – and political discourse (Takyi et al., 2010). An example of the influence of Christianity in public life is seen in the way the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in the run-up to the 2004 election actively “sought divine intervention to win the elections” (Takyi et al., 2010, p. 63), which, coincidentally or not, they ended up winning. Ghana has recently been described as being at the heart of global Christianity (Mpoke Bigg, 2017).

Given the prominence of both religion and NGOs in Ghana, the country is a natural fit for a study on the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based NGOs; indeed, Ghana is noted for the involvement of religious groups in providing educational, health, and social services (Takyi et al., 2010). I focused on Christian NGOs partly because of the dominance of Christianity in the capital, Accra. Accra, an urban centre, is vastly different from the northern, more rural part of the country, where higher levels of poverty persist (“Ghana”, n.d.). Another reason for focusing on Christian NGOs is their large presence in the country: there are over 7000 Christian NGOs registered in Ghana (Assimeng, 2010 as cited by Kumi Asomoah, Osafo, & Agyapong, 2014, p. 612). Though Christian NGOs and Muslim NGOs may share some characteristics – such as having a duty-oriented view to aid as opposed to secular NGOs that tend to have rights-based views (Berger, 2003) – I chose to focus on Christian NGOs because of the demographics of the regions where I planned on conducting my research as well as the prominence of Christianity in public and social discourse. Moreover, I focused on Christian

NGOs because of the dominance of Christian NGOs in the international development scene: most of the largest international FBOs are Christian, such as the Salvation Army, World Vision, and Catholic Relief Services (Berger, 2003). Indeed, Christian FBOs are among the most active FBOs in partnering with donor agencies (Clarke, 2007).

### **Gender Discrimination and the NGO/FBO Response**

Twenty-three out of the twenty-four participants in this study are females. The gender imbalance was intentional for several reasons. In Ghana, as in most parts of the world, women and girls are at a disadvantage. Recognizing this disadvantage and taking it into account in my methodology is important because critical theory, my guiding theoretical framework, requires the researcher to be aware of inequality and oppression (Padgett, 2008). Since I was aiming to amplify the voices of people who are marginalized (Warkentin & Sawatsky, 2018), I decided to focus on FBOs that work mostly with women. Three out of the four FBOs selected in this study offer programs and services that are specifically for women; the fourth FBO works with children, youth, and adults with disabilities or who were involved with the Department of Social Welfare, both males and females. Two participants from FBO #3, both females in their early 20s, spoke about the patriarchal stereotypes they faced: as females, there was no expectation that they would learn anything aside from how to look after the children and maintain the home. As one participant who attended the FBO's conference on women's empowerment explained,

*I was happy, I was happy within myself, because even in school, most of the guys say, oh, you women, even education, if you reach this place, it's enough for you, because you'll marry, your husband will take care of you... I like how they [the facilitators] talk about women. They don't underrate us, or they don't look down upon us.*

It appears that NGOs and FBOs in Ghana, as well as their funders, recognize the need to empower women and give more opportunities to girls and women. Many of the NGOs and FBOs I came across in Ghana were geared either towards children and youth (both males and females)

or towards women specifically. Since NGOs/FBOs exist to address the needs of the community (Najam, 1996) and women are particularly marginalized in Ghana, it makes sense that a majority of the programs and services offered by NGOs/FBOs would be geared towards women.

At FBO #1, the only FBO in this study that offers all of its programs and services to both males and females, only one male participant was willing to participate in the study. Other male service users were approached and, although they did not decline outright, their mannerisms and avoidance strongly suggested to me that they were not interested in taking part. I wanted to ensure that participation was voluntary, therefore I did not pursue their recruitment.

I cannot say with certainty why only one male was willing to participate from FBO #1. What I suspect is that the difference in power between males and females in Ghana had a role to play. Although changes are happening in gender roles in the country, Ghana remains a strongly patriarchal society. The male service users likely felt that they had the power to decline, even if indirectly, whereas the female service users, who were nominated by a male supervisor at the FBO, likely did not feel they could turn down the request to participate.

### **Determining “NGO” and “FBO” Status**

The four organizations selected for this study are all non-profit, voluntary citizens’ groups, which meets the UN definition of an NGO (United Nations, n.d.). FBOs #1-3 are registered as NGOs with the Department of Social Welfare in Ghana while FBO #4 currently falls under the jurisdiction of a registered NGO and in late-2018 was in the process of becoming its own registered NGO. Therefore, from the perspective of the government of Ghana, all four FBOs are NGOs.

All four organizations offer services to address an apparent or real need in the community, which qualifies them as operational or development NGOs (Leverty, 2018). Each



organization also has some form of partnership with a Global North NGO or FBO, though only FBO #2 depends directly on its Global North partner for all of its funding. FBOs #1, 3, and 4 generate the majority of their funding from local donors, both Ghanaians as well as foreign nationals, while receiving a minority of their funding from Global North-based donors.

Determining whether they are faith-based organizations was a matter of comparing their mission statements and my observations from the field with the definition of an FBO provided by Clarke and Jennings (2008):

any organization that derives inspiration and guidance for its activities from the teaching and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within the faith (p. 6 as cited by Olarinmoye, 2014 and Tomalin, 2012).

All four of the organizations made some reference to Christianity in their mission statements. Moreover, FBOs #1 and #2 incorporate Christian prayer in their daily programs, while FBO #3 uses Christian examples (i.e. stories from the Bible) in their women's leadership and empowerment conference. The specific project run by FBO #4 included in this study does not have any overtly Christian elements to it, however the director of the program is a Roman Catholic priest, the FBO references Christianity in its legal name, and the FBO falls under the jurisdiction of the official Roman Catholic aid agency in Ghana (Caritas Ghana).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This research utilized focus groups and semi-structured interviews to obtain data. I conducted my research while based at the University of Ghana, Legon, from August to December, 2018. I was on an international field placement as part of my advanced-year placement for the two-year Master of Social Work program at Wilfrid Laurier University. As part of my placement, I spent three days a week working at a Christian faith-based organization in Accra that provides residential services for children, youth, and adults who are living with

physical or developmental disabilities or who were placed there by the Department of Social Welfare due to poverty or family issues. Approximately 50 residents with disabilities and 30 residents without disabilities, mostly children under the age of 18, live at the large compound run by the FBO. My tasks at the FBO included working with the children on school work as well as assisting them with daily life tasks. My field supervisor was a Ghanaian social worker and acted as a gatekeeper at FBO #1 and provided me with assistance in making contact with FBO #2.

Prior to my four-month international field placement, I spent eight days in Accra in June 2018, acclimatizing myself to the local environment and culture, as well as connecting with my field supervisor. I stayed at the Ghana Institute for Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), located directly across from the University of Ghana, Legon. My host at GIMPA, Professor Samuel Bonsu, assisted me in acquainting myself with the University of Ghana campus, as well as providing me with information on the role of religion in Ghanaian society.

My international field placement began on August 10, 2018 when I arrived in Ghana and ended on December 5, 2018 when I left the country. I resided at the International Students' Hostel located at that University of Ghana, Legon (UG). While at UG, I took a graduate-level course from the Department of Social Work entitled "The History of Social Work and NGO Development" that allowed me to interact with local social work graduate students and learn from their perspective about the role of NGOs in Ghana. I split my time between course work, assisting as a Teaching Assistant for two undergraduate social work courses, my field placement, and conducting my research.

My data collection procedures were imbued with a deep respect for the human dignity of the people who participated in my research (Charmaz, 2007). In line with Charmaz's (2007) recommendation, I sought to develop a relationship with the participants prior to conducting the

focus groups and interviews.

Intensive qualitative interviewing is a method that fits both with qualitative description as well as constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2007; Sandelowski, 2000). It is a method of data collection that encourages the participants to provide their interpretation of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2007), in this case, receiving services and interacting with the staff at a local faith-based NGO. I used the interview guides (found in Appendices B and C) to help guide the process so that the participants would feel comfortable in sharing about their experiences with the FBO. Since I was following the constructivist grounded theory methods of conducting interviews, I immediately began coding the data after the first interview and used the emerging codes to modify the interview questions to reflect areas of focus that the participants seemed to be moving towards (Charmaz, 2007). The modified interview guide, used in both the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, is found in Appendix D. My role in the interviewing process was to “listen, to observe with sensitivity, and to encourage the person to respond” (Charmaz, 2007, pp. 25-26).

Using data from interviews alone may lead to the false notion that the participant is inherently an expert at the phenomenon being studied (Padgett, 2008). While it is important, from a cultural humility perspective, to acknowledge the expertise of people of their own life situations, it is false to believe that a person will be able to observe everything in their daily life and be able to relate back all that they observe to a researcher. People often have spotty memories and are not able to recall all aspects of their lives (Padgett, 2008). Consequently, focusing solely on data obtained through interviews and focus groups can diminish the quality of a study.

To avoid this issue, I employed field observation as an additional method of gathering

data. Observing participants in the field is similar, though some would argue distinct, from the ethnographic method of participant observation (Padgett, 2008). The main distinctions between observing participants in the field and ethnographic participant observation are that the former is not site specific and is typically combined with interviewing as a data collection method, whereas the latter is site specific and involves immersion in the specific field environment (Padgett, 2008). I spent time over a number of days at the faith-based organizations, observing the way staff interacted with the service users at the FBOs. I attempted to be “systematic, thorough, and nonjudgmental” in my observations (Padgett, 2008, p. 89). Later each day after conducting my field visits, I transferred my observations into field notes, being mindful of not interpreting what I had observed at this stage (Padgett, 2008).

My focus was on the relationships and interactions between the staff and the service users at the FBO. Since FBO downward accountability requires the staff at the FBO to prioritize the needs of the service users, I was interested in observing how the staff related to the service users when they came in to seek services. I also paid attention to the physical layout of the space at the FBO, including the smell and sounds present. I asked myself questions such as, “How do I feel being in this space? Welcome, hurried, at ease?”; “How do service users react when they enter this space?”; “How are they greeted and by whom, and how does the process of providing services begin?”; “Who appears to be in charge?”; “What power dynamics are at play between the service users and the staff and what, if any, are the connections to cultural and gender expectations?”

Since the procedure for collecting data at each of the four FBOs that I visited varied, I explain the specific steps I took below. In general, in every case I used purposive sampling to recruit participants. I spoke with the gatekeepers at each FBO during my first visit and explained

what my inclusion criteria was – service users over 18 years old and had received services from or participated in programs run by the FBO within the past year. The latter inclusion criterion was meant to ensure that participants had recent experiences with the FBO and consequently fresh memories of what their experiences were like. Where possible, I also asked for participants who could speak English fluently, since as a novice researcher I did not initially feel comfortable using a translator. I conducted all of the interviews and focus groups in English except for the final two focus groups, which were the penultimate and final interviews, respectively. At that point in the research process, I felt comfortable enough with my interviewing technique and the questions to use a translator; translation was necessary since the participants could not speak English fluently. The gatekeepers assisted me at each FBO by nominating the service users they believed met my inclusion criteria. The rest of the recruitment process varies according to each FBO and is explained below.

In the seven individual interviews and four focus groups, I used two digital recorders and avoided writing in order to reduce distractions and pay more attention to the participants. The participants were not informed that they would be compensated for their time until after they had agreed to participate. This was intentional as I did not want to recruit participants who did not meet my criteria but claimed to meet them in order to be compensated. Participants at FBOs #1, 3, and 4 were given 30 Ghanaian Cedis (approximately \$9 Canadian at the 2018 rate of exchange) for their time. The management at FBO #2 had informed me that there would likely be issues if the other service users found out that the participants in my research had been compensated individually, so the decision was made to provide a form of compensation that would benefit all the service users. After consulting with the management at FBO #2, the participants were not compensated directly but the entire group of service users at the FBO

(approximately 40 people) were treated to two separate day-excursions to the beach. I accompanied the service users on these excursions and used them as opportunities to gather more field observations.

Most of the participants were not able to read the Consent Form, therefore I verbally explained the salient facts to them. Nevertheless, each participant was offered a copy of the consent form and given the opportunity to ask any questions prior to the interview commencing.

### **Data collection procedure at FBO #1.**

The first faith-based organization I conducted my research at was also the site of my field placement for my MSW. It is a Baptist-Christian FBO that provides services to children, youth, and adults with disabilities as well as those who were involved with the Department of Social Welfare. This FBO was founded over 20 years ago by an American missionary and was run for a number of years as a partner project of an FBO that operates in the US and offers similar types of services. A few years ago, FBO #1 legally separated from its American counter-part and became its own legal entity with its own board of directors. This FBO receives the majority of its funding from individual and group donations from within Ghana as well as financial support from its American partner FBO.

At this FBO, I explained my research on my first day there to my field placement supervisor, who was also a supervisor at the FBO, and he assisted me in recruiting two participants for semi-structured interviews and four other participants for a focus group. I spoke with three of the participants and explained what I was doing with my research and sought their voluntary consent. The other three participants, who were part of the focus group, were not available until the day of the discussion, thus I obtained their voluntary consent that day.

Two weeks into my placement, in late August, I conducted one individual interview and

followed that up with the other individual interview and focus group the following week. The first individual interview was conducted outside, in the FBO compound but at a distance from the main buildings. The other individual interview and the focus group were conducted in the computer lab of the main building in the compound. The computer lab offered privacy but had a window that opened to the rear of the building. One participant expressed concern that someone could be listening at the open window, however I did not observe anyone there at any point.

There were no major issues with recording the interviews or focus group. The participant who expressed concern about someone listening in on the interview spoke quietly and made several references to the possibility that someone – a staff member or a youth who would report to a staff member – could be listening to the interview. The participants in the focus group interrupted the interview about halfway through and began asking me questions about Canada and my university program. They were also making comments to each other in the local language (which I do not understand) and laughing nervously at some of the questions and responses given. They appeared to be at ease with each other but had questions about what I would share with the staff and what was being recorded. I reassured them several times that their responses would not be shared directly with the staff and that anything used in my report would be anonymized.

### **Data collection procedure at FBO #2.**

My field supervisor at FBO #1 is a social worker and so I asked him for assistance with identifying other Christian FBOs in Accra. He gave me a list of several different FBOs and explained what they do. I selected one based on the neighbourhood and the type of programs they offer. Fortunately for me, my supervisor knew one of the managers at that FBO. With the assistance of my field supervisor from FBO #1, I connected with a project located in an informal

settlement area of Accra called Agbogbloshie. A national Ghanaian NGO, part of the Assemblies of God denomination of Christianity, runs the project. The project in Agbogbloshie has been around for about 20 years, being in its current location for the past 17 years. The project receives funding from a Christian NGO in the Netherlands to provide room, board, and vocational training for nine months to 40 young women. The programs offered are bead making, dress making, and hairstyling. The girls typically range in age from 14 to 22 years old. Originally, the project targeted female “head porters,” usually young and minimally educated women from the Northern region of Ghana who work in the local market carrying (oftentimes heavy) loads on their heads. More recently, young women who were being trafficked were also included in the program. The program now accepts teenage and young adult women who are identified by community members as in need; though most of the service users come from vulnerable situations, there are a small number who come from stable households and take part in the program to benefit from the free training provided.

My supervisor from FBO #1 accompanied me on my first visit to the project and introduced me to the management staff. After meeting with the three on-site administration officials, I was told that they needed to confirm with their head office prior to giving me permission. A week later, I received a phone call stating that I had the all-clear and could begin visiting as soon as I was ready. Thereafter, I visited the project on a weekly basis, typically spending two to three hours at the location.

During my second visit, one of the managers introduced me to the group of service users who were learning hairstyling. I spoke with the service users and explained my intentions and purpose in being at their project. I inquired if any were interested in being interviewed, explaining that the interview would be in English and that the participants had to be at least 18



years old, and found two willing participants. We arranged to conduct the interviews the following week. After interviewing the two participants, I asked them if they could recommend four other service users to take part in a focus group. Taking their suggestions, I spoke with the four other service users individually and asked if they would be interested in participating, being careful to let them know there was no obligation and they could decline if they were uncomfortable with the prospect. All four agreed and the focus group was held later in the week.

The two individual interviews were conducted in the courtyard of the compound, away from the main area where the service users were engaged in their activities. There were no issues with these interviews. The participants engaged willingly and even gave extra information that was not directly related to the questions asked.

The focus group was conducted inside the main building at a distance from the other service users. One challenge for the focus group was that the other service users were still doing their training nearby and were speaking loudly. While the focus group was at a distance from the rest of the service users, the noise from the other service users combined with the participants speaking softly made part of the recording impossible to decipher. The choice of location for the focus group was not ideal, however the participants were not allowed to leave the compound and there were no other private locations in the compound where the focus group could be reasonably held. On the day of the focus group, the weather was particularly hot, with temperatures in excess of 35 degrees Celsius, thus making it unrealistic to hold the focus group in the open compound where the two individual interviews were held.

I asked the service users who were making a lot of noise to try to lower their voices, but the noise levels remained high. I also repeatedly asked the participants to speak louder, but they maintained their low volume. I did not want to pressure the participants and so I allowed the

focus group to continue, even though I knew the recording would be difficult to decipher. The participants in the focus group also seemed hesitant to answer some of the questions. It was not clear whether they did not understand the questions or had another reason for not answering. I did not want to force them to answer, so after explaining the questions in different ways, if they still chose not to answer, I moved on to the next question. The only time the participants laughed and engaged with each other was when the subject of food was brought up by one of the participants. Other than at that time, the participants only communicated when answering a question. All the participants were familiar with each other, having lived together for over five months, but they did not interact much during the focus group.

After conducting the interviews and focus group, I continued visiting the FBO on a weekly basis to gather field observations. I also spoke with two of the managers and gathered background information on the FBO and the specific project. Both managers were very willing to answer my questions and provide as much detail as they could.

In addition to the weekly visits to the FBO, I accompanied the service users and two staff members on two day-trips to the beach. On these trips, I was able to observe the interactions of the “house mother” (the lead female frontline worker) and the service users in a different setting. Observing the interactions during the two trips helped me to see the depth and quality of the relationship between the house mother and the service users.

### **Data collection procedure at FBO #3.**

During my four months in Ghana, I stayed at the International Student Hostel at the University of Ghana. A staff member at the International Programmes Office had assisted me when I was in Canada to set up my accommodations. Once in Ghana, I spoke with the staff member, who had studied social work, and explained my research intentions. She suggested a

Christian FBO where she had done an internship, located approximately 30 minutes from Accra in Tema. The non-denominational Christian FBO was founded by a Ghanaian pastor in 2006 and currently has a partner organization in the United States. The main source of funding for this FBO are individual donations received at churches throughout Ghana, with some financial support coming from the American partner FBO.

This FBO has four main goals: to provide boreholes for fresh water in under-served communities; to provide free medical care, also in under-served, typically rural, communities; to “plant churches,” or, in other words, to spread the Christian Gospel message; and, to provide leadership training. The specific project I included in this study was concerned with the last goal, providing women’s leadership and empowerment training. The FBO was partnered with an Assemblies of God church in Akrade, a rural town over an hour from Accra by mini-van, and had held mixed (men and women) leadership conferences for a number of years prior to the decision in 2015 to begin a women’s specific conference. This decision was made to address the low number of women attending the mixed conference. The conferences range from one day to up to four days and typically occur twice a year. In 2017 and 2018, the conferences were held at an Assemblies of God centre in Akosombo, a relatively wealthy community located approximately 30 minutes by car from Akrade.

My contact at the International Programmes Office at UG gave me the telephone contact for the supervisor at the FBO head office in Tema, a coastal, industrial city about 30 minutes from Accra by mini-van, and informed me that she would write to him and tell him to expect a call from me. After making contact with him over the phone, I travelled to Tema by *tro-tro* (mini-van bus) and we met in person. I briefly explained what I was doing and how he could be of assistance. He let me know that he was interested in helping me out but that he also had to

check with the Executive Director before he could formally agree to be of assistance. He informed me of several projects that the FBO was involved in and I selected the women's leadership conference in Akraide. A few days after our initial meeting, I received a phone call from the supervisor informing me that the Executive Director had given his approval. I therefore returned for a second visit at the head office in Tema a week-and-a-half later and met with the other staff, explaining to them my purpose and answering their questions. I also asked them questions about their work at the FBO and took written notes. The supervisor gave me the contact information for the pastor in charge at the local Assemblies of God church in Akraide, where the women's project is based.

I contacted the pastor by telephone and we arranged to meet the following week. I travelled to Akraide by *tro-tro* (over one hour travel time, not including one hour waiting for the *tro-tro* to fill up with passengers at the bus station) and met with the pastor at her church. We spoke for an hour and I explained the purpose of my research and asked if she could recommend any potential participants. She stated that she had three women in mind, two from Akraide and one from the neighbouring town of Atimpoku, about 10 minutes down the road from Akraide. She informed me that all three would be able to do the interview in English. When I asked about participants for the focus group, the pastor said that she wanted me to speak to women from a smaller community, Frankadua, about 45 minutes by mini-van from Akraide, saying that they also participated in the women's conference and would have a different perspective as they were less educated and came from a poorer community. She told me they would be willing to be interviewed but would need a translator as they only spoke the local language, Ewe.

I returned a week later to Akraide and met with the two participants from that community along with the pastor. We spent a little over an hour talking and getting to know each other. They

asked me several questions about my project and my school program at Laurier. I also spoke with the husband of the pastor, who is also a pastor, and listened to his concerns about the needs of the community. I then travelled with the female pastor, who is the coordinator of the women's conference, by *tro-tro* to Atimpoku to meet with the participant from that community. We spent about an hour talking and getting to know each other.

A week later, I returned to the church in Akrade and conducted the three semi-structured individual interviews with the two participants from Akrade and the one participant from Atimpoku. The interviews were conducted in the Assemblies of God church. There were no major issues during the interviews. Two of the participants shared extensively while one participant seemed either to not understand some of the questions or to not want to answer them. I was careful to encourage the participant to share while not putting pressure on her.

Later that week, I travelled with the pastor to Frankadua, where I met the translator, a woman who was also a service user of the project and willing to be part of the focus group, and the four female participants. I conducted the focus group with the assistance of the translator at the Assemblies of God church in Frankadua. Three of the participants were related to each other. The participants all had a lot to say and interacted with each during the discussion, building off of each other's comments.

I returned two-and-a-half weeks later to Akrade and went with one of the sons of the female pastor by *tro-tro* to Akosombo, where the conference was held in 2017 and 2018. Akosombo is about 30 minutes from Akrade. The son took me around Akosombo by foot and taxi, allowing me to familiarize myself with the location that the women travelled to for the conference.

**Data collection procedure at FBO #4.**

Shortly after arriving in Ghana in August 2018, I wrote an email to Caritas Ghana, the official charity of the Catholic Church in Ghana. I did not receive a response and so I visited the head office the following week. The head office is about a 40-minute walk from the University of Ghana, Legon. At the head office, I spoke with a staff member from the human resources department, who informed me that I would need to get approval from the Executive Director prior to conducting any research at a Catholic FBO in Ghana. I returned a week later and spoke with the secretary of the Executive Director. She told me she would speak with the Executive Director and get back to me. A week later I returned to the head office and spoke with the secretary again, who said that the Executive Director was interested in meeting with me. She gave me his telephone number and I arranged with him to meet the following week.

I spoke with the Executive Director for an hour at his office and received his full support. He suggested I connect with a project located in Agbogbloshie (the same informal settlement neighbourhood as FBO #2). After I agreed to the suggestion, the Executive Director called the priest in charge of the project and informed him that I would be in contact shortly. After I left the meeting, I phoned the priest and arranged to meet with him the next day.

As a Catholic FBO, the project falls under the overall supervision of Caritas Ghana. However, it operates independently and secures funding from individual donations, both in Ghana and abroad, particularly from Italy. The FBO was started in 2003 by an Italian Catholic Franciscan priest. It began as a school for adults, growing over the years to include a medical clinic, a daycare, and a vocational training school for young women. The leadership of the project changed in 2014 when the current director, a Missionary of Charity priest from India, took over from the founding director.

I could not locate the project on Google Maps as it is located within the informal settlement neighbourhood of Agbogbloshie, so, after travelling to Accra city centre, I walked approximately 30 minutes to the nearest intersection off a main road by the market and phoned the priest. He came and met me by the side of the road and together we walked through the maze of small dirt roads bordered by rickety structures to the project's location. We met for an hour and the priest suggested a group of women who work in the market and take sewing classes at the FBO as potential participants. I briefly met with one of the women that day in the sewing classroom and explained to her, with the sewing instructor acting as a translator, about the purpose of the interview. She had some questions for me, including why I would want to come to Ghana to conduct research, and after I responded to her questions, she agreed to take part in the study. I visited the project the following week, hoping to meet the other three women, however they were not there, so I spoke to the first participant again. The sewing instructor informed me that she had spoken to the other three women who had agreed to participate in the focus group as well. I arranged with the sewing instructor that I would return in a week-and-a-half and requested that she make arrangements to have all four service users present.

When I returned for the focus group, I brought along a female graduate social work student to act as a translator. When we arrived at the FBO, only two of the service users were present. The sewing instructor phoned a third service user and, at the same time, one of the other two service users went out to find the fourth service user who was in the market. About 45 minutes later, all four participants were present and the focus group was held, with the graduate student acting as a translator for the women. The sewing instructor was asked to leave the room while the focus group was being held. The women spoke the local language, Twi, however one participant felt more comfortable speaking in her local dialect and so she gave her answers in her

dialect to another participant, who translated them to Twi, which was then translated by the graduate student to English.

I returned on three occasions to observe the interactions between the service users and their instructor. On those occasions, I spent approximately one hour with the group, chatting with the instructor and the service users. I was also present at a special ceremony that was held to inaugurate a second-floor addition to the FBO's building. There were over 100 community members who attended that ceremony and I had the opportunity to observe the interactions between the director and the community members. I also met with the director twice at his residence, in a different informal settlement about a 45-minute walk from the site of the FBO. We spoke about the history of the program and the relationship of the FBO to Caritas Ghana as well as the international donors who supported the FBO.

### **A Note on the Diversity of the FBOs**

The four FBOs included in this study are quite diverse in terms of the population served, services offered, length of programs, and geographic location, as can be seen in Table 1 (Appendix E). Selecting a diverse group of FBOs for this study was intentional as one of the criticisms of previous studies on FBOs is that they tend to focus on only one case (Agyemang et al., 2009). This study attempted to have a range of FBOs in order to address that concern and provide multiple perspectives. The number of FBOs and range of geographical locations had to be limited because of time and resource restraints. Accra was chosen as the main geographical location for the study because I was in Ghana primarily for my international placement in the Master of Social Work program at Laurier and the only option I had for my placement was to be based out of the University of Ghana, Legon. Since Accra was the main geographical location for the study, two FBOs are located in Accra while a third is in Madina, the suburb immediately



north of the city. The fourth FBO works in towns and villages and thus offers perspectives of service users from outside the capital city. FBO #1 is a long-term residential program, while FBO #2 offers a nine-month residential program. FBO #3 provides annual 1-3 days conferences and FBO #4 provides a half-day program that takes at least two years to complete.

Clearly, the four FBOs are a diverse group. As discussed below in the Findings section, common themes nevertheless emerged from the data despite the diversity of FBOs. However, the participants' willingness to speak openly appeared to be affected by the situation they found themselves in. Participants from FBO #1, who are long-term residents of the FBO, were generally very hesitant to say anything critical about the FBO, while participants from FBO #4, who take part in a half-day program, were quite vocal in their criticisms. The other characteristics of the FBOs – geographic location, population served, services offered, and length of programs – may have also influenced the responses from the participants. However, as this study is exploratory in nature, comparisons based on these characteristics were not done as no controls were in place to make the comparisons valid.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

All interviews and focus groups were transcribed as soon as possible after the data collection. After collecting data from the first interview, I began initial line-by-line coding, going quickly and spontaneously through the data to help me code better by giving me the chance to think about the data and codes in different ways as I coded (Charmaz, 2007). My initial coding was of the entire transcript, which is a method Charmaz (2007) claims allows the researcher to develop codes and themes which would otherwise be missed. Throughout the process, in line with the constant comparative methods of constructivist grounded theory, I compared my codes with the data and looked for emergent codes and themes (Charmaz, 2007).

Due to time constraints and a lack of access to people with similar demographics as my research participants, I was unable to test my interview questions to see whether they would be understood prior to beginning the interviews and focus group discussions. After the first two individual interviews and the first focus group, all from FBO #1, it was clear that the participants were struggling to understand the questions as they were worded. I decided to modify the questions to increase the likelihood that the participants would understand them. However, I decided to first conduct a line-by-line coding of the transcripts and write memos on them, which would help me “direct and focus further data collection” (Charmaz, 2007, p. 80) prior to adjusting the questions. The results of my initial coding and memo writing revealed areas that I wanted to explore further with the subsequent participants, so I altered the interview guide (see Appendices B and C for the original interview and focus group discussion guides, respectively, and Appendix D for the modified interview guide used for both the individual interviews and the focus group discussions at FBOs #2-4).

During the coding process, I created a spreadsheet where I placed quotes from the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups alongside their initial codes. I then went through the codes and attempted to simplify and reduce the number of different codes, ensuring that quotes that had similar meanings were given the same codes. In total, I had 112 codes for the 7 individual interviews and 4 focus groups.

Following the initial coding, I utilized focused coding to extract the most significant themes from the data (Charmaz, 2007). I compared the codes to each other and developed relevant themes from the codes. From the initial 112 codes obtained in the first stage of coding, I developed six themes. I used active verbs in the codes and themes (i.e. “wanting to learn more” as opposed to “a desire to learn more”) to stay close to the data and assist me in observing the

processes involved (Charmaz, 2007). Examples of which codes are subsumed under which themes can be found in Table 2 in Appendix F.

In keeping with the methods of data analysis espoused by Charmaz (2007), I wrote memos after coding each transcript. In my memos, I wrote my ideas and questions that emerged based on the data and the codes and themes that I developed (Charmaz, 2007). Memo writing helped me to keep asking myself questions about the data, codes, and themes, including the meaning of the codes and the gaps in the analysis process (Charmaz, 2007).

### **Rigour**

Qualitative studies are often faced with skepticism, thus the need to explain one's strategies for rigour (Padgett, 2008).

I compared the data from the focus group discussions with the data from the semi-structured interviews as well as my observations of the participants in the field to ensure data triangulation (Bailey, 2007). Data triangulation increases the rigour of a study (Bailey, 2007).

I also used my thesis supervisor from Laurier, an MPhil social work student from UG, and a PhD Global Governance student from Laurier who was also at UG to debrief when I was in Ghana. I spoke with one or more of the three people in-person, through text messages, or via email after each interview and focus group, sharing how the interview went and asking for their opinions. Debriefing and seeking support are ways to help the researcher stay "sharp" while collecting data as they offer the researcher the chance to seek feedback (Padgett, 2008, p. 189).

As I took field notes and wrote memos as well as coded in two phases, I am also able to demonstrate rigour in this study by leaving a decision trail (Padgett, 2008). This form of auditing allows me show how I came to decisions in the analytical phase.

**Member checking.**

A common characteristic of qualitative research is member checking, whereby the transcribed interview and/or the themes generated from the data are presented to the participants for their feedback (Padgett, 2008). Member checking is one way to ensure the validity of the findings of a qualitative research project as it allows the participants to give feedback about whether the researcher has captured the essence of their perspective and experience (Padgett, 2008).

Due to my time and resource limitations as well as the limited availability of some of the participants because of their work obligations, I was unable to undertake member checking. Three of the participants from the focus group at FBO #1 were never around when I was at the organization due to their work commitments. It was logistically very challenging for me to get to Akrade and Frankadua, where the participants from FBO #3 lived, in addition to the fact that all of the participants worked during the day and four of the participants did not speak English, meaning I would have had to use a translator to go over the interview transcripts with them. Similarly, the four participants from FBO #4 worked or were in training during the day and would also require a translator to go over the transcripts.

I was not able to start developing themes until after I left Ghana and returned home, at which point it would have been extremely difficult to check with the participants. As noted above, many of them are not able to read English and therefore to check with them, I would have required the assistance of someone in Ghana to whom I could have sent the findings and asked them to read the findings to the participants and solicit their feedback. It was not a realistic possibility given my time and resource limitations, though I acknowledge that member checking is an important way to ensure the validity of qualitative research findings.

**Ethical Issues**

In this study, I asked people who may have been dependent on an organization's services to honestly describe their experiences with that service. I therefore had to ensure the participants gave their informed consent and fully understood the risks and benefits of their participation, which are the two main ethical concerns of qualitative research (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

It is possible that the participants in the focus group may have felt vulnerable in front of their peers when they openly shared their perspectives on the FBO. Given their dependence on the FBO to provide much sought-after services, they may have been inclined to avoid criticizing the FBO. While I encouraged the participants to share openly, I also informed them they could decline to answer any question they were not comfortable with and on several occasions during the interviews, I moved on from a question when the participant was quiet and appeared uncomfortable with answering.

I was aware of the potentially coercive effects of my position as a privileged member of multiple dominant intersectional identities (i.e. Canadian, native English speaker, graduate student, light-coloured skin tone) that may have decreased the legitimacy of the informed consent given by the participants (Padgett, 2008). I tried to address these ethical issues by building a relationship with the participants prior the interviews (Dixon et al., 2006). I visited the participants at the FBOs and shared about my research, my background, and what my experience in Ghana was like. I gave them the opportunity to ask me questions, which several of them did, including questions about Canada and my impression of Ghana. For the FBO #3 focus group, I was not able to meet with the participants prior to the focus group discussion because of time constraints (my own and the participants'); similarly, despite multiple attempts to meet with the participants from FBO #4 prior to the focus group, I was unable to meet with all of them and

only met with one prior to the focus group. In those two cases, I took the time when I sat down with the participants at the focus group to explain my position as thoroughly as possible and to give the participants a chance to ask any questions.

While I ensured complete confidentiality and anonymity to the participants on my behalf, there exists the potential that participants may share information from the focus groups with staff at the FBO. Participants could then be at risk of retribution from the staff if the staff do not like what the participant shared. I tried to mitigate the risk of this by explaining to the participants that participation is voluntary, and they may leave at any time in the interview process (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). I also reminded the participants, both at the beginning and the end of the focus groups, that what was said there should remain within the group.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

In conducting this research, I employed qualitative description as espoused by Sandelowski (2000) with overtones of constructivist grounded theory as detailed by Charmaz (2007). In keeping with the spirit of combining the two methodologies, I will present the results of my data collection both as a brief summary of the participants' experience of being a service user at an FBO in Ghana and according to the six themes that emerged from my initial and focused coding. The summary of the participants' experience is the product of a qualitative descriptive study (Sandelowski, 2000). It is meant to be written in everyday language and should provide a description that both the researcher and the participants would deem to be accurate (Sandelowski, 2000). I also code the data using the coding methods of constructivist grounded theory as Charmaz (2007) explains in order to interpret the data at a deeper level than qualitative description on its own would allow. The summary I provide is intentionally brief so that I put more emphasis on the words of the participants themselves, which follows in the section on the themes.

### **A Qualitative Description of Being an FBO Service User in Ghana**

Prior to engaging with a faith-based organization in Ghana, most service users will be invited by someone in a position of authority. The inviter serves as an intermediary between the FBO and the potential service user, a person whom the potential service user trusts and who is connected in some way with the FBO. What draws the potential service user to engage with the FBO is the offer of a free service that will enhance the service user's life, typically in an economic manner, that is, increasing the earning potential of the service user by providing the service user with new job skills or training.

Oftentimes, the newly-engaged service user will be hesitant on their first day, unsure of

whether the services offered by the FBO will make a difference in their life and whether they will be able to persevere in the program. However, the warm welcome extended by the staff and the general accessibility of the program quickly allays the fears of the service user and they begin to see the potential for positive change in engaging with the FBO.

At times, challenges emerge, both from within the FBO and externally. The challenges may have to do with the way the training is provided or with family issues that make attending the program difficult. In any case, the service user deals with the challenges as they arise, staying focused on their initial reason for engaging with the FBO, namely to learn something that will help them economically in the future.

No matter how difficult the challenges become, the service user will likely not speak with the FBO staff and ask for changes that would reduce the challenges. Speaking with the staff, whether the immediate instructor or the overall director, is seen as running the risk of creating problems for the service user, thus the service user will avoid sharing their thoughts and opinions. If, however, the staff reaches out to the service user and asks their opinion, the service user is prepared to share. This proactive outreach on the part of the staff, however, rarely happens and thus the concerns of the service user are typically not heard by the staff.

The service user will generally be appreciative of the services offered by the FBO, in particular because of the Christian dimension of the services. Despite the challenges they may face and their feeling of being limited in what they can learn and do, the service user will often experience success and feel proud of what they have accomplished, notably the acquisition of new, practical skills that they believe will enhance their life. In recognition of the new skills they will have acquired, the service user will have a positive regard for the FBO and share that positive perspective with fellow community members.



**Observations of each FBO**

The following section contains observations of each of the four FBOs. These observations were obtained through numerous field visits, conversations and informal interviews with staff, and consulting relevant literature on the history and mission of the FBO, whether in hardcopy or online format. After these observations, I detail the six themes that emerged from the four focus groups and seven individual interviews.

**FBO #1.**

The FBO is located in the Madina neighbourhood of Accra, approximately 30 minutes by car north of the city centre. The facility has two dormitories, one for males and another for females, as well as a multi-purpose hall, storage facilities, and two traditional Ghanaian-style huts, one of which can accommodate over 100 people, while the other can accommodate approximately 30 people. It has a dirt football pitch and shares a basketball court with the Department of Social Welfare, which owns the basketball court as well as a one-story building under construction within the same compound. The FBO was founded in 1994 by an American Christian missionary and currently serves over 50 children, youth, and adults with disabilities as well as around 30 children and youth who were usually referred to the FBO by the Department of Social Welfare. The service users range in age from 5 to over 50 years old. Previously, the FBO was under the leadership of its American partner organization, but it now operates independently. There are four staff – two male and two female – who work directly with the children, while there are numerous support staff and volunteers, including cooks, cleaners, and drivers.

The number of service users, while generally static, changes occasionally with youth being dropped off by the Department of Social Welfare for a few days or weeks and then being

removed, to be reunited with their families or placed elsewhere. A small number of service users, less than 20, do not reside at the centre but come in for day services. These service users do not come on a regular basis and have limited dealings with the resident service users.

As noted, there are two female and two male direct support staff. These staff members assist the service users who need help with personal care, including washing, dressing, and feeding. The staff also enforce the rules and provide guidance to the youth. A varying number of adult volunteers also provide support, with cooking, cleaning, and tending the children.

Both undergraduate and graduate social work students from the University of Ghana come for placement for one or two days a week. The number of placement students varies; when I was there, there were three Ghanaian undergraduate students and two international undergraduate students who came on different days for their placement.

Staff often directed older youth to look after younger youth. In this way, a youth in their late teens or early twenties sometimes acted as an additional staff member. The younger youth would bring their problems and concerns to the older youth to seek assistance. The older youth would sometimes assist but more often than not would act dismissively towards the younger youth. When there were physical confrontations between younger youth, an older youth typically stepped in and separated the fighting youth. During my field placement at this FBO, I observed youth fighting on a daily basis, though there were rarely any serious injuries. Staff sometimes directed youth who were a few years older than their peers to look after the younger ones; thus, a 10-year old would be charged with looking after a 7-year old for a period of the day or during a specific group activity.

I observed the service users, particularly the younger ones, relating to the staff as children to parents. However, all of the service users, including the youngest ones, were very independent

and would go about their day with minimal guidance from the staff. It seemed that everyone knew and understood the routine and what was required of them. When someone was new or not following the expected routine, another youth would try to redirect them first before a staff member stepped in to set the youth straight.

Various outside groups regularly brought donations of food and necessary supplies (toilet paper, water sachets, toothpaste, etc.) to the centre. Most often, the groups were from churches in Accra. The groups ranged in size, from two-person contingents to groups of more than 20 people. Whenever a group came to give a donation, the youth would gather around a large table and the donated materials would be put on display on the table. One or more members of the group would then give a speech, explaining who they were and why they were donating to the FBO. A representative from the youth would then receive the donations on behalf of the centre, thanking the group for their generosity. Typically, the youth would sing one or more songs of thanksgiving before pictures were taken and the group would depart.

The six participants from this FBO who were included in the study ranged in age from 18-33 years old. All six identified as being Christian, with Presbyterian, Baptist, and International Central Gospel Church denominations represented. Each participant had been resident at the FBO for at least one year. Three of the participants were going to a vocational school, one was in secondary school, and two were not in school or working.

### **FBO #2.**

The compound for this FBO consisted of a large dormitory that housed 40 service users, a warehouse-style building with only three walls that acted as the main centre for activities and the church on weekends, two buildings for daycare services, and a dining hall. The centre is located on the outskirts of an informal settlement area called Agbogbloshie. This area has a population

numbering close to 100,000 people, with the overwhelming majority (90%) of the people coming from the Northern region of Ghana (Turina, 2015). Agbogbloshie has two contrasting nicknames: “Sodom and Gomorrah” and “City of God” (Turina, 2015). The former nickname references the perception that the area is rife with crime, while the latter nickname focuses on the goodness of the people who live there. Agbogbloshie has also been called “most toxic place on Earth” (Turina, 2015, “Introduction”), where enormous piles of garbage and refuse are piled high along both sides of a small stream that runs through the area. From the FBO’s centre, it is only a one-minute walk to the heavily polluted stream.

One “house-mother” (a female staff member in charge of discipline and the day-to-day affairs of the service users); three female teachers; and, three administrators work at the centre. A small number of support staff (cook, security guards) also work there. The nine-month training program ends with the service users taking a national certification test in bead working, dress making, or hairstyling. After they pass the certification test, the clients receive a nationally-recognized certificate in their respective trade.

Though not all of the service users are Christian (most of those who are originally from the Northern region of Ghana are Muslim), there is the expectation by the staff and administrators that all the service users will worship in the Assemblies of God tradition while at the centre. Each day begins with a morning devotion and a church service is held at the main activity hall every Sunday.

The training takes place at the main hall, a cavernous building with 25-foot ceilings, and measuring approximately 125 feet by 35 feet. One side of the building is open to a courtyard, which adds to the impression of the building’s large size. Occasionally, due to the proximity of the centre to the heavily-polluted stream nearby, a foul smell will waft over the centre. Aside

from the concrete courtyard, there are no recreational facilities on site.

There are three workstations set up, one each for bead working, dress making, and hairstyling. The workstations consist of tables, chairs, and the relevant materials (i.e. manual sewing machines for the dressmaking group and mannequin heads with wigs for the hairstyling group). The teacher sits with the service users and actively guides them in their work. When I was there, the service users had already been in the program for more than six months and so had enough skills to work independently, with occasional interventions by the teacher. The service users spend most of the morning and afternoons, Monday to Friday, learning their trade.

I observed that the students interacted constantly with the teachers and that the relationship seemed to be friendly and mutually respectful. The teachers clearly had authority and exercised their authority, yet the students also were laughing and joking around with the teachers. The students seemed to have a positive relationship in particular with the house mother. Even when the house mother reprimanded a student for doing something wrong, the student and the house mother were quickly laughing and talking again.

I was present when the hairstyling class took part in the national certification examination. Chairs and tables were set up in 5 rows facing the national examiner, who sat a desk facing the students. Service users from the other two trades (bead working and dress making) acted as “clients” of the hairstyling students. The examiner gave the hairstyling students a specific hairstyle to do and the students had approximately three hours to complete the process. At the end of the allotted time, each student came up to the examiner with their “client.” The examiner looked at the hairstyle and gave her feedback to the student. All the students passed the national examination and received their certificates. The staff were present during the examination and congratulated the service users when they completed the examination.

The six participants from this FBO ranged from 18 to 22 years old. Three had finished senior high school and one had finished junior high school. The other two had attended school but did not finish junior high school. Four participants were learning hairstyling, one bead working, and one dress making. All six participants had started the program around the same time in March 2018.

### **FBO #3.**

This FBO is located in Tema, a large, growing city about 30 minutes from Accra. The head office is in a primarily residential area, with unpaved roads, close to a main highway. The building itself is relatively new, looking more like a large house than an office building. Each staff member has their own office, although the offices are bedroom-sized and comparatively small, having enough space for a desk, two chairs, a bookshelf, and little more.

The women's conference, while organized by the FBO, is facilitated by volunteers from the United States who are part of the US partner organization. The volunteers come specifically for the conference each year. Both men and women from the African American community in the US act as facilitators with support from the Ghanaian FBO staff.

The lead Ghanaian organizer is a pastor at the Assemblies of God church in Akrade. She has considerable say over the topics for the conference. She told me that she suggests to the US facilitators what topics should be covered after informally consulting with the local community members. The pastor also recruits participants for the conference by speaking about it at the church service and at the women's group that runs at the church. Posters for the conference are on display at the pastor's church as well as other churches in the surrounding communities.

Akrade, where the pastor's Assemblies of God church is located, is a small, mostly rural community. It is located along a main road about two hours from Accra. Atimpoku, where one of

the participants is from, is about ten minutes away from Akrade by mini-bus. Atimpoku has more opportunities for trade and business, being located at a major junction point for travellers heading from Accra to the Volta Region; however, it is still a mainly rural community.

Frankadua is a smaller, more rural community than Akrade and Atimpoku and is located about 45 minutes to one hour from Akrade along the main road to the Volta Region.

The conference is held in Akosombo, a relatively prosperous community that is the site of the largest dam and hydro-electric generating station in Ghana. The road leading to Akosombo is guarded by a checkpoint, which highlights the national importance of the hydro-electric generating station. Many of the residents of Akosombo work at the dam and generating station and live in government-provided housing. When I visited Akosombo with the adult son of the pastor in Akrade, he explained to me that being from Akosombo was seen by many people in Ghana as a sign of wealth and status. There is a marked contrast between Akosombo and Akrade, Atimpoku, and Frankadua in terms of the development of the city, including the housing units and school facilities. Akosombo, for example, is home to one of the most respected private schools in all of Ghana, where many government officials and ex-patriots send their children.

I recruited three participants for individual interviews and five participants for a focus group. Two of the individual interview participants were from Akrade and one from Atimpoku. The five participants for the focus group were from Frankadua. The participants ranged in age from 18 to their early 50s. Two participants had no formal education, one had reached Class 6 in primary school, another Form 1, and four had post-secondary degrees (all in education). The individual interviews were conducted in English; for the focus group, I asked questions in English, which were then translated by one of the participants (who had a post-secondary degree in Education) to the local language, Ewe. She would then translate the responses back to English.

The participant who acted as a translator knew the other four participants and had also taken part in the women's conference and thus was able to answer the questions as a participant as well.

#### **FBO #4.**

Similar to FBO #2, this FBO is located in the informal settlement area of Agbogbloshie. Unlike FBO #2, which is on the outskirts of the informal settlement area, the centre for this FBO is located within the highly-concentrated community of Agbogbloshie. It is approximately a seven-minute walk from the main road through a maze of unpaved paths lined with improvised stalls on either side to the FBO's centre. The FBO recently (late November 2018) opened a new building, where the vocational training program that I researched was moved. When I interviewed the four participants, in early October 2018, the training program was on the second floor of an older, less sturdy building, up a rickety outdoor staircase, in a room measuring approximately 10 feet by 7 feet with one single overhead fan and one window. The soil in Agbogbloshie is grey with pollution and contamination while the buildings are highly concentrated and never more than two stories high.

The current director of the program is a Catholic missionary priest from India. He solicits funds for the program from personal contacts, some based in Ghana and others in Europe, most often Italy, where he spent a number of years. He has run the FBO for the past four years, taking over from an Italian Catholic missionary who founded the program and ran it for several years before returning to Italy.

The female sewing instructor for the vocational training program is one of a handful of paid staff members (the others being the female day-care staff and a male nurse at the small medical clinic). Sewing classes run each morning from about 8am to 12pm, after which time the service users leave to go sell products in the market. There are four sewing machines and



sometimes there are more than four service users, which means there are times when a service user will have to wait for a machine. I observed the service users working on a project where they were making over 40 handbags for a benefactor from France who was going to take the handbags to France to sell. The instructor was using a thick, old hardcover bound sewing instruction book, written in English, to get lessons and patterns to teach the students. She informed me this was the book she had used to learn how to sew.

The participants ranged in age from their early twenties to mid-thirties. Two had no formal education, one had finished Class 3, and one had finished senior high school. The participants had been at the FBO from between eight months to 1 ½ years. Two of the participants brought their children to the adjacent daycare, also run by the FBO.

### **Themes**

Six major themes emerged from the focused coding of the interviews and focus group discussions. In no particular order, they are: appreciating what the FBO offers; being limited; dealing with challenges; wanting to learn more; accessing services; and, experiencing success. In order to foreground the perspectives and experiences of the service users, the following subsections contain extensive quotes from the participants. The quotes selected are based on their relevance to the major theme as well as whether the quote is representative of more than one participant's views. In other words, I aim to highlight quotes that reflect a view that more than one participant held. I also include quotes that could be seen as outliers, to ensure that the diversity of the perspectives and experiences of the participants is not muted. I note when a quote comes from a single participant and when a quote is representative of multiple participants' perspectives. The quotes from the two focus groups that had translators (FBO #3 and #4) are in the third person due to the way the translation was done. I use the following abbreviations to

identify the participants from the individual interviews while respecting confidentiality: “P1F1” refers to “Participant 1” from FBO #1; “P2F1” refers to “Participant 2” from FBO #2; “P1F2” refers to “Participant 2” from FBO #2; and so on. Due to the nature of the focus group discussion, I do not differentiate between the participants in the focus group quotations; the focus group discussions are referred to as FGD1 for the focus group from FBO #1, FGD2 for the focus group from FBO #2, and so on.

### **Appreciating what the FBO offers.**

Many of the participants expressed a general appreciation for the work that the faith-based organization does. Across all four FBOs, the participants remarked on their appreciation for the FBO in general and the programs and services offered specifically.

*Let me say the people around us. The founder, and the director and everyone. (P1F1, in response to the question of what they like best about the FBO)*

*Not really, but just have to thank God for [FBO #3], because it's not easy parting with, I could see that personally, they parted, they sacrificed just for others. It's a good thing, it's a plus to them. From far away just to come to Ghana to come and support women in Ghana. I appreciate it so much, I appreciate it so much. (P3F3, speaking about facilitators who were brought in from the US to assist at the conference)*

*I think these programs are very helpful.... This program, it helps a lot. (FGD2)*

*It's a place that has a lot, especially those that need help. (FGD2)*

*For her, she will say the program is very good, it's beneficial. So if she meets someone, she will tell them, if you come and you register for this program, it will help you in terms of your future. (FGD4)*

*I have said, we get everything, not everything, we get what our physical needs, uh-huh, we get our social needs, too. They send us to school. (FGD1)*

*I love this place. We have care, shelter, and a lot. (P1F1)*

*I really, really like this place. (P2F2)*

*Ok, to live here is very enjoyable.... (FGD1)*

*My experience here is that I enjoyed it very much because I hear stories from outside world and I see like the opportunity that I'm having here is different from, yes. (FGD1)*

*It's a very nice organization, they've given us everything. (FGD1)*

*These are the things that I don't like but apart from that, I like everything. How the place, I like how the place is, the staff, as I said earlier, they're very good people, all the teachers are good. How we are being fed three times daily. (P2F2)*

*First, they were so much happy about the whole conference. The facilitators have so much come, they were very lovely and happy, and they taught them whatever they want. (FGD3)*

A number of participants reported their appreciation for the work of the staff, in particular, at the FBO. These participants highlighted the good relationships they have with different staff members at the FBO, and how they feel good about those positive relationships.

*In general, the staff is very good. You can even share your problems with them, feel free. (FGD2)*

*For me, what I know is that she's a very good teacher. (FGD2)*

*So when we started our class, it was very good. Our madame is a kind person, she teach with passion. Even when you're not willing to learn, how she'll make yourself, you'll feel to learn. You'll join the class, learn. (P1F2)*

*They [the facilitators] were helpful. (P2F3)*

*The staff. They are good to us. (P1F1)*

*They are so much happy for the facilitators, what they taught them. So they thought that every occasion they could be coming to do more. (FGD3)*

*Yes, yes, it [bringing in facilitators from the US] is helping. You know, naturally, when you are with people for a long time, though you may be telling the truth, but because they are more familiarized with you, they will not take some of the things so serious. But they're coming, coming to say the same thing, means a little different. So I think their coming is serving the community. (P3F3)*

*I like them. They like me. (P1F1)*

Some of the participants described the staff in parental terms and the FBO as a home-like environment, highlighting the close relationship between the service users and staff members.

*It's a place that when you come, you feel at home because the officers are good. (P2F2)*

*The staff here are friendly, too, and they're like our parents. And here we are like family. (FGD1)*

*There's no place like home. (FGD1)*

*I would describe it to the person like, [FBO #1] is a family house... Christian home, where people are like brothers and sisters here, where we are each other's keeper. (FGD1)*

*The staff try to bring us altogether as one family, yes. and we do all these things in God's name, because we are a Christian organization. (FGD1)*

*I think a lot, a lot. It's a great home. (P1F1)*

Two participants from FBO #3 commented on the good relationship between the facilitators brought in from the US and the service users at FBO #3. Those external facilitators also promoted a close relationship with the service users.

*Yes, I felt happy. I was happy, I was really happy. The way they [the facilitators from the US] danced with us, the way they mingled with us, they didn't, there wasn't any, they socialized with us, they didn't say, oh we are white people and you people are blacks so we not mingle with you, they mingle with us, they danced with us. (P1F3)*

*There was a lady who, when we came, they were praising God. She came and then she started dancing in the midst of the people, yeah, she socialized well. (P2F3)*

The family-like atmosphere created by the staff extended, in one participant's view from FBO #2, to the relationship between the service users themselves.

*And how we pray together and do a lot of things, we are one here. Once we are here, we are one.... So we love each others, and everything that like, if I have something to share with you, I'll not go to you, like angry place. I'll go slowly and talk to you so that all of us will be one. So, among all of us girls, we are not causing trouble like that, it is only the odd times. (P1F2)*

Most of the participants from FBO #1 described the staff as being impartial and willing to support the service users in their decisions.

*And they also follow your decision, like what you want. (FGD1)*

*They don't make decision for us. (FGD1)*

*Yes. If you say you want to continue your education, they will help to do that. (FGD1)*

*The staff really treats us equal. (FGD1)*

*They don't discriminate, they don't do partiality. (FGD1)*

A small minority of participants reported that they did not always get along with the staff.

The negative interactions – and, in at least one case, the negative relationship – with staff left the following participants feeling upset.

*... I wish they could change all of them [the staff] and then bring the new, someone that could take good care of them.... But the behaviour and then the attitude [of staff], that is what I don't like. (P2F1)*

*If they hassled me like that, then I feel bad.... But sometimes I want to talk to them [the staff] but I don't. I don't know how I would go ahead and talk to them.... It's hard for me to talk to them. (P1F1)*

*She said for her, she [the staff member] has a little bit of temper. So if she teaches you something today and the next day you don't really get it and you come back for her to teach you again, she will talk to you anyhow. So she's scared to ask her. (FGD4)*

While the participants primarily indicated their appreciation of the staff, they also had words of praise for the programs and the benefits they gained from receiving services at the FBO.

*As I hear saying, the one they organized last year, many acquired practical skills, and this time around too, it gave us some knowledge that I can do more, far better than a man. So it was very helpful. (P2F3)*

*But when this program is here, I think it's helpful to those of us because when you are carrying the things [as a head porter], there's a lot of risk in that. (P2F2)*

*She is saying that anything that can be done to make the program a success will be good, because if we look at the whole community [Agbogbloshie], this is the only program that helps. Because it helps in the sense that it helps train people, those that don't have jobs and those that haven't been to school, this is the only program that helps. (FGD4)*

*Yes, because there is a lot of people here. Any place, if you know how to do beauty care or beads or something like that, it's like business for everyday. Yeah, so it choose to be in*

*this area, that one is good for this. (P1F2)*

*What I like the most about being here is they have given us a trade to learn and to be constant. (P1F2)*

From the participants' descriptions, the programs were generally beneficial. However, participants from two FBOs spoke about their initial fears and hesitations about taking part in the services being offered. Their fears were quickly allayed, however, and they noted how they benefitted from the programs.

*For me the good ones are more than the bad ones. When I came here, even though I was scared of the environment, I was like I could stay here because I'm the good type. (FGD2)*

*When I came here, I was first afraid... After some conversations, I became relaxed and coming and taking my things. (FGD2)*

*She's also saying that she's so much impressed for going there, because at first she was scared, but then after, she's going to the program and now she's ok. (FGD3)*

*I felt since they [facilitators from the US] were coming from the outside, I thought maybe, I may not be able to understand them as they speak to us, but as time goes on, they spoke, I realize this is not people who will come and talk for you not to understand. You know, coming from the US and all that, we were somehow afraid of the intonation and all that. As they took their time, they took their time as they spoke. (P3F3)*

One participant expressed her appreciation that the basic necessities were provided for them by the FBO. Her concern was less about what was learned and gained from the FBO and more about having what was necessary for survival.

*I'm saying, at least we have somewhere to sleep. Bathroom, the washroom. (FGD2)*

### **Being limited.**

Many participants spoke about being limited in terms of what they were able to do at the FBO, what they were able to get from the services being offered, and what they were able to learn from instructors and facilitators at the FBOs.

Participants from FBO #2, who were taking part in a nine-month residential training

program, noted their feelings of being stuck at the program. When I spoke with staff at this location, they informed me that the policy was for service users to remain within the compound at all times unless they were given permission by the staff to go and make purchases at the market just outside the compound. The staff explained that this policy was in place to safeguard the service users (who are typically between the ages of 14 and 22) and that previous incidents, including at least one incident where a service user ended up getting pregnant after spending time outside of the compound, led the staff to enforce this rule. The participants I interviewed were not opposed to this rule in principle, but they did express their desire to have the opportunity to explore the neighbourhood on occasion.

*But it would be a good idea for them to give us a chance to move around. (FGD2)*

*Q: Do you feel like you're stuck here sometimes? A: Yes. (FGD2)*

*When you're outside to buy, they give us a chance. My problem is, they should give us, when we come here, we stay for nine months. We tell them... Just once in the nine months they should give us a chance to go see our parents. (FGD2)*

*Taking us out on an excursion, out for fun. Because most of us, our parents are not coming to visit us. Give us a chance that just for a day we move around. (FGD2)*

*Yes. I think it's good that once in a while, let's say, once in two months or three months time, the staff should take us out, because some of us, we don't know anywhere.... They could take us out, to castles, to know about our national story.... Yes. Because when we go to the beach, we really enjoyed. We had a lot of fun, we were swimming in the water, eating, drinking, dancing, and chatting. I really enjoyed. (P2F2)*

Some of the participants at FBO #2 felt, in particular, that they were too restricted in having access to their parents while residing at the FBO. They noted their initial fears about not getting the chance to see their parents during their nine months at the FBO and the reality of not being able to see them whenever they wanted.

*I felt welcome, but still I was still afraid. Because I have a lot patience, what will happen, will I be able to see my parents? (FGD2)*

*When I came I was feeling shy. I think here would be bad or I'm not seeing my parents again. (FGD2)*

*Sometimes I feel like going to see my parents but I won't get the chance. (FGD2)*

*Yes, I can go to Madame and say that my mother say that she miss me so she wants to come to visit me. Would they give me chance or something like that? Maybe they will say yes or no. So that one, if they say yes, you have to let your mother come, but if they say no, you can't force them. (P1F2)*

A common theme across the organizations was the limitations of the FBOs themselves, whether in terms of funding issues or staff recruitment and retention. Many of the participants seemed to have a notion about the limitations that the FBO was facing without knowing for certain what the exact issues were. Management at the FBOs spoke about being limited in what they can pay their staff as well as the number of paid staff they could have in the organization. These two limitations are directly related to the quality of instruction the service users receive.

*She's saying, if she doesn't know, if [the staff] has money to hire an additional person, because sometimes they want to know how to sew a current style, but whenever they ask [the staff], she says she knows what she was taught in school, but then she doesn't know how to cut those styles, so if they could get someone who could teach them to cut the current styles, it would help them. (FGD4)*

*No, we want more teachers because, like our Madame like this, she knows something, but somebody too may know something else, yeah. (P1F2)*

*Mr. Kevin, the staff, you see, they are working on it [hiring more staff], it's not easy to get staff to work at [FBO #1]. (FGD1)*

*We need staff.... There are not enough staff, there are not enough. (P1F1)*

Sometimes the lack of qualified instructors willing to work for low pay means the service users have to hope for a volunteer to teach them what they are looking for.

*But unless the person do a voluntary work do that, that is when the person comes in to help. (FGD1)*

To complicate the staffing issues even more is that sometimes those who are willing to work for the FBO are not the best fit from the perspective of the service users. This in turn can



limit what the service users are able to learn.

*But then when she comes back [from missing class due to working] and asks the madame to teach them and then she says she can't teach them, she has already said what she wants, and she can't take her time, she doesn't know how well they can learn with that. (FGD4)*

*She's saying that for the madame here, as an apprentice, if they keep quiet and then they learn, they can learn a little bit. Just with the current styles, they can't cut it because their madame can't cut it. (FGD4)*

*I think we should have about two [teachers].... Because some of us, we are not fast learners, some of them are not fast to get something. So when we have one teacher it's difficult.... (P2F2)*

*She says for her, some people, they would have been many here, some people come and they expect that they come in, they have not gone to school, they want to learn with the freehand cut. But they come in and the sketches are difficult for them to learn with.... And they realize that for a long time, they are not able to learn how to cut, they eventually leave, because they don't see the use why they should be here. (FGD4)*

The financial situation at the FBOs can even leave the service users sitting idle when the basic materials needed for their vocational training are missing.

*She says, at first when they started, [the staff] had a little bit of money, so they used to buy them fabrics. But since they [the FBO] started the school, now they can see the little bit of hardship when it comes to funding, so they have not been able to buy fabric. So for some time now when they come, they just sit idle because there are no fabrics for them to work with. (FGD4)*

*She said, sometimes, it often happens [running out of fabric]. Sometimes even [the staff] suggest they go buy second-hand fabric. But then for them they don't have money to go and buy. (FGD4)*

*Yes, because sometimes we choose to need something from here, but our money will not come at the same time that we want. Or, the next month or the following month, but the first time, anytime that they will say, they will get it. (P1F2)*

Another issue the service users sometimes have to deal with is the lack of necessary start-up capital to begin to use the skills they have acquired. After going through the training provided at the women's empowerment conference, the participants from FBO #3 wanted to begin making soap and yogurt to help them earn an income. The FBO had provided the training they needed to

learn these two income-generating activities, but the participants did not have any start-up money, so they could not put their new skills to use.

*She said that they have learned alright, and they can be able to, but things that they need to do the practical things, they are not able to get them and moreover they are given a form to procedure to follow to do this, but the form is still lying there and nobody has the means or the funds to start this. (FGD3)*

*And they also need capital to start on what they have learned so that they could be able to survive on that. (FGD3)*

From the participants' perspective, it seems that the issue is not so much that the staff are unwilling to use the funding available to benefit the service users, but that the staff have their hands tied and are unable to get what they themselves want in order to better serve their clients.

*She's saying that for [the staff], if it were up to them, the whole place would be full. But then for now, they're out of funds. (FGD4)*

*Ok, as for my side, I hope that they can do things more than that. But it's like, this time we are going down, but we praying that God should continue to let them be.... Ok. In the beginning of the year, they have told that at that time, this place was very happy, that they choose to get visitors anytime, anytime. But from that time, until this our time, they don't have something like that in this place. So I think times is changing. (P1F2)*

In addition to being limited by which staff were available to teach and the funding available, some of the participants from FBO #1 spoke about their perception of some staff's negative attitude towards the service users.

*I have to be quiet and listen [to the staff].... Something bad could happen to me.... Like, if you don't want to do something and you don't want to do it and they are forcing you to do it. (P1F1)*

*...And then maybe the people will bring it [donations], but they [the staff] are not going to give it to them [the residents].... They [the staff] are not ready to be, to take care of them [the service users]. It's like a force, yeah.... The way they treat the children I don't like it. (P2F1)*

Other participants shared that they were taking part in the FBO services because of a lack of other opportunities, most notably the opportunity to go to school.

*I'm learning this trade simply because, not because I have the zeal to learn it, but because I don't have any other choice.... not all of us are willing to go back to school, but because of financial problem and a whole lot, so I have to learn this trade.... So I just said, ok, I would like to learn some trade so that, even if I wouldn't be able to be educated, at least I should be able to do something. (P2F2)*

*She says she can't go to school and she wanted to learn a trade. (FGD4)*

*So she said for her, a friend of her recommended the place for her, she wanted to go and learn how to sew but then she didn't have money to go, so the friend told her when she comes here it's free, so she decided to come here. (FGD4)*

### **Dealing with challenges.**

Aside from being limited in the ways described above, the participants noted many other challenges that they have to face in the course of receiving services from the FBO. The insufficient number of staff was a recurring theme among the participants.

*But it would have been better maybe we get two or more facilitators, those people are doing, these people are doing.... Yeah, you had to wait, for a group to go near, look at what is going, then they will come for another group. And I feel if we were to get two or more facilitators, they all go at the same time. (P3F3)*

*And mine is also the staff. They should increase the staff, yes, the staff that are working are not that many. (FGD1)*

*You want staff that attend to the children specifically, yes, the children's side not the rest. (FGD1)*

*They need more facilitators to teach in other areas. So if other people can come, they are willing to accept them. (FGD3)*

For the participants from the residential vocational program at FBO #2, one of the big challenges was the quality of the food. While at the FBO for their nine-month training program, the service users are provided with all their meals on-site. The staff restrict their movements outside of the compound, which means that the service users have few options aside from eating the food that is provided for them by the FBO. The FBO has one full-time cook and the service users take turns working with the cook to prepare the three meals a day. There are set meal times

and the service users eat together in one dining hall. Each service user receives the same amount of food, though if someone does not finish their food, another person will usually eat the leftovers.

*And they should do something about the food. (FGD2)*

*Different soup, mostly pepe [spicy], most of them don't like pepe. If they don't like it, they will not eat, they will go and sleep. They have to change our food for us. (FGD2)*

*I want to leave. Their food. I don't like it. At times the banku [a local food] is too much. If you want to go out and buy food, they don't allow you. (FGD2)*

*The food, the food. It's not all that good to [me]. There are some days when you look at the face of the food, if you are a Ghanaian and you see what types of food they prepare, you'll cry, seriously, before eating it. Also, I have a serious problem with our food.... The first time I ate the food I was not happy. I was not happy. I left the dining hall. I couldn't eat in there. (P2F2)*

These same participants also noted issues with the building infrastructure and the quality of the drinking water available on-site. The roof of the buildings, like most of the buildings in Agbogbloshie, were made from corrugated sheet metal. Most of the metal sheets were rusted and appeared porous.

*I think we need more furniture. (FGD2)*

*What I would like to see changed is the building, the roofing, some are having leaking, when it's raining, when it rains heavily... so if they could help us to change that.... And the next thing is, our roofing, our roofing sheets, if it could be changed. Even if they could change the [unclear] we would like it, because when it rains heavily, where I am, and not only me, it affects most of, only those who are in the middle, it's not good. (P2F2)*

Many people in Accra drink water from 500ml plastic water sachets, sold for the equivalent of about \$0.30 Canadian each. FBO #2, unlike the other residential program at FBO #1, did not have water sachets available for their service users, so the service users typically drank water from the tap, which was connected to the city's water supply system. Some service users said that when they get money from their family, they will try to buy water sachets from the market.

*We drink, some of us drink. But the water [from the tap connected to the city water supply] is dirty. (FGD2)*

*Because it's scary to drink the pipe water, you have to try to buy it. (FGD2)*

*For me I was feeling like vomiting [after drinking the pipe water], feeling sick to the stomach. (FGD2)*

One participant, who was feeling sick at the time of the interview, spoke about the difficulty of accessing health care services while at FBO #2. The nearest government-run hospital to FBO #2 is about 25 minutes away by taxi, though the congested traffic conditions could easily result in a 30 to 40-minute drive.

*One thing I want to suggest otherwise is the setting. I think if we have either a nurse, a doctor, then it will be better. Because someone will be sick and the person has to wait for a while, wait for a car. But if there's a doctor or nurse personally for this place, he or she will see through it before they go to the hospital. Right now, I'm having a serious headache, but sometimes the medicine is not helping. (FGD2)*

Others from FBO #2 commented on what they perceived to be the rather unsavory character of the surrounding neighbourhood. It should be noted that the vast majority of the service users at FBO #2 come from different parts of the country specifically to attend the program in Agbogbloshie, whereas the service users from FBO #4, which is also located in Agbogbloshie, typically have lived in the area for a while before beginning to receive services at the FBO.

*To be sincere, looking at the community, I was feeling very scared. Even sometimes when I'm going to buy something, when I'm given the permission to go and buy something, I feel very scared because it's kind of cloudy and maybe there may be wicked people. So I'm scared. (FGD2)*

*I'll first talk about what I dislike. It's [pause] the area. Seriously, I don't like the area simply because the people who live around us, they're very bad people who can cause problems to us at any time.... And it would be a help if they would gather the ganja boys [young men who often smoke marijuana] from the back there, that one too would be a help. (P2F2)*

Still, for others, the challenges lay outside of the services provided by the FBO. For

service users participating in the training programs run during the day at FBO #4, the biggest challenges related to paying rent and having child care for their children. The service users at FBO #4 typically attend the sewing class in the morning until around 12pm, at which point they go to the market to sell various items to earn an income. The sew class is free but the FBO does not provide any stipend for the service users, all of whom have to pay weekly rent in Agbogloboshie. The rent can be around 30-40 Ghanaian Cedis per week, roughly \$9-\$11 Canadian, which would take the typical small-scale market vendor at least one or two days to earn. These external challenges are a distraction to the service users and make it more difficult for them to learn their trade at the FBO.

*She's saying that there's also the issue that she has children, she has to take care of them. So sometimes she has to take a break to go and earn money. (FGD4)*

*So it's quite difficult because sometimes they would have to skip days and then they won't be able to come to work [learn to sew]. And that one goes against them because they leave the work [sewing class] in order to fend for themselves. (FGD4)*

*But then when she sells, it's not enough. Sometimes she feels sleepy and she can't make it here and she sleeps, so it's a big problem for her. (FGD4)*

*But then the only issue is that while she is here, she is also thinking about her rent, how she's going to pay for her rent and take care of that bill. (FGD4)*

The issue of earning enough money to pay for rent was a pressing one for the participants from FBO #4. Two participants asked if there was any possibility of the FBO providing the service users with housing while they accessed services from the FBO.

*So she thinks that if the organization, if there's a means for the organization to provide them with houses or places to sleep it would help them, because earlier on she was saying that when she comes to work, inasmuch as they are thinking about issues pertaining to their learning to sew, they are also here thinking about things in the house.... (FGD4)*

*She says for her, the rent is very expensive here. So sometimes they come in here three days and then they go to work three days, because they also need to pay for their rent. And they pay their rent weekly. So if the organization can get them a place where they*

*can sleep, so that they can take care and learn how to sew.... (FGD4)*

*She says for her, if they could provide them with places where they can sleep.... So if they can get a place where they can sleep, she can concentrate while the husband takes care of the children and it will be better for her. (FGD4)*

Paying the rent and providing for the children are more than mere tasks to accomplish.

One participant spoke about how failing to work and earn some income in order to provide for the rent and the children could jeopardize her marriage.

*She's saying for her... Getting a job here for the men is difficult so their husbands, although they are working, the money that they are getting is not enough. So as a woman, they want to help their husbands. But then if the woman wants to sew and she comes to spend her whole day here, she wouldn't be able to help her husband. Then the children and the rent will all be on the husband. That will cause problems for their marriages. (FGD4)*

Dealing with those tangible challenges would be difficult enough. Some participants spoke of the barriers they face because of gender discrimination and stereotyping. In the small towns of Akraide, Atimpoku, and Frankadua, patriarchy dominates and influences what career options are available for women and girls. Learning about women's empowerment and the equality of women and men had a positive impact on the participants from FBO #3, leaving them with the desire to learn even more.

*I liked the way the program went. Because a certain man said that, as if the leader were selling their house, because sometimes her husband doesn't support the house. But as she is a woman, she also supports the husband, even though maybe we say it is the responsibility of the man to take care of the home. But from what the leader was saying, a woman can also support. So the woman also has the power to trade and then manage the home. (P2F3)*

*I was happy, I was happy within myself, because even in school, most of the guys say, oh, you women, even education, if you reach this place, it's enough for you, because you'll marry, your husband will take care of you. So when I heard that, I realized that, no, those things are false, because we the women we can also go up. We can also climb the ladder to anywhere that we want to go.... I like how they talk about women. They don't underrate us, or they don't look down upon us. They talk mostly about we the women, how we can help our community, anyway that we find ourselves, even in the midst of men, we shouldn't say that this position is for only men. We the women can take the*

*opportunity to also be that leader. (P1F3)*

*What they learned about the conference, they were taught as a woman how to depend on yourself and do something, not necessarily depending on a man. So if you keep doing that, the men will even respect you and they prefer it to be doing it and having more lessons. (FGD3)*

### **Wanting to learn more.**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that all of the FBOs included in this research provide at least some form of vocational training, all of the participants expressed a strong desire to learn more. Most of the participants stated that they wanted to learn more practical, business- or job-related skills.

*As I said, these three programs [dress making, hairstyling, and bead making], for me it's enough. For me, it should be educated how to set up a business, how to write the things, I think that would help us. Able to do things. Because there are people outside, they don't know how to start business, they get very confused. If we're taught of those things, it would help us. (FGD2)*

*She says some people want to learn hairdressing, so if they could bring a hairdresser who could teach that group, that particular group, who want to learn hairdressing, it would be very very good. (FGD4)*

*For her, they could introduce the hairdressing program so that people who want to learn how to do hair could come here. She'll be glad. (FGD4)*

*She's saying that in Frankadua township, there's no proper work apart from the farming. So if they can put up a vocation here for them, that would help them do some skills or activities, so that when it's a church service or program like this, they can also do something to help the community or they themselves, they prefer that way. (FGD3)*

*One thing that I would say is that they should organize, or they should do something to help the community in the way of craft work and other things, how people will learn to do pastries, drinks, fashion designing and other things. (P1F3)*

*She's also adding to what she said, that they want something to be doing in the town, apart from their individual farming. They don't farm very large, just small portion for their daily lives. (FGD3)*

Basic literacy, such as would typically be learned in primary or secondary school, as well as business sense and women's empowerment were also topics that many participants expressed



they were interested in learning.

*The community, since most of them are market women, they need education on how to go about their business, the kind of business on how you should go about it to help you to help economically, your finances, which one to buy, which one to sell, which one to preserve, the income, how to save, how to save. So that you develop the market. Most of them they are not very good at saving. They go today and they spend everything today. But they need that empowerment, they need that education, so that they will be able to save for tomorrow.... Atimpoku, they need more education, they need more education. With the women, they need more, like, and they get more health facilities, talk to them about it, educate them on it.... Well, I think since it's all about women, since it's all about women, women we have a lot of treasures that need to be developed in us, since it's all about women, we need more about women, we need more about women. (P3F3)*

*When teaching us how to manage our money, we can add that one too, just maths, so that our coming here will be good. (FGD2)*

*Apart from all that they said concerning the NGO, they still need if they can help them in adult education, so through that they can also speak the language and write something, in case there's nobody there to translate. (FGD3)*

Ensuring that younger members of the community, those who currently may not be benefitting from the services of the FBO, receive some sort of job training was another topic that participants brought up. The participants wanted to see practical skills training for the younger members of the community, which mirrored their own desire to learn more practical skills. The focus was on having the younger members develop survival skills as opposed to developing natural talents or having the opportunity to engage in recreational activities.

*They should go and bring someone who can teach the children, the younger ones, how to maybe do beads, or slippers, or something. (FGD1)*

*Something that in case when they leave here, they can live on to survive, without education. (FGD1)*

*They can teach them how to make slippers. So that when you leave here, you can survive on. (FGD1)*

*The same thing they are saying, so when it comes to the youth side, there is no proper work, they need to vote away, some are doing the kinds of jobs that they didn't have to do. But if they can put up a work here for them, maybe it will help them for their living, even the kids and the youth here, they can put some skills for them to be doing. (FGD3)*

*They [the youth in the community] also need, they also need something like that. We need to group them and then sell job opportunities around to them.... They need to be grouped for people to monitor what they do, so that they can develop well. (P3F3)*

In general, many of the participants expressed the desire to learn more relevant business- and job-related skills so as to improve their lives. There was a clear perception among the participants from the different FBOs that more education, at least in terms of practical training, would result in a better life.

*And I have to come, so that I will learn, and if I learn, I will not have to carry any loads [as a head porter] and no one's going to take that skill from me. So I can decide to come and learn and live here and then go back to my village and go and work over there.... Like my, the thing that I want to achieve here is how I will be very fast to learn the beauty care, so that I can use it to do something in, like in my family. (P1F2)*

*So she said that as a female, it is very good for you to have a handiwork. So when she came in, she was expecting to learn something, because even if you are married and your husband is not there, as a female we should be able to have money, to do something, to take care of your children even in the absence of your husband.... And she also mentioned the fact that when, for now, as she's learning, she will be able to sew her own clothes so that she wouldn't have to pay others to sew for her. (FGD4)*

*So she said when she came and she began the program, her expectation was that she can be able to sew for herself so that she wouldn't take her clothes to someone who will take money from her because she doesn't have money to pay so she's able to sew for herself, it will be good. (FGD4)*

*They were convinced [to attend the women's empowerment conference] because they said they would teach them skills, like soap making, powder, and other activities like ice cream, those are the reasons they were convinced. (FGD3)*

*Yeah, we can learn about this bead making, basketry, even dress making, fashion designing, we can learn about those things.... As I said early on, craftworks, we can, the beads, we can bring the, the beads should be many so that people can have it and work it out for them to see or them to know that they have really known that part. (P1F3)*

### **Accessing services.**

Aside from participants from FBO #1, where the service users generally did not choose to be placed at the FBO, most of the participants reported that they began to engage with the FBO

after being invited by someone in authority.

*And it was introduced to us by our pastor [name withheld] who spoke to us at the women ministry and encouraged women to be part of it. (P3F3)*

*... I was in the house when she [the pastor] came and invited me to it. (P2F3)*

*When we came to church, our pastor announced it that they would be having a conference at Akosombo and it would be four days. (P1F3)*

*So she's saying that they went to school and then [the director] came there and told them the fact that they are going to start something, the sewing foundation, the sewing program. (FGD4)*

*So, they are also social workers, this people they give help to the ones who need it. I was once there, and they asked me, would I like to further my vocation, or like to learn some trade.... The master said, we know an organization which they do that, so we will link you to the master. (P2F2)*

All the participants from each FBO reported that they felt welcomed when they came to the FBO for the first time, even if they initially felt scared. The staff created a positive atmosphere that helped put the service users at ease.

*It was easy to find, because there was an usher at the entrance, so when you get to her, you write your name, and she will show you where to sit.... I felt welcomed, because it wasn't about Assemblies of God, it was about every denomination, so we all sat together. (P2F3)*

*They were very happy and felt welcomed. (FGD4)*

*The first time that I was brought here, the day they do the interview for me that they have some place to help a lot of people, I was very happy because at that time, I choose to stay at the streets. (P1F2)*

*Everything was good [response to the question, what was your first time like at the FBO?]. (P1F1)*

*When I came here, I was first afraid.... After some conversations, I became relaxed.... (FGD2)*

*Yes, I felt very comfortable, the way they welcomed me, they welcomed me with a smile and so on, so I was really welcomed. (P1F3)*

In terms of receiving services, the participants spoke about mixed results. The

participants from FBO #3, who attended a conference on women's empowerment held by the FBO, felt that the staff did an excellent job at creating a conducive atmosphere for learning and providing the necessary materials to facilitate their learning.

*Oh yes, it was very welcoming.... there were opportunities for us to interact, ask questions, and we were even given handouts, for every delivery moment, you look at the handouts as they were talking to you.... Oh the presentation, as I said, the presentation was perfect. To me, to me. Because for some of us, where we are educated, the English session and everything we understand. It was perfect. As I said, they came with handouts, to support whatever they were doing. It's not like they talk and you have to take your personal notes and all that, but this one, what they are talking, it's on paper given to you. So I feel it was perfect.... Yeah, to make sure everyone, yes, and with the handouts, those of us who can read, with the handouts, at a point in time, you look at the paper and you get exactly what they are driving at.... Oh yeah, all the facilitators were local people, so it was easy to follow. (P3F3)*

*Yeah, they were interacting with us, like, they interacted with us in a way that we would understand. They didn't rush because some are not literate, so you also have a translator, a person who translate it for us, we were coping with him and her, too. (P1F3)*

*They were treated very well. They welcomed them, lunchtime they provided them with food, so they were very much happy. (FGD3)*

The participants from FBO #4, who were taking part in a sewing program, reported less favourable results in terms of finding the teaching method accessible.

*So personally for her, from Madame, she teaches them from the book, so personally she finds it quite difficult. (FGD4)*

*She says for her, [Madame] draws the style, she sketches the style. So she expects them to cut the fabric according to the sketched style, but for her it's quite difficult. (FGD4)*

*So for her, she draws, she sketches first, and then puts the measurements in the book. But for her, if she could get a Madame who teach her how to cut with a free hand, without a sketch it would help her because she's never been to school before. So writing or drawing or sketching it before cutting the fabric is difficult for her. (FGD4)*

One participant from FBO #4 summed up the frustration felt by all of the participants in that focus group, who all felt that the teaching style of the facilitator did not work well with them as a group.

*... but if they are bringing a program like this, if they are initiating a program like this, they also need to sit down and think through the kind of person they employ to lead them. Because they need to look around and see the person to lead them. So if they bring a person that the people who are coming to learn can't learn from, or the person can't teach them, even though it's free, they're not benefitting from the program because the person can't teach them what they are here for, or their expectations are not met. They don't see the reason why they should come here, they'd rather go somewhere and work. (FGD4)*

Many participants reported that they were given the opportunity to ask questions while receiving services or provided with step-by-step instructions for what they were trying to learn.

*Oh yes, any question they were asked, they made the time to give them the appropriate answer.... Yeah, people asked questions. Some had few experiences, they asked why we ever made it like this, but yours is like this? They had the opportunity to, yeah.... Even she put them on a paper and gave out to us, so in case you want to go and buy, don't remember the something, the process everything was on it. And we even took part. (P3F3)*

*If I want to ask, she'll teach. (FGD2)*

One accessibility issue identified by participants from FBO #3 was that the women's empowerment conference was held in a community about 30 minutes away from where many of the service users live. I visited the community where the conference was held, Akosombo. It is an upper-middle class community, home to the country's largest hydro-electric power generation plant. The communities where the service users come from – Akrade, Atimpoku, and Frankadua – are much smaller, lower income, farming communities. Transportation between Akosombo and the other communities is limited to small mini-vans, known as *tro-tros*. Private buses or mini-vans would be required to transport large groups of people to Akosombo. However, as the following quotes explain, the transportation arranged by the FBO to Akosombo was barely adequate. Holding the conference in an affluent community over 30 minutes away from the lower-income communities where most of the participants reside created barriers and reduced the accessibility of the conference.

*But the only, because there was bus, busing us from here to Akosombo, and to bring us back, and we were even refreshed, we were given something to. It would have been better if those in maybe Akrade here, would have something like that here, Akosombo would also have, so that there wouldn't be that kind of busing people, bringing them back. Just walk from your house, come to the centre and then go back.... Locally so it's easier for people to have access. To have access to it. Just walk from your house, you can... Those around, for us they are speaking they can even hear from their homes and that will bring them in the next day. (P3F3)*

*They want to invite so many people, but when it's happened like this, the car that's taking them to other areas, it's only few. So when they come to their town or community, they'll be much present, invite more people to come to the Frankadua township. (FGD3)*

Two other related issues at FBO #3 were the dates chosen for the conference and the frequency of the conference. Certain days are not convenient for the target audience since they have to attend the local market to sell their produce. If the organizers of the conference do not take into consideration the availability of the potential service users, they risk decreasing the accessibility of the conference and also reducing the number of conference participants.

*But as it was in the morning, people came although but I think [if] it was scheduled at a time that people do not go to the market, the number will increase than the day that they scheduled at the time that people go to the market. (P1F3)*

Having workshops on a more regular basis was another recommendation put forward by participants from FBO #3 to increase the accessibility of the training.

*It's like the Whites or those people who come to teach them, maybe once in a year or twice. So in this case she's saying, if maybe they can have a group here, where once in a while, not even frequently, they could be taking them to these activities. (FGD3)*

While the participants may have good ideas about how to improve the services provided, speaking to staff and sharing their ideas is not something most of the participants find easy to do.

*Not really, not as much as I know. Not as much, I've talked about it. Just because the question came [when asked if she had ever shared her ideas to the staff in charge]. (P3F3)*

*We can't say it [give suggestions]... They [the staff] will have to decide. (FGD1)*

*It's hard for me to talk to them [staff]. (P1F1)*

Some participants from FBO #3 relate that if they are asked about their opinions, they would be willing to share.

*They [elders] would be willing to share because elders in the community would be happy to see their community develop.... Now in my school, I ever spoke to some people, there's a reverend sister in charge of some girls, they gave scholarships to some girls in Atimpoku and the last time she asked me, the people, those who are sponsoring the program, asked what is the next need they feel should come in. So I remembered talking to her about a library for the school or something, a community library. (P3F3)*

*I would say they can see the leaders of this community and then ask them their needs and even the individuals in the community, too. (P2F3)*

Interestingly, though this participant shared her opinion when asked by a staff member about what could be done to improve the services being provided, the FBO did not act upon that suggestion. The participant asked for a community library several years prior, but there were no plans in place to build the library. Only one participant reported a success story where she shared her concerns with the staff and had them addressed immediately.

*So one day, I don't know what happened, I just got up and went to Madame's office and I said, Madame, what I'm doing [dress making class], I don't like, I want to change. Because they give us the chance that when you know that you cannot do the thing or you are not happy, it's not compulsory. You can change to any of the two areas left [hairstyling and bead making] that you feel that you can do it. So I told Madame I want to change and she said, ok, where do you want to pass? I said I want to go to the beauty class. Ok, no problem, if you like beauty and you're interested, go and bring your machine to the office. (P2F2)*

### **Experiencing success.**

As this study is looking at the perspectives and experiences of FBO service users, one of the most important areas to explore are the participants' stories of success. What are the FBOs doing that help the service users experience success? How do the participants define success? Many participants spoke proudly of the new skills they learned through the services offered by the FBO.

*Oh yes, I was interested. They taught us how to make ice cream, yogurt, I was interested*

*as a professional, you don't have to hold on to one work. I was interested, I learned one, and I was also interested in the liquid soap, though I had experience some years back, this one has come to add up to what I know and since then I can testify that I don't actually buy liquid soap from the market. (P3F3)*

*When she got involved, she saw that the program was very good because she's been able to learn how to sew and then the madame who teaches them how to sew is very good, so she likes it. (FGD4)*

*She says that for her, when she started with the program, she knew that those who could work or do something with their hands, it benefits them. So she got herself involved in the program expecting to have that kind of skill, so she has realized that it has really helped her and expectations are being met. (FGD4)*

*So the last year, I learnt about the fresh yogurt and the liquid soap. (P1F3)*

Earning extra income from their newly-acquired skills was something else to celebrate.

*Yes, it's helping us a lot. Because this community, we don't have any government work or a company. So as they taught us the yogurt and the liquid soap, people have been doing it to sell, people have been doing it to sell. So it helped them get or to earn income because, had they not been that conference, you'll not be doing anything, you'll just be in the house. So through the yogurt and the liquid soap, it helped people earn money. (P1F3)*

The participants from FBO #3 spoke of their experience learning about women's empowerment and gaining a newfound sense of self-confidence.

*No, I felt happy. Because, as I said, it gave me some spirit of confidence that I can do what a man does. Even without the support of my husband, I can also support the home. As a woman, I also have the power to do something. So I also felt happy about it.... I have some confidence. (P1F3)*

*Yes. First, let's say this is Africa. Women, like women didn't participate in education, they were denied of education, saying that the place of the woman is the kitchen. But now, we overcome that sense of powerlessness. Women are well educated nowadays, too. So by the end of the program, I also felt, I also have the power to do something. Even more than a man. (P2F3)*

Participants from FBO #2 were proud to have learned how to relate to others better, in addition to the trade skills they learned.

*And you also feel good when you're learning, when you're learning your skill. (FGD2)*

*You will learn how to behave yourself and learn how to talk to others. If you don't know*



*how to cook, you will learn something. (FGD2)*

*I learn, I learn how to respect each others. And I learn how to talk to a human being. And they choose to teach us a lot of things here, how to dress, how to do everything good, so as to that one we like it.... I will tell them that this place is good because we learn more things that like, a lot of us here, like the time that we came here, we don't know how to talk to each others, and a lot of things. If you come and learn that and you go out, your parents will know you've learned something from here because at that time you don't show respect, now you know how to talk. (P1F2)*

Growing in their Christian faith was important for the participants from FBOs #1 and #3. They viewed their growth as Christians as a sign of success and something for which they were grateful for.

*Maybe we were out there, we wouldn't have been Christians, they taught us how to worship God, they've given us everything, sent us to school, give us food, give us clothes, everything. (FGD1)*

*We are happy to be in a Christian home. (FGD1)*

*They were taught how to improve in their Christian life and they allowed them to ask questions and to fulfill within themselves and to explore themselves and to ask questions. They were so lovely so they were able to build up. (FGD3)*

A participant from FBO #2, who had lived on the streets prior to being introduced to the vocational training offered by the FBO, summed up what all the participants seemed to be getting at when talking about their success.

*And now I'm able to fight for my future. (P1F2)*

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The purpose of this research is to explore the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based NGOs (FBOs) in Ghana. I interviewed participants from four diverse FBOs and developed emergent themes using the Constructivist Grounded Theory coding methodology as explained by Charmaz (2007). Through line-by-line and focused coding, I identified six themes: appreciating what the FBO offers; being limited; dealing with challenges; wanting to learn more; accessing services; and, experiencing success.

In this section, I analyze the data related to these six themes in relation to previous related research and the tenets of Critical Theory, with an emphasis on the role of power, privilege, and social justice. After analyzing the data, I consider the implications for broader social work practice and research.

### **Meeting (Some) Needs Without Partnership**

Najam (1996) states that meeting the needs of the community members themselves is meant to be a primary goal of NGOs. Across the four FBOs researched in this study, the participants expressed that their respective FBO was providing a service or program that met at least some of their needs. Whether the need was job training (FBOs #2 and #4); providing opportunities to further their education (FBO #1); or, learning about women's empowerment and consequently feeling more empowered (FBO #3), the FBOs in this study were working to meet some of the needs of the participants. There was a clear appreciation among most of the participants of the services and programs being offered by the FBOs. In general, most of the participants have had positive experiences engaging with the FBOs. The appreciation and overall positive experiences of the participants suggests that they are benefitting in some way from the FBOs. Indeed, many of the participants spoke of the pride of learning something, whether a

trade, a skill, or an understanding of their own self-worth, that has and will continue to benefit their lives.

However, as was discussed above, NGO/FBO downward accountability includes the concept of partnership, where the FBO and the community members are in a relationship of equals (Whitmore & Wilson, 1997), working together to develop and deliver relevant services and programs. In the present study, when participants were asked about their ideas for improving the services offered, few of the participants indicated that they either have already shared their suggestions with the FBO staff or that they would be willing to bring up their suggestions and concerns with the staff. From their demeanour and words, the participants seemed hesitant if not unwilling to share their opinions with the staff at the FBO. Only one of the participants, from FBO #3, indicated that a staff member had solicited her opinion about ways the FBO could help the community. In this case, the participant shared that a library would be a benefit to the community, but several years after that exchange, there are yet to be any plans in place to provide the library.

In the case of the participants from FBO #4, who did bring up their suggestions, they received a negative response from the staff that now discourages them from even attempting to bring up any further concerns or suggestions.

*And she quite remembers sometime they went to [the staff], asking for machines, but then [the staff] got angry.... So, now they are scared to go to [the staff] to ask for anything.*

In the staff-service user relationship, the staff – who are paid and typically more educated – are the clear decision-makers. The service users – who are dependent on the free services offered to them – are not in a position to bargain or make demands of the FBO. If the service users are to feel free to share their opinions and suggestions on ways to improve the services and programs being offered, the FBO staff need to create a safe space where the service users can speak freely

without fear of retaliation or pushback. The power lies in the hands of the FBO staff and thus they have the responsibility to reach out to the service users to solicit their feedback.

In addition to the difference in power and privilege between the staff and the service users, there are also the cultural roles and expectations that impact the ability of the service users to participate in the development, delivery, and evaluation of the programs. A number of Ghanaians – graduate students at UG, FBO staff, service users – explained to me that children in Ghana are taught to respect the opinions and decisions of their elders, regardless of whether they are right. Consequently, it can be particularly challenging for a service user in Ghana, already in a weaker position compared to the staff who wield authority, to speak up and express their needs when the staff assert themselves. Many of the participants in this study described relationships with the staff that sounded more like patronage-client and less like partnership (Miraftab, 1997). The participants were both vulnerable and powerless (Bawole & Langnel, 2016) in the face of the staff's decisions.

I had to check myself when making my observations about the staff-service user relationships. My social location – as a Canadian-born male with a post-secondary education – affords me many opportunities to speak up and share my feedback with authority figures, especially when I disagree with how things are being done. As I observed the interactions between staff and service users, I had to remind myself that the way I was used to interacting with authority figures would not be culturally appropriate in the local context.

To avoid making culturally-biased judgements, I relied on listening carefully to the way the service users talked about the staff. The service users generally seemed to get along with the staff, though when it came to participating in program development and evaluation, they did not seem to have an expectation that they would be listened to. The participants were receiving free

services in a school-like environment, which may have led the participants to equate the FBO programs and services with school. Students in Ghana generally do not have the opportunity to make demands or contradict their teacher due to complex hierarchal and cultural traditions, so it is possible the participants felt they should just be quiet and accept the free services the FBO provided for them. Indeed, the participants indicated that the existing services were meeting some of their needs. However, despite meeting some of their needs, the FBOs in this study did not engage in meaningful partnership with their service users.

### **Being Close to the Community**

When participants spoke about their appreciation of the staff and the FBOs' efforts to provide relevant services and programs, it was clear that their appreciation was based on the positive relationship between the staff and the service users. During the coding phase, I found multiple examples of participants describing the FBO as a "family" and the staff as "parents." Moreover, many participants expressed concern for the well-being of staff, particularly whether they were perceived to be overworked and underpaid.

*We want it [the number of instructors] to be two because sometimes this woman [the current instructor] choose to suffer and tired, but it is her work, so she to continue to doing it. (P1F2)*

*I have to say that the staff money is not enough.... I think it's good to give them [the staff] enough money.... And we need the one who will help them to get their salary, really. (P1F1)*

*The staff here are friendly, too, and they're like our parents. And here we are like family. (FGD2)*

Along with having a close relationship with the service users, the staff appear to have a good understanding of local conditions and the needs of the service users, supporting Lipsky's (2011) description of one of the characteristics of FBOs. The local leader of FBO #3 in Akraide, for example, has lived in the community for more than 20 years. After observing the low number of

women attending the mixed gender leadership conferences being held by the FBO every year, she spoke with women in the community and later made the recommendation to the head office that a women's leadership and empowerment conference be implemented. By adjusting to the local conditions, the FBO is now able to attract significantly more female service users than before.

From my field observations at FBO #2, I noted how close the "house mother" (the lead female front line staff member) was to each of the service users, young women ranging in age from 15 to 22. Though the title "house mother" was used colloquially, I observed stereotypical, "traditional" (in the Ghanaian context) "motherly" behaviour exhibited by the staff member: she was affectionate with the service users and responded to their unique personalities, but she was also quick to admonish them when they did something wrong. In conversations with this staff member, I noted how she seemed to understand the challenges the service users face before, during, and after their nine-month training experience at the FBO. She would often remind the service users of why they were at the FBO (in essence, to learn job skills that would allow them to avoid the hard and dangerous labour of being a head porter in the market) and would share stories of previous service users who had experienced success and setbacks. Similar to the local leader at FBO #3, the house mother at FBO #2 had a very good understanding of the local conditions (Lipsky, 2011).

Moreover, each of the FBOs involved in this study has been associated with their respective community for a number of years, ranging from a low of 12 years (FBO #3) to over 20 years (FBO #1), which is consistent with Nishimuko's (2009) characterization of FBOs as having deep and long-term rootedness in their communities. When the leadership of the Catholic FBO #4 changed, the current director was offered support by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of

Accra, which has general authority over all Catholic FBOs in Accra, to relocate to a more spacious location, approximately a 45-minute walk from its current location in Agbogbloshie. The director, noting that there would be barriers to accessibility if the program was relocated at such a distance from the community it was intended to serve, made the decision to preserve the FBO in its current location. He made this choice despite the high building density in Agbogbloshie and resultant limited room for physical expansion of the program. FBO #4 is rooted in the community it serves and remaining in the community is a priority for the director of FBO #4.

The combination of knowing the local needs and being a long-term part of the community likely factors into service users' appreciation of the work of staff. Moreover, this combination allows the FBO to be "embedded" in the local community as opposed to being more distant and formal (Tomalin, 2012). While power dynamics, including cultural traditions, can create a sharp division between staff and service users, the embeddedness of the FBO in the local community appears to soften the impact of this division, promoting a more family-like environment within the FBO and facilitating a generally positive experience for service users.

### **Lacking Accountability to Service Users**

Lipsky (2011) claims that one of the comparative disadvantages of FBOs over secular NGOs is that the former are less accountable and transparent. When an FBO is accountable to its service users, the latter will be involved in determining which programs and services are offered. Many participants in this study spoke of being limited by the services and programs offered by the FBO. While the participants appreciate what the FBO does for them, they also have many unmet needs that they would like the FBO to address. Aside from one participant at FBO #2 who was able to switch training programs to suit her preferences, none of the participants reported

being able to successfully ask for different services to meet the emerging needs of the community.

The low accountability of the FBOs included in this study is clear when Bawole and Langnel's (2016) concise definition of NGO downward accountability of "answerability to beneficiaries" (p. 921) is used as the standard. In Bawole and Langnel's (2016) study of accountability in an NGO operating in northern Ghana, the authors report that the service users were typically treated as mere "end-users" who had little say in the planning and development of services (p. 927). Similarly, the participants in this study report significant challenges speaking with staff about their concerns and suggestions, ranging from feeling that it was not their place to make suggestions – "*We can't say it – they [the staff] will have to decide*" (FGD1) – to facing backlash for mentioning their opinions:

*And she quite remembers sometime they went to [the staff], asking for machines, but then [the staff] got angry.... So now they are scared to go to [the staff] for anything" (FGD4).*

In a situation where an FBO is downwardly accountable, the staff and the service users should be on equal footing (Whitmore & Wilson, 1997). The situations described by the service users in this study reflect a strong top-down model where the staff are the experts (Flint & Meyer zu Natrup, 2014). Though the staff may be familiar with local conditions and may think they know what the community members want, understanding the aspirations of the local community is challenging – oftentimes when NGO staff ask the community what they want, the staff "tend to hear only what they want to hear" (Najam, 1996, p. 345). Without any mechanism to hold the FBO accountable, the intended beneficiaries have no choice but to go along with the program (Najam, 1996).

What also came through during the interviews and focus groups was that the service users rarely felt that they were asked by the staff about their opinions or feedback on the services and



programs offered. However, it is important to note that none of the participants identified the lack of consultation by the staff as a problem. This may relate to the power imbalances discussed above, where those in authority are typically seen as having the unconditional right to make whatever decisions they judge to be most prudent. Moreover, all of the programs and services offered by the FBOs in this study are free-of-charge. Since they are not paying for these services, the participants may not feel that it is their place to expect to be consulted or to demand for more.

Most of the participants at FBO #1 seemed to go to great lengths to avoid saying anything critical about the FBO; participants in the focus group appeared to censor each other when one would begin to mention a potentially critical comment. The participants from FBO #1 are long-term residents of the FBO and depend on the FBO for all aspects of their livelihood – shelter, food, clothing, education, transportation – thus the service users are in a very weak position to bargain with or make demands of the staff. The FBO has significant power over their service users, which can lead to the FBO dominating their service users (Haugaard, 2010). Wellens and Jegers (2014) likewise report from their study of non-profits in Belgium that service users seemed more afraid to complain about the NGO as their dependence on the provided services increased. When a service user depends on an NGO for their entire livelihood – as in the case of the service users of FBO #1 – receiving honest feedback is challenging.

The service users from the other three FBOs are not completely dependent on the FBO as are the service users from FBO #1; however, they have limited-to-no other options to receive the same free services in their local community. In other words, the service users from FBOs #2-4 could refuse the services offered, but they would likely not be able to find an equivalent, free program in their local community. Since the participants generally saw the training provided as a way to help them “*fight for [their] future*” (P1F2), walking away from the only free services and

programs that are accessible to them would not really be a realistic choice. Thus, in a sense, the service users were dependent on the FBOs and could not risk losing access to the services by being disruptive and demanding to participate in the design or evaluation of the services. If the participants are to share their opinions, it would be up to the FBO to ensure they have space to share while also feeling confident they will not be reprimanded

### **Being Partially Downward Accountable?**

While the existing literature speaks about the benefits and need for greater NGO/FBO downward accountability, the data I collected in my study raised the question for me, what, if any, are the benefits of being partially downward accountable? None of the four FBOs in this study have clearly defined mechanisms, whether formal or informal, to evaluate their downward accountability, a necessary attribute of an organization that aims to practice downward accountability (Sawandi & Thomson, 2014). On the one hand, the local leadership of each organization reported that they consult with their service users and are providing services that they need. From the perspective of the service users, however, the FBOs are not downwardly accountable because they are not answerable to them, their beneficiaries (Bawole & Langnel, 2016). The service users do not feel they can share feedback, let alone hold the FBOs accountable for their actions.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of the service users interviewed in this study report being happy with what the FBO does for them and indicate a feeling of empowerment thanks to what they have learned at the FBO. The three key features of downward accountability are accountability, empowerment, and participation (O'Dwyer & Unerman, 2010). From what the participants in this study reported, the four FBOs are empowering their service users by teaching them important job-skills and helping them to learn about their self-worth and inherent dignity as

women. Thus, it could be argued that the FBOs are partially downward accountable insofar as they are meeting one of the three key characteristics (empowerment) of downward accountability. Is it fair to say, then, that the FBOs, as partially downward accountable organizations, are benefitting the communities they serve? Do the FBOs need to meet all three characteristics of downward accountability to be judged as beneficial to the local community?

Nearly all of the participants in this study expressed a desire to learn more – whether to learn a new job-related skill, about women’s empowerment, or basic literacy. When an FBO is operating long-term in a community and providing or facilitating training, to what extent should the FBO adapt to meet the changing needs of their service users? The participants from FBO #4 expressed their desire to have the FBO provide housing and child care to ease the burden on the participants so they can focus more on learning their trade at the FBO. If housing and child care are current needs of the service users, should the FBO adjust itself to meet those needs? Are there any reasonable limits to what the FBO should aim to provide to meet the needs of their service users?

Staff from all four FBOs highlighted challenges with securing funding, thus the question perhaps may be, given the limited funding of FBOs, is it imperative that FBOs try to meet *all* of the needs and wants of their service users, or is meeting *some* of the needs and wants of service users sufficient? The FBOs may not be downwardly accountable in the sense that Najam (1996) describes if they do not include their intended beneficiaries in the planning, development, and feedback processes, but if the FBO is meeting some of the expressed needs of the community – which all four FBOs in this study are – then could the FBO be described as being partially downward accountable yet still beneficial to the community? In this study, all of the FBOs were empowering their service users, but the level of accountability and service user participation was

limited, meaning the FBOs met one out of the three key characteristics of downward accountability (O'Dwyer & Unerman, 2008). Given how challenging it is to meet the fulfill the multiple accountabilities required of an NGO (Bawole & Langnel, 2016), perhaps being partially downward accountable is a good enough target for FBOs.

### **Vulnerability and Faith**

Most of the participants expressed appreciation for the work of the staff and the services and programs offered by the FBOs, and some participants even spoke about their concern of the well-being of staff, including whether the staff were feeling stressed, overworked, or underpaid. There were very few criticisms of either the staff or the FBOs as organizations – a phenomenon previously noted by Agyemang et al. (2009) and Unerman and O'Dwyer (2010), who point out that the vulnerability of the service users means it is unlikely that they will criticize an NGO providing any kind of service to the local community. This reluctance to criticize is a potential pitfall of downward accountability (Bawole & Langnel, 2016). Even when NGOs are willing to receive feedback from their service users, the vulnerability of the service users may mean very few critical opinions are expressed, thus reducing the effectiveness of seeking feedback from service users.

In this study, 22 out of the 24 participants did not have full-time, formal employment. Moreover, 20 out of the 24 participants did not have any post-secondary education and a number did not complete their primary education. It would not, therefore, be a stretch to say that the majority of the participants were in vulnerable positions, dependent on the FBO for the services and programs being offered. Given what Agyemang et al. (2009) and O'Dwyer and Unerman (2010) report from their respective studies on the relationship between higher levels of vulnerability and lesser likelihood of NGO criticism, it is not surprising that there were few

criticisms levelled at the FBOs by the participants.

However, another factor that may have contributed to the positive reviews of the FBOs is the primacy of the Christian faith in Ghanaian society. As I noted in the section on my positionality above, I am both a “cradle” Catholic and a “practising” Catholic. As an insider to the Christian faith (recognizing that Christianity is by no means homogenous and encompasses vastly different expressions of the faith), my understanding of being a Christian includes forgiving and avoiding judgement, as well as appreciating what God has provided for us. I suspect that these thoughts, common among Christians, influenced the participants to avoid being critical of the FBOs.

Indeed, Ghana is a very religious country, sometimes even described as the most religious country in the world (Mpoke Bigg, 2017). Large outdoor billboards are found along the main roads in Accra advertising upcoming Christian conferences. Politicians frequently reference God and their Christian faith. In *tro-tros*, the ubiquitous mini-vans used for public transportation, it is a common phenomenon for a person to board the vehicle with a Bible in hand and then, with the permission of the driver, spend 10 to 15 minutes preaching to the vehicle occupants. Indeed, it is not uncommon for one or more persons to give money to the impromptu preacher at the end of the sermon. Any night of the week at the University of Ghana, Legon, it is possible to find a number of groups of students praying out-loud outside on a field designated for prayer groups. Numerous television and radio stations, websites, and newspapers are owned by and directed towards Christians. Religion, particularly Christianity, is everywhere in Accra and the surrounding regions. Several participants spoke about their appreciation of the Christian character of the FBO:

*Ok, the best thing I like here is our church service, especially church service.... (P1F2)*

*I hoped to hear from women of God, their development in the Christian life, testimonies of people, how to go about, you know Christian life is up and down, hoping to hear experiences from women of God and pastors of God and then other teachings. (P3F3)*

*And also, we have service, we have church service here, that if you are a Christian, you can join them, to the service. That makes me excited about this place. (P2F2)*

*We are happy to be in a Christian home. (FGD1)*

*Really they did it nice, because everything that they said, they relate it to the Bible, so that you know they are not just saying it, they relate it to the Bible so you can know that this person in the Bible was like this. (P1F3)*

*Before they went to the conference, they hoped that at the end of the program, she will meet other Christians and learn from them and that will improve upon her Christian life. (FGD3)*

The only participants who did not speak about faith were from FBO #4. Coincidentally, the participants from FBO #4 also had the most criticisms of their FBO, though at the same time they spoke about their appreciation for the services being offered.

This study did not ask participants about their level of religious commitment, thus it would not be possible to determine whether there is a causal link between low religious commitment and a willingness to criticize the FBO. However, as noted above, all of the participants are Christians and Christianity is a religion that promotes forgiveness as well as thanksgiving to God for the blessings received. Though no causal link can be established from the results of this study between the role of participants' faith in their lives and their limited criticisms of the FBOs, it is nevertheless important to take the influential role of faith in Ghanaian society into consideration when reviewing the data.

### **Implications for Social Work**

At FBOs #1 and #3, there was one social worker in a management position in each respective organization. FBOs #2 and #4 did not have social workers on staff, but, as with the other two FBOs, they worked with the local Department of Social Welfare when determining

potential new beneficiaries. As such, social workers play an important role in the functioning of the four FBOs included in this study. The implications from this study for social work practice, however, extend beyond each of these four FBOs and into the wider NGO/FBO community.

**Social workers as mediators.**

Service users of NGOs and FBOs are inherently at a power disadvantage as the staff have more knowledge than intended beneficiaries as well as controlling the acceptance to and rejection from the program of those same intended beneficiaries. There is little in the way of stopping an FBO from terminating its relationship with a service user if the FBO determines the service user is no longer eligible for services. There is also little in the way of stopping a staff member from determining that a highly critical service user is suddenly ineligible for services.

Social workers, therefore, can play an important intermediary role when working with NGOs/FBOs and intended beneficiaries. Since the former often do not do an adequate job of engaging the latter in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of their programs and services, social workers can work to amplify the voices of intended beneficiaries such that those in leadership positions at the FBOs take notice. If intended beneficiaries are concerned with experiencing backlash or retribution for being critical of the services being offered, the social worker can act as a mediator and share the concerns of the intended beneficiaries without identifying information with the management of the FBO. In this way, the potential beneficiary can speak freely with the social worker without fear of reprisal, while the staff at the FBO benefit from hearing the honest opinions of their intended beneficiaries.

**Social workers as information gatherers.**

Of course, in order for social workers to be able to share the opinions and concerns of intended beneficiaries with the relevant FBO, the social worker needs to be able to gather

information from the intended beneficiaries. To do this effectively, the social worker also needs to build trust with the intended beneficiaries. As noted above, there is one social worker in a position of management at both FBO #1 and FBO #3. None of the participants from FBO #1 or FBO #3 reported that they had been asked from the social worker about their opinions or concerns, nor did any of the participants report that they had shared their opinions with the social worker at their respective FBO. This is not to criticize the social workers at FBOs #1 and #3, nor is it to imply that the social workers are not doing their job well. From my observations, as managers, neither social worker worked closely enough with the intended beneficiaries to be in a position to gather relevant information from them. Both social workers appeared to be dedicated to their jobs and interested in working to benefit the communities they served, yet removed from the front-line service that would afford them the opportunity to directly listen to the concerns of the service users.

As all of the participants in this study have ideas about ways to improve the programs and services offered by the FBOs but are also hesitant to share those ideas with the staff, what appears to be needed is for social workers to fill the gap in knowledge transfer and be the link between the management and the intended beneficiaries. Social workers already have the necessary skills – relationship building, effective communication, reporting – so all that remains is for them to employ those skills in service of the intended beneficiaries.

### **Social workers as social justice advocates.**

As was already explained, intended beneficiaries of FBOs are at a power disadvantage in comparison with the staff at the FBOs. That being the case, social workers can function as social justice advocates by working to promote downward accountability within the FBOs.

Notwithstanding that FBOs are able to meet some of the needs of service users without engaging



in authentic partnerships, as suggested by this study, there is significant room for FBOs to improve their partnering with community members and intended beneficiaries. Social workers can advocate for greater partnering and more meaningful partnerships on the part of FBOs, whether they are staff members of the relevant FBO or working within the community where the FBO is engaged.

**Social workers as community organizers.**

Similarly, recognizing that many service users are hesitant to speak up and share their concerns with locally-engaged FBOs, social workers can work to mobilize community members so that they can bring forward their concerns with confidence to the FBO. As community organizers, social workers can help community members determine what their priorities are and then develop ways in which they can effectively communicate those priorities to managers at the FBO in a way that will encourage the managers to take the priorities seriously. Since the FBOs typically target under-served and underprivileged populations – in many cases in Ghana, that would be women and girls who are illiterate or poorly educated – social workers can use their power and privilege to make sure the concerns of the people who are marginalized reach the ears of those with decision-making capabilities.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to explore the perspectives and experiences of service users of faith-based organizations in Ghana, including service users' perspectives and experiences of the FBO's engagement with the local community in service development, delivery, and evaluation. From the seven individual interviews and four focus groups of service users, what emerged is that the participants generally have positive experiences with the FBO and appreciate the services and staff at the FBO. Most of the participants describe a sense of empowerment stemming from learning new employment-related skills and gaining new knowledge about women's potential and inherent abilities. At the same time, all of the participants indicate that there is more that they would like from the FBOs: more staff, more services, more programs, and more opportunities. Thus, while appreciating what is currently offered and the staff who currently work there, the participants have as-yet unmet needs and unfulfilled aspirations.

To the question posed in the Methodology section "Does the FBO meet the expectations and needs of the service user?" the answer from the data would be "partially." From the perspective of the service users, the services being offered are indeed relevant, but they do not meet all of their needs. The general consensus among the participants is that it is not easy or without negative consequences to share their opinions with the staff at the FBO on the programs and services offered. While they are willing to share, they typically will wait to be asked by the staff, which usually does not happen. Complex cultural, religious, and hierarchal power dynamics seem to be at play that make such interaction particularly challenging. Indeed, there seems to be a gap in communication that limits the FBO's ability to meet all of the needs and wants of their intended beneficiaries. According to the participants, staff at the FBOs typically do not seek feedback from the service users about the program, and service users usually will not

share their feedback unless asked by staff. This communication failure does not result in a negative experience for service users nor does it give them a negative perspective of the FBO, but it does limit how beneficial the FBO is to the service users.

The FBOs in this study appear to be partially downward accountable and the participants generally seem to feel better prepared to face future challenges thanks to their newly acquired skills and knowledge. From the perspective of the majority of the participants in this study, the FBOs are benefitting the community but there remains plenty of room for improvement.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations, beginning with the social location of the researcher. As an outsider of Ghanaian society, I was not able to ensure that the comments given by the participants were not influenced by my position of power as a member of a dominant, privileged society (Canada). While I attempted to build rapport with the participants prior to conducting the interviews (Charmaz, 2007), the reality is that the participants may not have felt comfortable talking with an outsider or may have provided comments intended to solicit both compassion and a commitment on my behalf to provide assistance to the organization. In more than one instance, even after explaining that my role was limited to hearing their stories, a participant asked whether I would be able to help the service users by addressing the service gaps left by the FBO.

In a similar way, I was limited by my minimal understanding of Ghanaian culture, including norms involving interactions between males and females and between authority figures and those who depend on them for assistance. I attempted to address these cultural barriers by speaking with my thesis supervisor, who is originally from Ghana, and participating in a number of workshop-style classes at my university that prepare students for international placements. However, despite my best attempts at learning about Ghanaian culture and norms, I am keenly

aware that I was not able to avoid mistakes and blunders in my interactions with the gatekeepers and participants. As well, I may have misinterpreted non-verbal communication cues (such as body language) both during interviews and while observing the participants in their interactions with the FBO staff.

Language also proved to be a bigger issue than originally anticipated. Two focus groups (for FBOs #3 and #4), with a total of 9 participants, were done using a translator (in the focus group for FBO #3, there were five participants and one participant acted as the translator), while the rest of the focus groups and interviews were conducted in English. The participant-translator for FBO #3 was recommended by the gatekeeper, the local pastor at the Assemblies of God church that organized the women's conferences. In the course of the focus group, it became clear that the participant-translator was getting tired of translating: on more than one occasion, a participant spoke at length and the participant-translator condensed the statement into a few lines. A professional translator may have provided a more accurate translation, however the participant-translator had a close relationship with the other participants and, from an ethical standpoint, I judged that it was better for the participants to feel comfortable than for me to get a literal, word-for-word translation.

For all the other interviews and focus groups, which were conducted in English, the participants at times seemed to have difficulty understanding the questions. Moreover, the meaning of their answers was not always clear to me as they spoke in broken English. These language issues affected the data collected and the analysis of the data.

Moreover, as I had to rely on gatekeepers within FBOs to provide me with access to participants, I was not able to ensure that the participants put forward by the gatekeepers were representative of the service users of the FBOs. The participants may, in fact, have been selected

by the gatekeepers for their positive regard of the FBO. I may not have had access to participants who may be critical of the FBO due to my reliance on gatekeepers working for the FBO, who may have been concerned about participants projecting a negative image of their place of employment, which could jeopardize the funding for the FBO and ultimately their jobs.

None of the participants could speak to the FBO's engagement with the community, aside from their own personal experiences. This made it challenging to answer my research question on the perspectives and experiences of service users of the FBO's engagement with the community. In retrospect, I realize that the hierarchy and power structures inherent in Ghanaian society make it difficult for vulnerable local community members to question the way an FBO engages with them.

While there are both Christian and Islamic faith-based organizations operating in Ghana, this study focused exclusively on Christian FBOs. The findings therefore are limited in that it does not consider the perspectives of services users from FBOs of non-Christian faith groups. Non-Christian FBOs may have different experiences with downward accountability.

As the scope of this study is limited, it will also be limited in terms of generalizability. Given the small size of the sample and the diversity of FBOs (in terms of religious affiliation, population served, programs offered, geographic location, and sources of funding among other characteristics) the experiences of service users from this study will not be generalizable to all service users of all FBOs. The study is limited to providing an insight into how service users of Christian FBOs in Ghana, specifically Greater Accra and nearby towns, experience the provision of services.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study provides a brief glimpse into the perspectives and experiences of service users

of Christian FBOs in Ghana. More exploratory studies on the experiences of service users of FBOs in Global South countries would add greater depth to the available literature. In particular, comparative studies on specific religious denominations – such as Catholic or Pentecostal – as well as on other religions – such as Islamic or Hindu – FBOs would also help researchers understand whether there are patterns of behaviour or ways of approaching NGO activities that are unique to particular religious groups and which serve as comparative advantages.

Though this study touched on service users' experiences with being consulted by the staff from the FBO, it did not look in-depth into the mechanisms of how staff and service users interact when sharing information. What this study did reveal is that many FBO service users are hesitant to share their opinions and feedback with FBO staff. Studies on the factors that increase service user feedback, including how staff solicit information and relevant cultural factors that may inhibit service user participation, may help FBOs improve their downward accountability practices.

Managers from all of the FBOs included in this study indicated that they consult with their service users prior and after offering programs and services; however, none of the FBOs has an official statement on downward accountability. A potentially fruitful avenue of exploration would be examining the relationship between having a clear statement on downward accountability, including mechanisms in place to promote service user participation, and service users' actual experiences with being consulted by the FBO. What difference, if any, does an official internal document on downward accountability at an FBO make on the experience of service users?

Finally, the results of this study raise questions about whether being partially downward accountable can still provide benefits for intended beneficiaries. It would be helpful for

researchers to examine the relationship between downward accountability and the intended beneficiaries' perceptions on how much they are benefitting. There may be a level of downward accountability that maximizes intended beneficiaries' perception of benefits, which would then be the standard towards which NGOs and FBOs would want to strive for. Further study surrounding this possibility is necessary.

**Epilogue: Reflections on Conducting International Social Work Research**

I came into the Master of Social Work program at Wilfrid Laurier University having completed an Honours Bachelor of Arts (Philosophy) at the University of Toronto, a Diploma in Child and Youth Work at Humber College (Toronto), a Graduate Certificate in Pastoral Studies at Catholic Theological Union (Chicago), and a Bachelor of Child and Youth Care at Humber College, in that order. In between these studies, I volunteered at two Catholic faith-based organizations, one in Kenya and one in Bolivia. I spent a total of nearly 19 months as a volunteer in those two countries, and my experiences there are what motivated me to undertake this study.

During my volunteer experiences, I saw first-hand both the good that FBOs can contribute to a local community as well as the challenges faced by the community members, who oftentimes, in my experience, had no say in what programs or services were being offered. My Bachelor of Child and Youth Care program taught me to recognize that service providers should work in partnership with service users and not in a paternalistic way. So, when I entered the MSW program, I asked myself, are faith-based organizations working in partnership with local community members? What do the local community members, the intended beneficiaries of the FBO, think about the services they are receiving?

I set out to explore the perspectives and experiences of service users of FBOs in Ghana with the acute awareness that I have never conducted field research before, and most certainly not in an international setting. From the very beginning of this process, my personal limitations were apparent: I had never been to Ghana before; I did not speak any of the local languages and had very limited knowledge about the local cultures; I have lighter coloured skin that people in Kenya and other African countries I visited mistook for being White, and my experience had taught me that White people were treated very differently from local people in African countries;



I had only four months within which to conduct my research; and, I would also be engaged in my field placement at a local FBO while in Ghana, so the four months were really reduced to one day a week for 17 weeks, or 17 days in total that I could use to dedicate to this study.

That last reality was what weighed on my mind the most when I went to Ghana. According to the schedule I had made for myself, I had a grand total of 17 days to find local faith-based organizations that would be willing to allow me to speak to their service users and then find service users willing and able to be interviewed in English. Fortunately, I had one connection already with the FBO where I was placed for my MSW international placement. I was also able to connect to two FBOs (#2 and #3) through people I met very early on during my time in Ghana.

FBO #4 was a long shot for me – I did not intend on having four FBOs included in my study (in fact, I originally only planned on having 8-12 participants because I anticipated that I would have difficulty recruiting more participants in the limited time I had), but I took the chance and showed up at the head office of FBO #4 and was pleasantly surprised by the positive reception I was given. I think, though this is mere speculation, that because I appeared to be White and I was coming from a Canadian university, I was granted access quicker to all the FBOs than I otherwise would have. I could be wrong in that assumption, but I have witnessed White people and those who appear to be White (including myself) being given preferential treatment over other foreigners, including other Africans, while in an African country.

Once I had gained access to the FBO, my next major concern was recruiting participants. I was interested in conducting the interviews and focus groups in English because, as an inexperienced interviewer, I did not want the added challenge of using a translator. I think I made the right decision in seeking out participants who could speak English because the two

focus groups that I conducted with the assistance of a translator were significant challenges for me. I did not use professional translators because the participants were from marginalized groups and I wanted them to be comfortable. The translator for the focus group for FBO #3 was a local community member whom the other participants knew well. The translator for FBO #4 was a colleague from the University of Ghana, with whom I had a good relationship, and who I knew had an easy-going personality that I hoped would put the participants at ease. I explained to the participants at FBO #4 the academic relationship I had with my colleague, which I think also helped put them at ease.

As someone inexperienced in research, particularly international research, I was unsure of the best way to recruit participants. I had prepared a poster in English that I planned on putting up at the FBOs, but the gatekeepers at each FBO were able to suggest to me potential participants, so I never used the poster. The recruitment process went much smoother and quicker than I expected. I did not tell the participants in advance that they would be paid for their participation, as I was concerned that would affect who and how many would volunteer to participate.

Paying the participants was something I decided upon in consultation with my thesis supervisor. In retrospect, I am happy I paid what I did (30 Ghanaian Cedis, which at that time was worth approximately \$9 Canadian), because I could see the participants were very appreciative to be getting something. The participants of the focus group for FBO #3, in fact, thanked me profusely, danced in joy, and even gave me hugs after I paid them for their participation. Those participants were coming from a very poor village and spoke about their financial struggles throughout the focus group. I was glad, therefore, that I had decided to pay the participants. It was the right thing to do.

Since I did not inform the participants about the stipend until they were at the sessions, I do not think the stipend had an effect on their input. What certainly had an influence was my appearance and my manner of speaking. As I noted above, I have had many experiences where people in an African country mistake me for being White. I know this happened in Ghana, too, as many people were surprised when I told them I am not White (my parents are both from Sri Lanka). Being perceived to be White likely created a bigger gap between the participants and myself than if the participants had understood that I was a racial minority in Canada. I tried to address that gap by taking time to build a relationship with them before conducting the interviews and focus groups, but I was also keenly aware of my limited time in Ghana, so I did not spend as much time on the relationships as I would have liked.

Looking back, I wish that I had waited a couple of weeks more to conduct the interviews and focus groups because I ended up spending a considerable amount of time (at least one day a week, sometimes also on Saturday) with the service users from FBOs #2 and #4, plus I spent three days a week with the service users from FBO #1. By the end of my four months in Ghana, I had developed a close relationship with the participants from FBO #2 and had a good relationship with the participants from FBO #4. I conducted the interviews and focus groups more-or-less at the start of those relationships, however, so I did not benefit from having the close relationship that I ended up developing with them. I think my data would have been different had I waited – the participants for the focus group at FBO #2, for example, were quiet and appeared shy when I interviewed them. By the end of my four months in Ghana, I had a very close relationship with the service users from FBO #2, so I suspect the four focus group participants from FBO #2 would have been more open if I conducted the group at a later stage. Time constraints, however, forced me to interview participants as early as possible.

A challenge that I did not anticipate was that I did not have a good relationship with the lecturer at the University of Ghana who was supposed to act as my supervisor. She rarely had time for me and, when we did meet, she always seemed rushed. I had hoped to debrief with her after each interview and focus group and to get her feedback on culturally relevant interviewing techniques, but the poor relationship we had meant that I hardly checked in with her. That was a disappointment for me, but I persevered.

Transportation was another challenge. Aside from FBO #1, which was conveniently located about 30 minutes from my hostel at the University of Ghana, getting to the FBO locations was difficult. FBOs #2 and #4, located in Agbogbloshie, near central Accra, were not technically that far from where I was staying, but traffic conditions during morning rush hour meant it would take me close to an hour to get to central Accra, after which I would walk about 30 minutes in 30+ degree weather to get to the locations. That meant I would arrive at the FBOs in a bath of sweat and have to spend half an hour or more trying to cool down before actually doing anything. Returning to my hostel in the evening meant another 30 minute walk followed by an hour in rush-hour traffic leaving the city.

The four locations of FBO #3 – the head office in Tema, and the three communities, Akrade, Atimpoku, and Frankadua – required careful pre-planning to reach successfully. Since I did not have my own mode of transportation, I would wait in the *tro-tro* at the bus station to fill up before it departed. That meant I was not able to arrive any earlier than 11am at Akrade, the closest of the three towns, even if I was at the *tro-tro* station by 7am. Returning to Accra posed similar challenges, with the frequency of *tro-tros* decreasing as the day wore on. So, I had to limit my field observations at those locations due to the amount of time it took to travel there and back. The travel issues also affected my ability to build a relationship with the participants prior

to the interviews. Since Frankadua was almost three hours away from Accra and I had to return to Accra the same day, I only went once, the day that I conducted the focus group. If I had more time, I would have spent time building a relationship prior to holding the focus group.

At FBO #4, the service users were not always present, which meant that even though I visited three times before actually holding the focus group, I only met one out of the four participants prior to the focus group. That eliminated the possibility of building a relationship with the participants prior to the focus group. Later, I was able to meet with them several times when I would drop by once a week, but for the focus group, I only had a limited relationship with the participants.

Out of the 24 participants I recruited, 23 were females and one was male. It did not surprise me to have such an imbalance because three of the FBOs offered their programs and services solely to women; indeed, I was more interested in recruiting female participants to make sure this marginalized group had a chance to have their voices heard. From what I observed and was told by the gatekeepers, most of the FBOs that offer training or educational programs target women and girls. The participants from FBO #3 who spoke about feeling empowered and learning that they could do the same things as men provided me with insight into why so many FBOs would focus their efforts on helping women. As the traditionally neglected and marginalized group in society, women now stand to benefit from support offered by FBOs in Ghana.

One thing I learned about myself in this process is that it is difficult for me to separate research from action. I struggled with hearing the experiences of the participants without trying to do something to make things better. I felt, at times, somewhat useless in that I was listening to their concerns and hopes for a better future, but I could not or would not be able to do anything

to support them. It was a genuine challenge for me to remain separated from the participants that way.

Looking to the future, I now know that if I were to conduct further research, I would want to do some kind of participatory action research project, something where I can help the community members while also conducting my research. I enjoy research and academia, but I also highly value direct action. This study revealed some shortcomings of FBOs in Ghana and it was personally challenging to not intervene and get involved in improving the situation for service users. My hope is that my study at least will in some way contribute to improving the experiences of service users of faith-based organizations in Ghana.

### References

- Absolon, K. (2010). Indigenous wholistic theory: A knowledge set for practice. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 5(2), 74-87.
- Addai-Mununkum, R. (2014). Rethinking Christian religious education in Ghana: History, challenges, and prospects. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 23, 294-306. doi: 10.1080/10656219.2014.966873
- “Africa beyond aid: President Akufo-Addo.” (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/news/4210-africa-is-beyond-aid-president-akufo-addo>
- Agyemang, G., Awumbila, M., Unerman, J., & O’Dwyer, B. (2009). *NGO accountability and aid delivery*. Retrieved from <http://www.accaglobal.com/ca/en/technical-activities/technical-resources-search/2009/december/ngo-accountability-aid-delivery.html>
- Amirkhanyan, A. A., Kim, H. J., & Lambright, K. T. (2009). Faith-based assumptions about performance: Does church affiliation matter for service quality and access? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 38(3), 490-521. doi: 10.1177/0899764008320031
- Andrews, A. (2014). Downward Accountability in Unequal Alliances: Explaining NGO Responses to Zapatista Demands. *World Development*, 54, 99–113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2013.07.009>
- Arhin, A. (2016). Advancing post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals in a changing development landscape: Challenges of NGOs in Ghana. *Development in Practice*, 26(5), 555-568. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2016.1189513>
- Bailey, C. A. (2007). *A guide to qualitative field research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Banks, N, & Hulme, D. (2012). *The role of NGOs and civil society in development and poverty reduction*. Manchester: Brooks World Poverty Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.bwpi.manchester.ac.uk/resources/Working-Papers/bwpi-wp-17112.pdf>
- Bano, M. (2008). Dangerous correlations: Aid’s impact on NGOs’ performance and ability to mobilize members in Pakistan. *World Development*, 36(11), 2297-2313. doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.11.001
- Bawole, J. N., & Langnel, Z. (2016). Downward accountability of NGOs in community project planning in Ghana. *Development in Practice*, 26(7), 920-932. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2016.1210094>
- Bebbington, A. (2005). Donor-NGO relations and representations of livelihood in nongovernmental aid chains. *World Development*, 33(6), 937-950. doi:

10.1016/j.worlddev.2004.09.017

Berger, J. (2003). Religious nongovernmental organizations: An exploratory analysis. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 14(1), 15-39.

Brass, J. N. (2012). Why do NGOs go where they go? Evidence from Kenya. *World Development*, 40(2), 387-401. doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2011.07.017

Brass, J. N. (2016). *Allies or adversaries: NGOs and the state in Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Brass, J. N., Longhofer, W., Robinson, R. S., & Schnable, A. (2018). NGOs and international development: A review of thirty-five years of scholarship. *World Development*, 112, 136-149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.07.016>

Brenya, E., & Adu-Gyamfi, S. (2015). External forces on Africa's democracy and development. *Epiphany: Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies*, 8(3), 28-56.

Burchardt, M. (2013). 'We are saving the township': Pentecostalism, faith-based organisations, and development in South Africa. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 51(4), 627-651. doi: 10.1017/S0022278X13000608

Burger, R., & Owens, T. (2010). Promoting transparency in the NGO sector: Examining the availability and reliability of self-reported data. *World Development*, 38(9), 1263-1277. doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2009.12.018

Charmaz, K. (2007). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Charmaz, K. (2017a). Commentary: Constructivist grounded theory. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), 299-300. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262612>

Charmaz, K. (2017b). The power of constructivist grounded theory for critical inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(1), 34-45. doi: 10.1177/1077800416657105

Clarke, G. (2006) Faith matters: Faith-based organisations, civil society and international development. *Journal of International Development*, 18, 835-848. doi: 10.1002/jid.1317

Clarke, G. (2007). Agents of transformation? Donors, faith-based organisations and international development. *Third World Quarterly*, 28(1), 77-96. doi: 10.1080/01436590601081880

Collet, B. A. (2008). Confronting the insider-outsider polemic in conducting research with diasporic communities: Towards a community-based approach. *Refuge*, 25(1), 77-83.

Collins, J. (2004). Ghanaian Christianity and popular entertainment: Full circle. *History in Africa*, 31, 407-423.



- Crack, A. M. (2018). The regulation of international NGOs: Assessing the effectiveness of the INGO accountability charter. *Voluntas*, 29, 419-429. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9866-9>
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage Publications.
- De Cordier, B. (2009). Faith-based aid, globalisation and the humanitarian frontline: An analysis of Western-based Muslim aid organisations. *Disasters*, 33(4), 608-628. doi:10.1111/j.03613666.2008.01090.x
- Dicklitch, S., & Rice, H. (2004). The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and faith-based NGO aid to Africa. *Development in Practice*, 14(5), 660-672. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452042000239805>
- Dixon, R., Ritchie, J., & Siwale, J. (2006). Microfinance: Accountability from the grassroots. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 19(3), 405-427. doi: 10.1108/09513570610670352
- Ebrahim, A. (2003a). Accountability in practice: Mechanisms for NGOs. *World Development*, 31(5), 813-829. doi:10.1016/S0305-750X(03)00014-7
- Ebrahim, A. (2003b). Making sense of accountability: Conceptual perspectives for northern and southern nonprofits. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 14(2), 191-212.
- Edwards, M., & Hulme, D. (1996). Too close for comfort? The impact of official aid on nongovernmental organizations. *World Development*, 24(6), 961-973.
- Elbers, W., & Arts, B. (2011). Keeping body and soul together: Southern NGOs' strategic responses to donor constraints. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 77(4), 713-732. doi: 10.1177/0020852311419388
- Fee, A., Heizmann, H., & Gray, S. J. (2017). Towards a theory of effective cross-cultural capacity development: the experiences of Australian international NGO expatriates in Vietnam. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(14), 2036-2061. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1093015>
- Fernando, J. L. (2003). NGOs and production of Indigenous knowledge under the condition of postmodernity. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 590(1), 54-72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716203258374>
- Flint, A., & Meyer zu Natrup, C. (2014). Ownership and participation: Toward a development paradigm based on beneficiary-led aid. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 30(3), 273-295. doi: 10.1177/0169796X14536972
- Fowler, A. (2000). NGO futures: Beyond aid: NGDO values and the fourth position. *Third*

- World Quarterly*, 21(4), 589-603.
- Ghana. (n.d.). In *The World Factbook*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/Publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gh.html>
- GhanaWeb. (1994-2018). *Pre-colonial history*. Retrieved from <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/history/pre-colonial.php>
- Green, A., Shaw, J., Dimmock, F., & Conn, C. (2002). A shared mission? Changing relationships between government and church health services in Africa. *International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, 17, 333-353. doi:10.1002/hpm.685
- Gringeri, C., Barusch, A., & Cambron, C. (2013). Examining foundations of qualitative research: A review of social work dissertations, 2008-2010. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 49, 760-773. doi: 10.1080/10437797.2013.812910
- Harsh, M., Mbatia, P., & Shrum, W. (2010). Accountability and inaction: NGOs and resource lodging in development. *Development and Change*, 41(2), 253-278.
- Haugaard, M. (2010). Power and critical theory. *Journal of Power*, 3(1), 1-5. doi: 10.1080/17540291003647530
- Hearn, J. (2007). African NGOs: The new compradors? *Development and Change*, 38(6), 1095-1110.
- Hiranandani, V. (2011). Canadian identity: Implications for international social work by Canadians. *Critical Social Work*, 12(1), 87-100.
- Hoksbergen, R. (2005). Building civil society through partnership: Lessons from a case study of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. *Development in Practice*, 15(1), 16-27. doi: 10.1080/0961452052000321541
- Hong, Y. J. (2012). Best practices in managing faith-based organizations through charitable choice and faith-based initiatives. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 38, 130-143. doi: 10.1080/01488376.2011.615268
- Humanitarian Policy Group. (2016). *Time to let go: Remaking humanitarian action for the modern era*. London, UK: Overseas Development Institute.
- James, R. (2011). Handle with care: Engaging with faith-based organisations in development. *Development in Practice*, 21(1), 109-117. doi: 10.1080/09614524.2011.530231
- Jotie, S. N. (n.d.). *Ghana beyond aid – President Akufo-Addo charts the path, 61 years after independence*. Retrieved from <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/media-center/features/4437-ghana-beyond-aid-61-one-years-after-independence>

- Kang, J. (2010). Understanding non-governmental organizations in community development: Strengths, limitations and suggestions. *International Social Work, 54*(2), 223-237. doi: 10.1177/0020872810368396
- Kapoor, D. (2005). NGO partnerships and the taming of the grassroots in rural India. *Development in Practice, 15*(2), 210-215. doi: 10.1080/09614520500041864
- Kilby, P. (2006). Accountability for empowerment: Dilemmas facing non-governmental organizations. *World Development, 34*(6), 951-963. doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.11.009
- Koch, D. J., Dreher, A., Nunnenkamp, P., & Thiele, R. (2009). Keeping a low profile: What determines the allocation of aid by non-governmental organizations? *World Development, 37*(5), 902-918. doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2008.09.004
- Kumi Asamoah, M., Osafo, J., & Agyapong, I. (2014). The role of Pentecostal clergy in mental health-care delivery in Ghana. *Mental Health, Religion, & Culture, 17*(6), 601-614. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2013.871628>
- Lediard, D. E. (2016). *Host community narratives of volunteer tourism in Ghana: From developmentalism to social justice* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from Scholars Commons @ Laurier. (1862)
- Leurs, R. (2012). Are faith-based organisations distinctive? Comparing religious and secular NGOs in Nigeria. *Development in Practice, 22*(5-6), 704-720. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2012.685868>
- Leverly, S. (2018). *NGOS, the UN, and APA*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/international/united-nations/publications.aspx>
- Lewis, D. (1998). Development NGOs and the challenge of partnership: Changing relations between North and South. *Social Policy & Administration, 32*(5), 501-512.
- Lipsky, A. (2011). Evaluating the strength of faith: Potential comparative advantages of faith-based organizations providing health services in sub-Saharan Africa. *Public Administration and Development, 31*, 25-36. doi: 10.1002/pad.586
- Lister, S. (2003). NGO legitimacy: Technical issue or social construct? *Critique of Anthropology, 23*(2), 175-192.
- Manji, F., & O'Coill, C. (2002). The missionary position: NGOs and development in Africa. *International Affairs, 78*(3), 567-583.
- Mawdsley, E., Townsend, J. G., & Porter, G. (2005). Trust, accountability, and face-to-face interaction in North-South NGO relations. *Development in Practice, 15*(1), 77-82. doi: 10.1080/0961452052000321613

- Miraftab, F. (1997). Flirting with the enemy: Challenges faced by NGOs in development and empowerment. *Habitat International*, 21(4), 361-375.
- Mohan, G. (2002). The disappointments of civil society: The politics of NGO intervention in northern Ghana. *Political Geography*, 21, 125-154.
- Morfit, N. S. (2011). "AIDS is money": How donor preferences reconfigure local realities. *World Development*, 39(1), 64-76. doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2010.09.003
- Moyo, D. (2009). *Dead aid: Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Mpoke Bigg, M. (2017, February 28). Faith puts Ghana at the heart of global Christianity. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ghana-church/faith-puts-ghana-at-heart-of-global-christianity-idUSKBN1670UP>
- Najam, A. (1996). NGO accountability: A conceptual framework. *Development Policy Review*, 14, 339-353.
- Nishimuko, M. (2009). The role of non-governmental organisations and faith-based organisations in achieving Education for All: The case of Sierra Leone. *Compare*, 39(2), 281-295. doi: 10.1080/03057920902750525
- O'Dwyer, B., & Unerman, J. (2010). Enhancing the role of accountability in promoting the rights of beneficiaries of development NGOs. *Accounting and Business Research*, 40(5), 451-471.
- Olarinmoye, O. O. (2014). Accountability in faith-based organizations in Nigeria. *Transformation*, 31(1), 47-61. doi: 10.1177/0265378813501733
- Olson, E. (2008). Common belief, contested meanings: Development and faith-based organisational culture. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 99(4), 393-405.
- Padgett, D. K. (2008). *Qualitative methods in social work research*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Porter, G. (2003). NGOs and poverty reduction in a globalizing world: Perspectives from Ghana. *Progress in Development Studies*, 3(2), 131-145.
- Rahmani, R. (2012). Donors, beneficiaries, or NGOs: whose needs come first? A dilemma in Afghanistan. *Development in Practice*, 22(3), 295-304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2012.664622>
- Risal, S. (2014). Mismatch between NGO services and beneficiaries' priorities: examining contextual realities. *Development in Practice*, 24(7), 883-896. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2014.950190>

- Rudestam, K., & Newton, R. (2007). *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Focus on research methods: Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing & Health*, 23, 334-340.
- Sandelowski, M. (2010). What's in a name? Qualitative description revisited. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 33, 77-84. doi: 10.1002/nur.20362
- Sawandi, N., & Thomson, I. (2014). Broadening corporate accountability: An 'idealised' downward accountability model. *Procedia*, 164, 429-436.
- Schuller, M. (2007). Invasion or infusion? Understanding the role of NGOs in contemporary Haiti. *Journal of Haitian Studies*, 13(2), 67-89.
- Smock, D. (2001). *Faith-based NGOs and international peacebuilding*. Washington: United States Institute of Peace.
- Srinivas, N. (2009). Against NGOs? A critical perspective on nongovernmental action. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 38(4), 614-626. doi: 10.1177/0899764009334308
- Sternberg, E. (2010). NGOs vs. civil society: Reflections on the illiberal, the illegitimate and the unaccountable. *Economic Affairs*, 22-28.
- Subramaniam, M. (2007). NGOs and resources in the construction of intellectual realms: Cases from India. *Critical Sociology*, 33, 551-573. doi: 10.1163/156916307X189022
- Takyi, B. K., Opoku-Agyeman, C., & Kutin-Mensah, A. (2010). Religion and the public sphere: Religious involvement and voting patterns in Ghana's 2004 elections. *Africa Today*, 56(4), 62-86.
- Tomalin, E. (2012). Thinking about faith-based organisations in development: Where have we got to and what next? *Development in Practice*, 22(5-6), 689-703. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2012.686600>
- Tønnessen, A. V. (2007). Faith-based NGOs in international aid: Humanitarian agents or missionaries of faith? *Forum for Development Studies*, 34, 323-342.
- Turina, C. (2015). *City of God: The most toxic place on Earth*. Trans. Julia Smith. Venezia, Italy: Clony Editing.
- Tvedt, T. (2006a). The international aid system and the non-governmental organisations: A new research agenda. *Journal of International Development*, 18, 677-690. doi: 10.1002/jid.1304

- Tvedt, T. (2006b). Understanding the history of the international aid system and the development research tradition: The case of the disappearing religious NGOs. *Forum for Development Studies*, 2, 341-366.
- United Nations. (2018). *Chapter X: Article 71 – Charter of the United Nations*. Retrieved from <http://legal.un.org/repertory/art71.shtml>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *DPI NGO relations – About us*. Retrieved from <https://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/content/about-us-0>
- Vogel, J. P., Betrán, A. P., Widmer, M., Souza, J. P., Gülmezoglu, A. M., Seuc, A., ... Merialdi, M. (2012). Role of faith-based and nongovernment organizations in the provision of obstetric services in 3 African countries. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 207(6), 495.e1-495.e7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajog.2012.10.003>
- Wahyuni, D. (2012). The research design maze: Understanding paradigms, cases, methods and methodologies. Retrieved from [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2103082](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2103082)
- Walsh, S. (2016). Obstacles to NGOs' accountability to intended beneficiaries: the case of ActionAid. *Development in Practice*, 26(6), 706–718. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2016.1200537>
- Warkentin, B., & Sawatsky, A. (2018). Point of discourse: Reconciling Christianity and social work through critical theory. *Social Work & Christianity*, 45(2), 57-67.
- Watkins, S. C., Swidler, A., & Hannan, T. (2012). Outsourcing Social Transformation: Development NGOs as Organizations. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38(1), 285–315. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071811-145516>
- Wellens, L., & Jegers, M. (2014). Beneficiary participation as an instrument of downward accountability: A multiple case study. *European Management Journal*, 32(6), 938–949. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2014.03.004>
- Whitmore, E., & Wilson, M. (1997). Accompanying the process: Social work and international development practice. *International Social Work*, 40, 57-74.
- World Bank. (2018, September 19). *Decline of global extreme poverty continues but has slowed: World Bank* [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/09/19/decline-of-global-extreme-poverty-continues-but-has-slowed-world-bank>

### **Appendix A: Wilfrid Laurier University Informed Consent Statement**

A qualitative exploration of the perspectives and experiences of beneficiaries of faith-based NGOs in Ghana

Principal Investigator: Kevin Devotta, MSW student

Faculty Supervisor: Magnus Mfoafo-M'Carthy, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives and experiences of intended beneficiaries (service users) of faith-based organizations in Ghana. The researcher is a Laurier graduate student in the Faculty of Social Work working under the supervision of Prof. Magnus Mfoafo-M'Carthy.

#### **Information**

Participants will be asked to describe their perspectives and experiences of receiving services from the faith-based organization where they receive services. The study will take between 45 and 60 minutes to complete. Data from approximately 8-12 research participants who use the services of faith-based NGOs will be collected for this study.

- As a part of this study you will be audio-recorded for research purposes. You have the right to refuse being recorded. Only Kevin Devotta will have access to these recordings and information will be kept confidential. You will be able to preview these recordings. The recordings will be transcribed by December 15, 2018.
- The recordings will not be used for any additional purposes without your additional permission.
- In order to participate in this study you will need to pay for transportation to the research site. You will not be reimbursed for this cost.

#### **Risks**

As a result of your participation in this study you may experience some discomfort in terms of revealing your perspective and experience with the faith-based organization in front of other participants. The following safeguards will be used to minimize any discomfort: the recording session will be in a private location, without the presence of any staff from the faith-based organization. Your comments will not be linked to you in any way in the research.

You are free to discontinue the study at any time and to choose not to respond to any question without loss of compensation.

#### **Benefits**

Participants may benefit from the participation in this research project by providing information that may help improve the way faith-based organizations respond to the needs of their service users. The research will contribute to the body of literature/knowledge on NGO downward accountability.

#### **Confidentiality**

The confidentiality/anonymity of your data will be ensured by assigning a code to your name so that your name is not connected with your comments. The data will be stored on a password-protected computer and on a password-protected recording device.

- Confidentiality may be broken when children are being described as being harmed by staff at the FBO.
- The de-identified data will be kept until May 2019 and will then be destroyed by the principal investigator.
- Identifying information will be stored separately from the data and will be kept until May 2019 and will then be destroyed by the principal investigator.

- The anonymous data will be stored indefinitely and may be reanalyzed in the future as part of a separate project (i.e., secondary data analysis).
- While in transmission on the internet, the confidentiality of data cannot be guaranteed.
- Only aggregate results will be published/presented.
- If you consent, quotations will be used in write-ups/presentations and will not contain information that allows you to be identified.

### Compensation

For participating in this study you will receive 30 Cedis even if you withdraw prior to the study completion.

### Contact

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study you may contact the researcher, Kevin Devotta, at [devo2290@mylaurier.ca](mailto:devo2290@mylaurier.ca) or 020-977-6531.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board (REB#5676), which receives funding from the [Research Support Fund](#). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Jayne Kalmar, PhD, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 3131 or [REBChair@wlu.ca](mailto:REBChair@wlu.ca).

### Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or participate in any activity you choose. Due to the anonymity of the data, if you withdraw from the study it is not possible to have your data removed/destroyed.

### Feedback And Publication

The results of this research might be published/presented in a thesis, book, journal article, conference presentation, or class presentation.

- Only aggregate findings and no individual, non-anonymous responses will be reported.
- The results of this research may be made available through Open Access resources.
- An executive summary of the findings from this study will be available by June 1, 2018.

You can request the executive summary by emailing Kevin Devotta at [devo2290@mylaurier.ca](mailto:devo2290@mylaurier.ca).

### Consent

I have read and understand the above information. YES ☐ NO ☐

I have received a copy of this form. YES ☐ NO ☐

I agree to participate in this study. YES ☐ NO ☐

I agree to have to allow Kevin Devotta to use direct quotes from this interview in his publications (my name will not be linked to the quotes). YES ☐ NO ☐

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide**

1. How would you describe your experience with receiving services from the FBO?
  - a. How do you find the services provided?
    - i. Could you describe your perspective of the services offered? Are they helpful? Do they meet your needs? Could you explain more?
    - ii. Are there services you wished the FBO would provide?
      1. Have you personally ever spoken to staff at the FBO about those services? If so, what response did you get? Were the staff willing to discuss the possibility of providing those services?
2. How would you describe the FBO's involvement with the community in developing, delivering, and evaluating the services they offer?
  - a. Could you describe your understanding of how the FBO works with the community to create and develop its services?
  - b. Could you describe your understanding of how the FBO works with the community to provide its services?
  - c. Could you describe your understanding of how the FBO works with the community to get feedback and check the usefulness of its services?
  - d. How do you think the community sees the FBO? How would the community describe the FBO?

**Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

1. What was your experience like the first time you came to the FBO for service?
2. Could you describe your perspective of the services offered? In what ways, if any, are the services helpful to you? In what ways, if any, are the services not helpful?
3. What do you think about the FBO's involvement with the community?
4. How do you think the FBO could improve its involvement with the community?
5. In your opinion, what are the best things about the FBO? What are the things about the FBO that you would like to see changed?
6. Overall, how would you describe the FBO and the services it offers?

**Appendix D: Modified SSI and FGD Guide**

*After coding the first interview and focus group, I modified the questions to reflect the themes that were emerging as well as to adjust the questions so that they would be better understood by the participants.*

1. Can you tell me how you heard about the program? Who told you and what did they say to convince you to join? What were your hopes and expectations for joining this program?
2. When you think about your first time coming here, what was your experience like? How were you feeling and what were the thoughts in your head the first time you came to this place?
3. What is your opinion about the staff here? Are there enough staff? Do you find it easy or difficult to talk with the staff? Could you tell me a bit about how you get along with the staff?
4. Usually when an organization decides to offer certain programs in an area, it is because the community wants those programs. In your opinion, are the programs being offered by this organization helpful to this community?
  - a. Are there different programs that people in this community would like to be offered here?
    - i. Have you or anyone you know asked the staff if they could offer those other programs? What was the staff's response?
  - b. What types of programs or help do you think people in this community need the most?
  - c. What do you think the organization can do to better meet the needs of the community?
5. How do you think the community sees the organization? How would people in the community describe it?
6. How would you describe this organization/program to someone who has never heard of it before?
7. What are the best things about this organization/program? What are the things that you would like to see changed?
8. Any other comments or anything you want to share about your experience here?

### Appendix E: Summary of FBOs

*Table 1: Summary of FBOs*

<b>FBO</b>	<b>Location/ Number of Participants</b>	<b>Demographics/ Programs</b>	<b>FBO History</b>	<b>Denomination</b>
FBO #1	Madina (suburb north of Accra)  2 individual interviews  4 participants in the focus group	Male and Female Service Users  Children, youth, and adults (Ages 5-50+)  With disabilities or involved with the Department of Social Welfare  50 residents with disabilities 30 residents who were involved with the Department of Social Welfare  Long-term Residential  Training offered off-site (by third parties)	20+ years  Founded by an American  Affiliated with a US FBO  US affiliate raises funds for them  Local fundraising from church groups and individuals	Baptist
FBO #2	Agbogbloshie (informal settlement near central Accra)  Outside the informal settlement area along the main road  2 individual	Female Service Users only  Ages 14-22  Originally for girls who were “head porters” or trafficked  Now open to any needy young	20+ years  Founded by Assemblies of God church in Ghana  Main funder is from the Netherlands  Local	Assemblies of God

	<p>interviews</p> <p>4 participants in the focus group</p>	<p>woman</p> <p>40 service users per term</p> <p>9-month residential program</p> <p>On-site Training</p>	<p>fundraising from AOG churches</p>	
FBO #3	<p>Head office: Tema (port city approximately 30 minutes from Accra)</p> <p>Locations of project: Akrade, Atimpoku, Frankadua (small towns)</p> <p>Conference location: Akosombo (wealthy city, site of largest hydro-electricity station in Ghana)</p> <p>3 individual interviews</p> <p>5 participants in the focus group (including 1 participant who acted as the translator)</p>	<p>FBO works with males and females on different projects</p> <p>For the project included in this study: Females only</p> <p>Ages: Mostly adult women, 18+</p> <p>Over 100 participants at last conference in 2018</p> <p>Conference lasts 1-3 days</p>	<p>FBO began working in communities 12 years ago</p> <p>Women's Conference began in 2015</p> <p>Fundraising is mainly from local churches</p> <p>Partner organization (established by same Founder) in US</p> <p>Some financial support for projects from US partner organization</p>	Non-denominational Christian
FBO #4	<p>Agboglobshie (informal settlement near central Accra)</p> <p>Within the informal settlement area</p>	<p>FBO works with males and females, children, youth, and adults</p> <p>For the project included in this</p>	<p>FBO founded in 2003</p> <p>Specific project started in 2015</p> <p>Most funding comes from</p>	Roman Catholic

	itself  4 participants in the focus group (with a separate translator)	study: Females only  Ages: Mostly adult women, 18+ Maximum 8 participants at one time Program Length: Approximately two years but depends on the learning capabilities of the participant	individual donors from Europe, particularly Italy, who are friends of the founder or the current Director  FBO falls under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Diocese of Accra and Caritas Ghana but receives minimal funding from them	
--	--	---	---	--

### Appendix F: Themes and Codes

The six themes that were developed through focused coding contain within them several codes that emerged from the initial line-by-line coding. A sample of the codes that are subsumed under the themes follows in Table 2.

*Table 2: Themes and Codes*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Appreciating what the FBO offers	Appreciating learning about Christianity Appreciating program Appreciating staff/facilitator Being satisfied with what they have Belonging Benefitting the community Feeling free with staff Having choices Learning practical skills Recognizing everything is provided for them
Being limited	Being afraid of speaking up Being aware of the FBO struggling Being limited by funding Being limited by materials Being limited by staff Lacking choices Not having needs met Not wanting to talk to staff
Dealing with challenges	Asking for more help from FBO Being aware of lack of skills Challenging stereotypes Feeling afraid Finding the teaching style difficult to follow Having to deal with outside challenges Not having needs met Struggling to ask staff Wanting to earn money/have job opportunities
Wanting to learn more	Expecting to benefit from the program Learning a lot Providing opportunities for children/youth Wanting more learning opportunities Wanting more staff/facilitators Wanting to learn quickly Wanting to learn practical skills Wanting to learn/practise more
Accessing services	Being invited by an authority figure Being satisfied with current programs

	Feeling welcome Having choices Having options Localizing the conference Making the learning accessible Preferring outside facilitators Willing to talk to staff
Experiencing success	Being empowered Educating and empowering Feeling empowered Learning a lot Learning about business/practical skills Learning how to improve their lives Learning women's empowerment