



GADANGME

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Addressing the Issue of the Gborbu Wulomɔ's Engagement to an Underage Girl

The recent report of the Gborbu Wulomɔ being married to a girl under the legal age of marriage has raised concerns and sparked controversy.

The GaDangme Council viewed the phenomenon as a complex issue that requires careful consideration and action, and for which reason the Council refrained from expressing opinion when the story broke preferring to do more research and consultations on the matter considering that the Gborbu Wulomɔ himself is not an illiterate.

At first blush, the Council, like all other well-meaning Ghanaians and social commentators deprecated and denounced the ceremony christened a Ga Customary Wedding Boi Ekpaa Yoo. Additionally, it is not difficult to infer that the significant age difference between the two parties may create an imbalance of power, leading to potential abuse and exploitation.

It is essential to acknowledge the legal and ethical implications of marrying a girl who is underage because in this country, there are strict laws in place to protect minors from exploitation and abuse. By marrying a girl who is not of legal age, the traditional ruler is potentially violating these laws and putting the girl at risk of harm.

Many have cited the Constitution 1992, the Criminal Offences Act and the Children's Act all dealing with consent to have sex, to be married, defilement of female and void marriages which are legitimate concerns with some even calling for the Police and other state actors to set in. In addition to legal and ethical concerns, there are also societal implications to consider. The traditional ruler's actions have reflected poorly on the Nungua traditional area as well as the GaDangme Community in general, giving detractors the opportunity to denigrate and make us objects of derision.

The other concerns being whether since the ceremony is part of the traditions of Nungua it should be respected and isolated or given immunity from state laws. That, also the Council finds problematic.



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Further probing has however revealed that instead of a traditional betrothal the MCs who are known during such occasions to exaggerate issues in order to create laughter and liven up the occasion misled everybody present as well as the entire community to believe that what was happening was a traditional wedding.

The Council has engaged the Gborbu Wulomɔ himself and some of his elders and it is important to clarify that the traditional ruler has stated that the relationship with the underage girl is a betrothal and not a marriage. This distinction to us has altered the legal implications.

We are inclined to side with the Gborbu Wulomɔ since the original reportage made the point that there was another ceremony that awaited the girl to purify and prepare her for procreation. We concede that whilst betrothal could involve an underage person, it does not grant license to the person to start having sexual relationship with such a child thereby jeopardizing her education and even endangering a difficult childbirth since her organs are not properly developed.

The GaDangme Council calls on the Gborbu Wulomɔ to address the issue and mitigate the concerns surrounding the betrothal and to ensure that the girl's well-being and rights are protected, and that her best interests such as her education are prioritized throughout the engagement process. She should continue her education until she reaches the legal age of marriage, and even marriage should not disrupt her education if she is still willing to continue.

The GaDangme Council also calls on the parents of the child to keep an eye on her and let her understand that notwithstanding the betrothal demanded by custom, she is still an infant and entitled to enjoy life and engage in youthful pranks like all others of her age.

We hope that this statement will assuage injured feelings and let this matter pass.

Sincerely,

Haa Ayikoi Otoo
President