

“Bolga Baskets”: A Compendium of Trade Basketry Arts of the Gurene People of Ghana

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Abstract

Gurene people are domiciled in the Upper East Region of Ghana, and are reputed for producing an assortment of innovative basketry products popularly referred to as “Bolga baskets”. These products are mostly sold to tourists, basketry lovers or exported to Germany, New Zealand, Denmark, Canada, Australia, the United States of America, Zambia and Burkina Faso. This study attempts to document the miscellanea of basketry artefacts produced by the *Gurene* people over the years. The researcher used an ethnographic research design, and extracted data from 103 respondents using observations, interview guides and focus group discussions. The respondents were sampled using snowball and purposive sampling methods. The data amassed were transcribed and analysed using thematic data analysis techniques in an Nvivo data analysis programme. The study revealed 60 varieties of basketry products which were mostly produced from guinea and vertiveria grass species.

Keywords: Bolga baskets, basketry arts, *Gurene* Basketry, African basketry, African art

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1. Introduction

Gurene people (the Frafras) live in the Upper East region of Ghana. They are Gur-speaking people who are well known for their artistry. They produce a miscellany of art objects such as basketry, textiles, pottery, leather products, wrought iron objects as well as jute and kenaf fibre artefacts.

Specifically, the *Gurene* people produce two distinct classes of basketry articles, viz; trade or commercial basketry articles (popularly referred to as “Bolga baskets”) and utilitarian basketry articles. The trade basketry articles are mostly sold to generate income while the utilitarian basketry objects are predominantly manufactured for use in the *Gurene* society.

The basketry artefacts are trendy products that are usually exported to America, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Japan, and other European countries; drawing substantial foreign exchange for the country and augmenting the income of many artisans in and around Bolgatanga, Bongo, Tallensi, and Nabdam (G-lish Foundation Ghana, 2014; Wemegah, 2014; JAICAF, 2010; Ljunggren, 2007). About 10, 000 artisans, predominantly women, derive their livelihood from the industry, which chalked an annual sale of U.S. \$4, 766.737 in 2001, sadly, however, declining to the U.S. \$225,270 in 2004 (Ljunggren, 2007). Alternative figures from Action for Enterprise’s (2006) study revealed that between 1993 to 2003, basketry products exported to Europe, the United States of America and Japan from Ghana, amounted to the U.S. \$12 million. Quite recently, the Chief Executive Director of Ghana Export Promotion Authority in an article published by Salaudeen, Wood & Thin (2019), stated that basketry exports generated foreign exchange earnings totalling \$800,000 in 2017 alone.

The above data demonstrates the viability of basketry in generating appreciable foreign exchange for the country and providing sustenance for the indigenous producers. Sadly, however, literature on “Bolga baskets” is limited and unorganised. This makes it difficult to appraise the products. The lack of information on the “Bolga baskets” also shrouds the variety of artefacts available from the *Gurene* community. It also hinders the promotion of the products and limits their appreciation. The researcher deemed it necessary to fill this gap by providing the needed information on the basketry artefacts. This study, therefore, specifically sought to establish the typologies of the “Bolga baskets”, underpin their functions and provide information on their physical and visual characteristics.

Indigenous handicraft industries are reputed for creating jobs, attracting investments, stimulating local economies and raking in tax revenues (Schwarz & Yair, 2010; MacDowell & Avery, 2006). Though there are limited scholarly materials available on the economic importance of the handicrafts sector worldwide (Richard, 2007), the scanty materials available empirically established that indigenous art production and sales usually improved the economic well-being of people in poor and disadvantaged communities across the globe (Kaye, 2011; Nowak, 2007; Richard, 2007; MacDowell & Avery, 2006; Pereira, Shackleton & Shackleton, 2006).

Many authors including Joffe and Newton (2007), Rogerson & Sithole (2001) and Schwarz & Yair (2010), articulate the crucial roles handicrafts play in providing sustainable sources of income and employment in various indigenous communities around the world. Nyawo and Mubangizi (2015) succinctly write that handicraft producers make a substantial contribution to the “growth and innovation in the wider cultural sector”. Nyawo &

Mubangizi add that artisans aid in attracting new tourists to a given locality by producing innovative articles that act as a magnet for tourists. Joffe & Newton (2007) further assert that indigenous arts generally contribute to small-scale business development, poverty amelioration as well as women empowerment.

Basketry objects have been produced and used in many cultures due to their essential characteristics. The term “basketry” is used to designate a host of articles produced from vegetative and non-vegetative materials. Basketry articles include; baskets, bags, food covers, mats, awnings, windshields, brushes, brooms, hats, fish traps, hats, cradles and belts (Adovasio, 2016; Wendrich, 1991).

Basketry products can diversify incomes, meliorate livelihoods in rural communities and are considered as tourism “pull factor” (Mbaiwa, 2004; Richards, 2001; Konstant, 1995). Generally, basketry products provide utilitarian and aesthetic functions and are important cultural artefacts that store and disseminate cultural traditions (Koros, 2002). Cunningham and Terry (2006) write that there has been a high increase in the sale and export of African basketry since the 1970s, suggesting a striking global interest and love of the art form.

Generally, basketry objects may be segregated into different classifications, based on their forms, functions, techniques of production, or materials employed in their production (Koros, 2002).

2. Methodology

This paper stemmed out of an extensive ethnographic study undertaken to illuminate the *Gurene* basketry industry in Ghana. Ethnographic researchers usually collect data through participant observations, formal and informal interviews, document collecting, audio-visual recordings, studying cultural artefacts, taking field notes and keeping journals (Reeves, Kuper & Hodges, 2008). The researcher believes ethnography offers the appropriate method and flexibility needed to investigate the basketry arts of the *Gurene* people.

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to select subjects for the study. The above methods were used to sample a total of 103 respondents. This comprised; basketry manufacturers, basketry exporters, government officers, officers from non-governmental organizations, household heads, medicine men, basketry retailers and middlemen. The interviewees were sampled from various communities in Bolgatanga, Tallensi and Bongo, all in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

Interviews, observations, focus group discussions and on-site visits were employed to collect rich data over an extensive period. The researcher triangulated the data collection instruments to mutually confirm and validate the data collected (Casey & Murphy, 2009; Leedy & Ormrod, 2004). The data was thematically analysed with an Nvivo data analysis programme. Thematic data analysis technique was used due to its flexibility and ability to bring to light salient themes within a body of transcribed texts at varied levels (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The thematic data analysis method is “a way of making sense of seemingly unrelated material” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4).

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 Gurene Basketry Arts

A plethora of trade basketry articles are produced by artisans in the *Gurene* communities of the Upper East Region of Ghana. These products, as explicated by key respondents, are mostly exported to Germany, New Zealand, Denmark, Canada, Australia, the United States of America, Zambia and Burkina Faso. They are also sometimes sold to tourists or basketry lovers locally.

The study established an assortment of basketry articles such as; jewellery baskets, laundry baskets, shopping baskets, trays, rattles, fans, pouffes and fruit baskets. Others are; décor baskets, waste paper baskets, sweet baskets, pot baskets, baby baskets, wine baskets, umbrella baskets, pet baskets, bags and coasters. The “Bolga baskets”, as established through the study, are produced from two key vegetative materials, viz; guinea grass (*panicum maximum*) and vertiveria grass (*vetiveria nigriflora*). The above materials are sometimes also integrated with polythene wastes and fabric discards to produce some of the articles. Most of the basketry objects studied were decorated with geometric patterns, imbrications, and open-latticed designs. A few of them were reinforced with leather, specifically on the rims and the handles of the articles.

The basketry products are categorised and presented below under seven sub-headings, namely; Containers and Carriers, Placemats and Coasters, Hats, bags and Purses, Rattles and Fans, Pouffes and Décor Baskets, as well as Pet Baskets.

3.2 Containers and Carriers

A wide variety of containers and carriers were discovered during the study. The various basketry objects classified under this subheading are; utility storage baskets, laundry baskets, shopping baskets, fabric and polythene integrated baskets, trays, fruit baskets, offering baskets, waste paper baskets and décor baskets. The others are; bicycle baskets, baby baskets, umbrella baskets, gift/souvenir baskets, wine baskets, and pot baskets. The above basketry articles are singly described below, and their respective functions and dimensions are duly underpinned.

3.2.1 Utility Storage Baskets

Two variations of the utility storage baskets were discovered during the study. They were crafted with coiling technique and decorated with imbrications. The cylindrical container presented in figure 1 “A” below has a base diameter of 20cm, with vertical sides measuring 27cm. It has a rim diameter of 20cm. The lid of the container is 20.5cm in diameter, with its vertical sides dropping to 4cm. The square variation shown in plate figure 1 “B”, has a base dimension of 24 x 24cm square, a height of 14cm, and a rim dimensions of 24 x 24 cm. The lid covering the object measures 24.5 x 24.5cm with its square sides dropping downwards to 4.5cm over the container. The baskets are crafted for use as jewellery baskets, interior décor objects and for storing assorted valuable items.



Figure 1. Cylindrical jewellery container “A”, Square jewellery container “B”

3.2.2 Laundry Baskets

Three types of laundry baskets were seen during the study. All the three were produced using stake and strand weaving techniques, and are normally produced by men. All the laundry baskets observed are cylindrical, and could be produced in variegated colours and decorated with interesting patterns. The products are normally manufactured in three sizes. The largest of the baskets has a height of 52cm, a base diameter of 47cm, and a rim diameter of about 48cm. The medium-size basket measures 49cm in height, with a rim diameter of 44cm, and a base dimension of 43cm in diameter. The smallest laundry basket towers to a height of 43cm and has a rim diameter of 41cm and a base dimension of 40cm in diameter. The baskets may be produced with lids as shown in figure 2 “A” and “C”, or without lids, as depicted in figure 2 “B”. The baskets could be crafted with two collapsible handles as shown in figure 2 “A”, two fixed handles as pictured in figure 2 “B” or round handles, as portrayed in figure 2 “C”. The articles are sold on the local market or exported to be used as laundry hampers.



Figure 2. Laundry Baskets

3.2.3 Shopping Baskets

A broad range of shopping baskets, constructed in round, oval, rectangular, and oblong shapes were discovered during the research. All the shoppers observed, either had straight, slanted, or rounded sides, as common with the round shoppers.



Figure 3. Round shoppers

The baskets have different handle formations, positioned mainly on the rims of the baskets. Some of these handles were reinforced with leather, while the others were left without any form of reinforcement. The shoppers were mainly crafted using twinning, stake and strand as well as coiling construction methods.

3.2.4 Round Shoppers

Two varieties of round shoppers were seen during the study, as captured above in figure 3 “A” and “B”. The basket shown in figure 3 “A” was twinned, and has a roundly-lashed rim, while the one in figure 3 “B” was crafted using the coiling technique, and has a thin rim. Both baskets have similar fixed handles, arching over the circular rims of the baskets. The handles were anchored at four spots below the rims and subsequently lashed into single arched shafts towards the middle of the baskets. The handle of the basket in figure 3 “A” is reinforced with leather. The normal dimension of the round shopper pictured in figure 3 “A” ranges between 40 – 44cm in diameter, with heights ranging between 28-31cm (excluding the handle). The coiled basket shown in figure 3 “B” is relatively smaller in size. It has a diameter of 38cm and a height of 21cm. Both products are used locally for shopping and are also exported extensively.

3.2.5 Pot Baskets

Two distinct types of pot baskets were seen during the study. These baskets are duly captured in figure 4 “A” and “B” below. The basket shown in figure “A” is affixed with a collapsible handle, while the second variety depicted in figure 4 “B” is manufactured without a handle. Both articles have flat bases. The pot basket shown in figure 4 “A” has a height of 41cm and a body diameter of 37cm. The second variety pictured in figure 4 “B” has a height of 39cm and a body diameter of 35cm. While the basket depicted in figure 4 “A” was designed to be used as a shopper, the respondents articulated that the second variety shown in figure 4 “B” was produced to be used as a flower basket. Both articles are twinned baskets.



Figure 4. Pot baskets

3.2.6 V-Shoppers

The v-shoppers shown in figure 5 “A”, “B”, “C” and “D” below, are very popular baskets sold on the local markets and also exported extensively. The baskets have “V” shapes and were produced using the stake and strand weaving technique mostly.

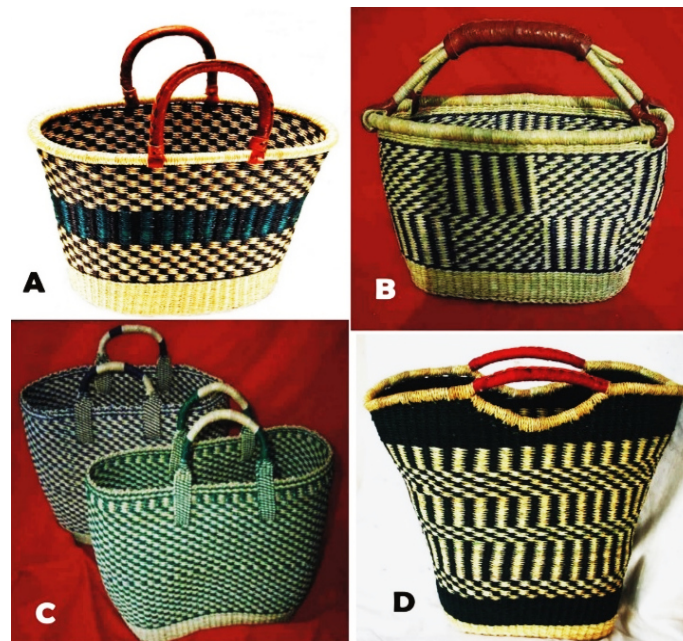


Figure 5. V- Shoppers

The basket shown in figure 5 “C” is usually crafted with tucked rims, while the other three varieties pictured in figure 5 “A”, “B” and “D” have elliptical rims and bases, as well as roundly-lashed rims. The handles of the v-shoppers differ, as evident in the images depicted above. The dimensions of the bases of the v-shoppers range from 19 – 22cm (long ellipse) x 13.3 – 18cm (short ellipse), while the rim dimensions range from 32 - 37cm (long ellipse) x 14.5 – 20 cm (short ellipse). The heights of the baskets range from 29 – 38cm (excluding the handles).

3.2.7 Tower Shoppers

The tower basket shown in figure 6 “C” below is one of the contemporary products produced specifically for export. Some of the respondents explained that the products are sometimes patronised locally.

The baskets could be seen in multiple colours, and are normally crafted with round handles sewn to the sides of the baskets. They look similar to the v-shoppers but have raised domes towards the middlemost parts of the rims. They are produced using the stake and strand weaving method. The base dimensions of the article shown in figure 6 “C” are 17cm (short ellipse) x 28cm (long ellipse). The dimensions of the rim are 23cm (short ellipse) x 40cm (long ellipse). The height is 46cm (excluding the handles). The baskets are produced to be used as shopping baskets.

3.2.8 Oval Shoppers

The oval shoppers are manufactured with slightly slanted sides. They have double handles which are usually affixed to the rim of the baskets. The handles of the products are sometimes reinforced with leather, as could be seen in figure 6 “A” and “B” below. The rims of this class of baskets are usually tucked inwards, as shown in figure 6 “A”, or roundly-lashed, as depicted in figure 6 “B” below. These baskets are mostly produced using the stake and strand weaving technique. The articles could be crafted with open-latticed decorations as shown in figure 6 “A”. The bases of the baskets range between 17 – 21cm (long ellipse) x 11 – 17cm (short ellipse). The rim dimensions range between 30 - 37cm (long ellipse) x 14 – 19 cm (short ellipse), while the heights of the baskets range between 19 – 35cm (excluding the handles). They are designed to be used as shopping and carting baskets.



Figure 6. Oval Shoppers “A” and “B”, Tower Basket “C”

3.2.9 Rectangular Shoppers

The rectangular baskets captured in figure 7 below, according to the interviewees, were developed specifically for export.

The basket shown in figure 7 “A” was produced using the stake and strand weaving method, while the adjacent product pictured in figure 7 “B” was manufactured with the twinning technique. The basket shown in figure 7 “A” is mostly produced with double handles, while the variety depicted in figure 7 “B” is usually crafted with single arched handles which are sometimes strengthened with leather.

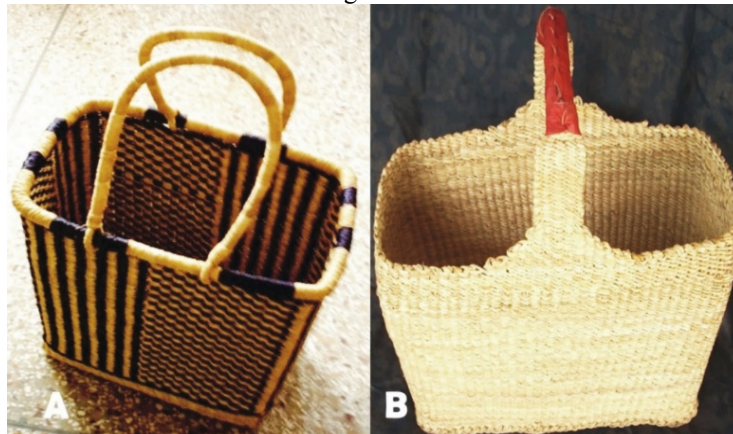


Figure 7. Rectangular shoppers

The basket in figure 7 “A” has a base dimension of 21 x 30cm, a rim dimension of 24.5 x 35cm, and a height of 34cm (excluding the handles), while the shopper in figure 7 “B” on the other hand, has a base dimension of 18 x 27cm, a rim dimension of 24 x 33cm, and a height of 27cm (excluding the handle). The products are crafted for use as shoppers and carting baskets.

3.2.10 U-Shoppers

The U-shoppers (see Figure 8 below) are recent creations targeted at tourists, expatriates, and for export. The shape of the baskets conforms to the shape of the letter “U” hence its name. the products are twinned baskets which could be produced in many colour combinations.



Figure 8. U-Shoppers

They are mostly crafted with double handles as could be seen in figure 8 above. The baskets usually have round bases, with dimensions ranging from 20 – 26cm in diameter. The rims usually have dimensions ranging between 29 - 36cm (long ellipse) x 13 - 18 cm (short ellipse). They are used as shoppers mostly.

3.3 Fabric and Polythene Integrated Baskets

Fabric discards and waste polythene integrated baskets are gradually emerging on the *Gurene* basketry landscape. The two most commonly produced forms, as observed during the study, are shown in figure 9 “A” and “B” below.



Figure 9. Scrap polythene and fabric integrated baskets

The object pictured in figure 9 “A” is a cylindrically-shaped basket. It has a base diameter of 23cm and a rim diameter of 25cm. The height of the basket is 29cm (excluding the handle). The second basket shown in figure 9 “B”, has the same shape and similar sizes as the u-shoppers described above. The handles of the u-shoppers are sometimes strengthened with leather, as portrayed in the image below. The articles were manufactured to be used as carriers and shoppers.

3.4 Trays and Fruit Baskets

3.4.1 Fruits Baskets

Seven variety of fruit baskets were discovered during the study. The articles, which come in round, oval, and triangular shapes, are captured in figures 10 and 11 respectively.

The fruit baskets shown in figure 10 “A” and “D” below are coiled products. The one captured in figure 10 “A” was crafted without any imbrications, while the basket pictured in figure 10 “D” is richly decorated with imbrications. The basket in figure 10 “A” has a rim dimension of 38cm and stands at a height of 15cm, while the second variety pictured in figure 10 “D” has a rim diameter of 36cm and a height of 13cm.

The basket in figure 10 “B” is a twinned basket that is crafted with an open-latticed decoration. The decoration is concentrated on the body of the basket. The rim of this basket is roundly moulded. It has a diameter of 32cm, and a base dimension of 27cm. The product stands at a height of 11cm.

The oval basket pictured in figure 10 “C” was manufactured with the stake and strand weaving method. The basket has hand-holes positioned at the two ends of the long elliptical sides of the basket, just below the roundly-moulded rim. The bottom dimensions of this basket are 28cm (long ellipse) x 19cm (short ellipse), while the rim

measures 36cm (long ellipse) x 23cm (short ellipse). The baskets stand at a height of 14cm. These products are intended to be used as fruit baskets.

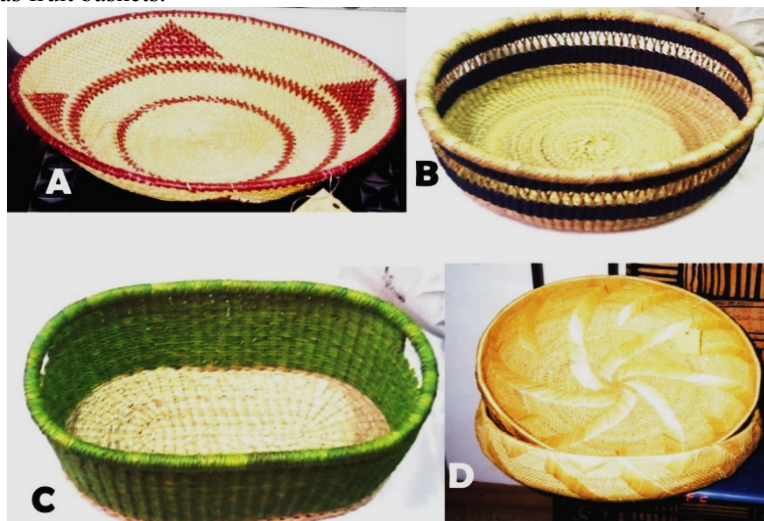


Figure 10. Fruit baskets

The second group of fruit baskets shown in figure 11 below were all constructed using the stake and strand weaving technique. The object shown in figure 11 “A” has a triangular base that measures 28cm x 28cm x 25cm, and a rim dimension of 29cm x 29 x 27cm. The basket has straight sides and stands at a height of 16cm.

The middlemost basket pictured in figure 11 “B” has a flat bottom, which measures 18cm in diameter. The rim of the article is 35cm in diameter and the height is 9cm.

The 3-in-1 fruit baskets shown in figure 11 “C” are nested objects which are crafted to tightly fit into each other. The bottom dimensions (diameter) of the three baskets are 21cm (largest size), 19.5cm (medium size) and 18cm (smallest size) respectively. The rim dimensions are; 35cm (largest size), 32.5cm (medium size), and 30cm (smallest size) accordingly. These shallow baskets have slanted sides with heights reaching up to 7.5cm (largest size), 6.5cm (medium size) and 5.5cm (smallest size). The baskets were crafted to be used in displaying fruits on dining tables, kitchen counters, side tables, and sofa tables.



Figure 11. Fruit Baskets

3.4.2 Trays

Four basketry articles designated as trays were studied by the researcher during the study. These products are depicted below in figure 12 “A”, “B”, “C” and “D”. The articles, which are lavishly decorated with well-coordinated imbrications, were produced with the coiling technique.

The tray in figure 12 “A”, has a circular base and rim. The product measures 32cm in diameter, with a height of 7.5cm. It has two v-shaped handles appended to the rim of the basket.

The second article shown in figure 12 “B” is equally a circular article. It has slanted sides, which towers to a height of 10cm. The bottom measurement of the tray is 27cm in diameter, while the rim measures 36cm in diameter.

Figure 12 “C” displays an oval-shaped tray with two v-shaped handles. The bottom dimensions of this article are 22cm (short ellipse) x 29cm (long ellipse), while the rim measures 27cm (short ellipse) x 37cm (long ellipse). The height of this basket is 9cm.

The fourth tray displayed in figure 12 “D” is a rectangular tray, with bottom dimensions of 18cm x 29cm. The article stands at a height of 12cm and has a rim measurement of 23cm x 34cm.

The products were designed to be used as serving trays, and for holding plates and drinks.

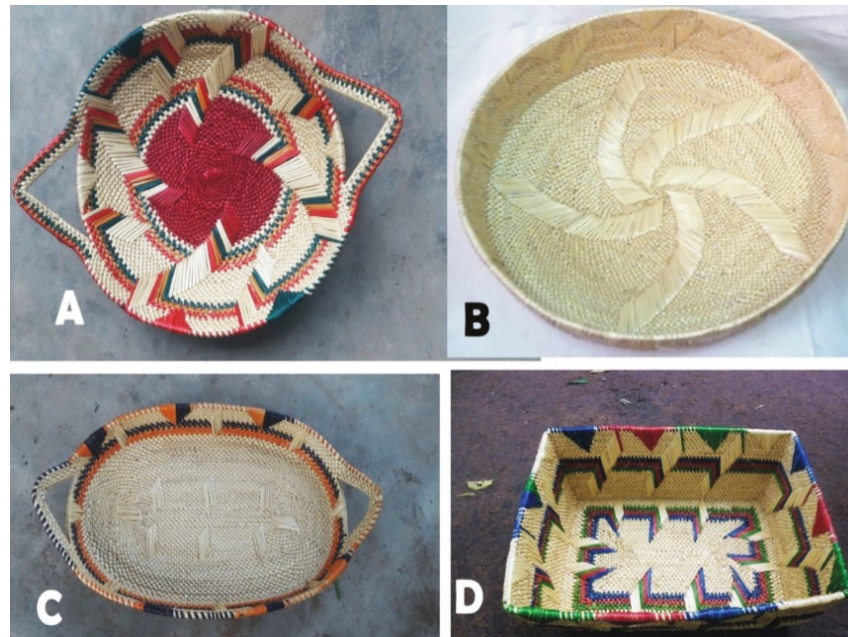


Figure 12. Trays

3.5 Waste Paper Baskets

The products pictured in figure 13 “A” and “B”, according to the respondents, were produced to be used as waste paper baskets. The articles are targeted at corporate organizations, and for export. The rectangular basket in figure 13 “A”, has a bottom measurement of 19cm x 30, and rim dimensions of 24cm x 36cm. The basket has slanted sides which reached a height of 36cm. The cylindrical object in figure 13 “B” has a bottom diameter of 23cm, and a rim diameter of 27cm. The height of this basket is 27cm. Both baskets have two hand-slits positioned on the upper body of the baskets and were produced using the stake and strand weaving method.



Figure .13 Wastepaper baskets

3.6 Bicycle Baskets

The bicycle baskets (see figure 14 “A” and “B” below), as explained by the respondents, was developed to enable the carting of various items. The two varieties of bicycle baskets observed were ingeniously manufactured to be either positioned in front of the handlebar, or on the bicycle’s back carrier. Both baskets have fabricated flat metal pieces concealed within the rim, which aids in the positioning of the articles. The smaller basket presented in figure 14 “A”, has a bottom measurement of 16cm x 20cm, a rim dimension of 18cm x 22cm and a height of 30cm, while the larger variety pictured in figure 14 “B” has a bottom dimension of 22cm x 29cm, a rim dimension of 25cm x 34 and a height of 28cm.



Figure. 14 Bicycle baskets

3.7 Baby Baskets

The product shown in figure 15 “A” below is popularly known as “baby Moses basket”. This product is one of the contemporary basketry objects produced by the *Gurene* artisans. It could be produced using either the twining or stake and strand weaving techniques. The product is patronized locally and exported. The article has an elliptical design, with double handles. A portion of the basket has an extended upper wall, intended to shield the head of a baby. The bottom measurement of the basket is 50cm (short ellipse) x 70cm (long ellipse), with a rim measurement of 55cm (short ellipse) x 75cm (long ellipse). The height of the basket measures 44cm (Upper wall - head side) x 24cm (lower wall).

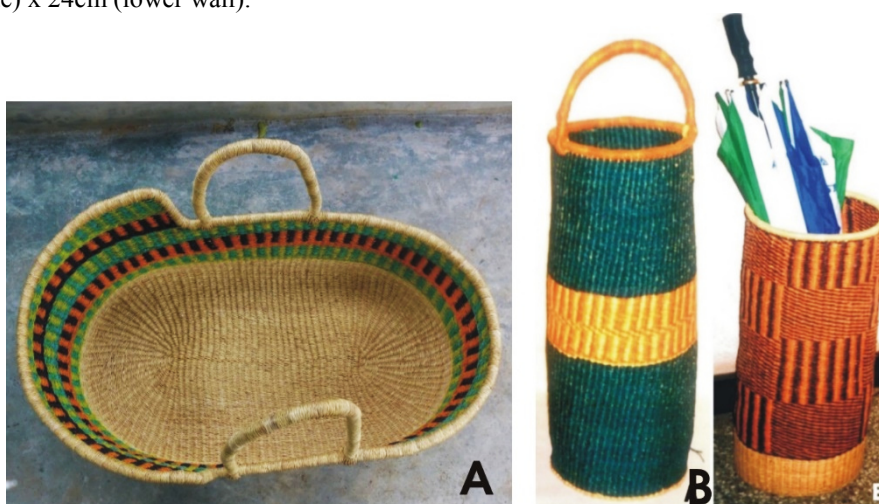


Figure. 15 Baby Moses basket “A”, Umbrella baskets “B”

3.8 Umbrella Baskets

The objects pictured in figure 15 “B” above, were fashioned to be used as storage baskets for umbrellas. Two types of umbrella baskets were noticed during the research; one has inverted U-shaped fixed handles, while the second variety was crafted without handles. The baskets have cylindrical bodies, with heights ranging between 47cm – 53cm. The bottom measurement of the baskets ranges between 18cm – 23cm, while the rims vary between 20cm – 25cm. They are usually produced using stake and strand weaving methods and could be made in several colour combinations.

3.9 Gift/ Souvenir Baskets

The articles shown in figure 16 “A” and “B” below are designated as souvenir/ gift baskets. The first products captured in figure 16 “A” below, are small round baskets, which are normally produced with rim diameters of between 16 - 22cm, with heights ranging between 15cm - 21cm (excluding handles). They are crafted to be used as gift hampers for packaging an assortment of gift items during festive occasions. The products, which are sometimes called “baby baskets”, are also designed to be used by children.

The second products shown in figure 16 “B” below, are tumbler-size baskets, with bottom dimensions varying between 4cm – 6cm. They are normally produced with rim dimensions ranging between 7cm – 9cm in

diameter. The height of the articles varies between 8cm - 10cm. They are designed to be used in packaging toffees, candies, and cookies. Both articles are usually manufactured using twinning weaving methods.



Figure. 16 Baby baskets “A” and Sweet/toffee baskets “B”

3.10 Wine Baskets

The baskets depicted in figure 17 below are narrow cylindrical baskets with single collapsible handles. The products are designed to be used in storing and serving assorted wines. The baskets have bottom dimensions of between 8cm – 10cm. The rims of the products vary between 9cm – 12cm, while their heights range between 26cm – 30cm. They are mostly manufactured with the stake and strand weaving technique.



Figure .17 Wine baskets

3.11 Placemats and Coasters

3.11.1 Coasters

All the coasters observed during the research (see figure 18 “A” below) are circular, and were produced using the stake and strand weaving method. The sizes of the coasters range between 10cm – 14cm in diameter. The articles could be seen in different colour combinations, and are designed to be used as drinking glass/cup supports or covers.

3.11.2 Placemats

Rectangular and circular placemats, as shown in figure 18 “A”, “B”, “C” and “D”, were observed during the study. The objects were made with the coiling and stake and strand weaving methods mainly. Figure 18 “B” displays an assortment of stake and strand woven placemats. Their measurements range between 24cm – 33cm in diameter. The coiled objects are shown in figure 18 “C” and “D”. They are quite firmer in weave than the placemats depicted in figure 18 “B”. The circular mats shown in figure 18 “C”, have dimensions ranging between 24cm - 30cm diameter, while the dimensions of the rectangular mat pictured in figure 18 “D” are 24cm x 32cm. The placemats are designed for use on the dining table as a guard against food and water stains, heat, and as dining table decorations.



Figure .18 Coasters “A” and Place Mats “B, C and D”

3.12 Hats

Hats are called *sepibre* or simply, *sepi* by the *Gurene* people. Five assortments of hats were observed during the research. The respondents, however, explained that the two most popular ones patronised by tourists, hat lovers and also exported are; *sepi ka'ate* (large hat – see figure 19 left) and *sepi billa* (small hat – figure 19 right). The diameter of the *sepi ka'ate* hats ranges between 30 – 39cm, and the crowns vary between 14.5 – 18cm, while the diameter of the *sepi billa* hats ranges between 28 – 31cm, and the height of the crowns vary between 14.5 – 18cm. The hats are mostly twinned.

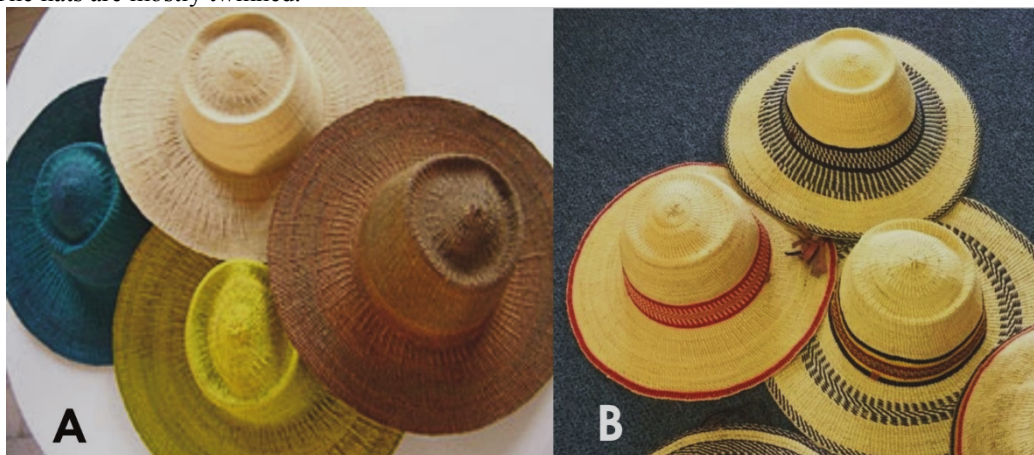


Figure .19 Hats

3.13 Bags and Purses

A miscellany of ten bags and purses were seen during the study and variously described below in figures 20, 21 and 22 accordingly. Quite a number of these articles were integrated with leather, as a way of reinforcing them or creating components such as handles or locking devices. All the bags and purses shown below, as explained by the respondents, could be woven in varied combinations of colours.



Figure 20. Lady's sling bags "A" and Cowboys sling bag - *nkologo* "B"

The object pictured in figure 20 "A" above, is a twinned lady's sling bag. The article measures 25cm in length, 10cm in breadth, and has a height of 19cm. The body of the bag is decorated with an open-latticed weave. A braided leather cord is attached to the extreme ends of the bag, to enable its suspension over the shoulder. Equally, a leather button and a locking device are integrated into the body of the article to help secure the flap of the bag. The bag is designed for women.

Figure 20 "B" captures a circular-shaped twinned basket with a lid. The product has leather cords and locking devices as well. It measures 16cm in diameter and has a height of 17.5cm. This bag, as explained by a section of the interviewees, is called *nkologo*. It is a sling bag that was originally used by cowboys. Currently, it is mostly patronised by young ladies and tourists as utility carriers.



Figure 21. Lady's shoulder bags

The product in figure 21 "A" above, is a V-shaped stake and strand woven bag with open-latticed decoration. The article comes with two leather handles and a leather-bound rim. The bag has a width of 28cm, a breadth of 17cm, and a height of 26cm. It is designed to be used as a utility carrier for women.

Figure 21 "B" depicts a rectangular stake and strand manufactured bag. The article is post-finished with a leather rim and two flat leather handles. This product is also targeted at women as utility carriers. The article has a width of 27cm, a breadth of 13cm, and a height of 28cm.

The object in figure 21 "C" is also a rectangular basketry ware, which is integrated with a leather rim and two leather handles. It is a stake and strand woven object, intended for use as a lady's carrier bag. The dimensions of the article are; width 25cm, breadth 13cm, and a height of 23cm.

The bags shown in figure 21 "D" are circular-rimmed twinned baskets. The articles are mostly produced with two leather handles, leather buttons, and corresponding leather locking devices. They are designed as bags for women. The rim diameter of the bags ranges between 25 -32cm, and the heights range from 24 -27cm.



Figure 22. Handbags and purses

figure 22 “A” above shows a semi-circular-shaped twinned handbag, crafted with two rectangular-shaped hand slits. The product has a width of 27cm, a breadth of 12cm, and a height of 26cm. It is a lady’s handbag.

The bag in figure 22 “B” is a twinned briefcase designed specifically for men. The informants pointed out that it was targeted at male office workers. It was intended to be used in carrying documents and office necessities. The article has two handles, roundly-moulded rims, and a pair of locking devices. The width of the article is 34cm. It has a breadth of 10cm and a height of 26cm (excluding the handles).

figure 22 “C” captures a semi-circular twinned clutch bag, designed for women. This article has a width of 26cm and a height of 17cm. It is meant to be used in carrying feminine essentials.

The article portrayed in figure 22 “D” is a twinned purse, produced from polythene waste, fabric discards and guinea grass. It has a zipped rim and a fabric looped handle. The width of the purse is 22cm, and the height is 14cm. It is crafted to be used in carrying money and other feminine utilities.

3.14 Fans and Rattles

3.14.1 Fans

Gurene fans (see figure 23 “A”) could be seen in many arrays of colours and sizes. The fans are mostly twinned and ornamented with intricately woven motifs. The products are very popular with tourists and are also patronised significantly outside the shores of Ghana, according to the respondents.

3.14.2 Rattles

Rattles (see figure 23 “B”) are used extensively in the *Gurene* communities as musical accompaniments. The articles are also exported or sold to tourists to generate income. They are usually produced using stake and strand weaving techniques over calabash or metal bases. They can be produced in various colour combinations and sizes.

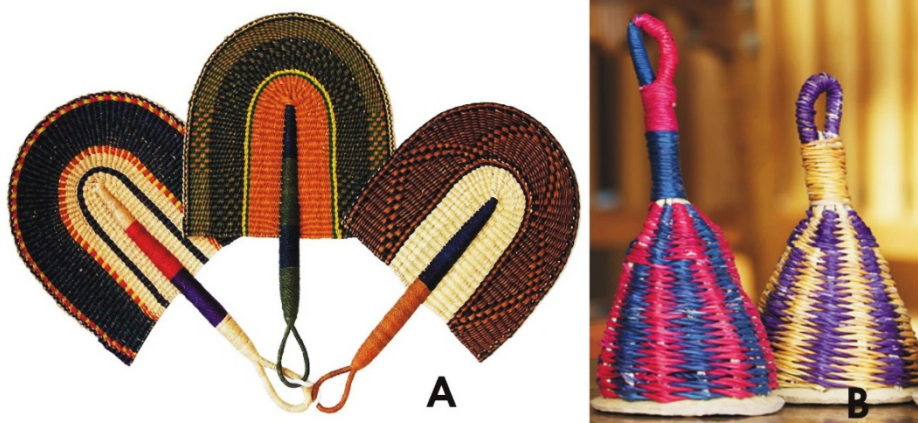


Figure 23. Fans “A” rattles “B”

3.15 Pouffes and Décor Baskets

3.15.1 Pouffes

The pouffes pictured in figure 24 below are some of the recent innovations. The articles are the basketry versions of the popular “Bolga” leather pouffes, which are common products in the *Gurene* society. The twinned pouffes are crafted for use as seats, footrests, and interior accessories. They are targeted at middle- and high-class users, and for export. The articles are stuffed with the soft silky fibres of kapok, and are mostly circular. The products seen during the research have the following dimensions; the largest size range between 50cm – 55cm in diameter, with heights varying between 27cm - 38cm. The medium pouffes have diameter ranges between 40cm - 45cm, and heights ranging between 25cm - 32cm, while the smaller varieties span between 30cm -35cm in diameter, with heights varying between 22cm – 29cm.



Figure 24. Pouffes

3.15.2 Décor Baskets

The décor baskets pictured below in figure 25, are finely woven baskets intended for furnishing and decoration of rooms. The baskets are intricately woven using twinning techniques and are ornamented with alluring-coloured motifs. The basket shown in figure 25 “A”, has a diameter of 39cm and a height of 30cm; the amorphous basket pictured in figure 25 “B”, has a width of 64cm and a height of 85cm. The object pictured in figure 25 “C” has a width of 67.5cm, and towers to a height of 76.5cm, while the wavy basket captured in figure 25 “D” has a width of 48.5cm and a height of 25.5cm. The respondents expounded that these varieties of products are sold to tourists, some hotels owners, homeowners, and also exported.



Figure 25. Décor baskets

3.16 Pet Baskets

Two types of pet baskets, as shown in figure 26 “A” and “B” below, were observed during the study. The product in figure 26 “A”, is designed as a bedding basket for cats, while the adjacent basket in figure 26 “B” is

crafted as a bedding basket for pet dogs. Both products are twinned objects. They are manufactured in different colour shades and targeted at foreign markets. The cat basket has a diameter of 48.5cm and a height of 53.5cm. The breadth of the dog basket is 58.5cm. It has a length of 76.5cm and a height of 31cm.



Figure .26 Cat basket “A” and dog basket “B”

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

A wide variety of basketry items are produced by the *Gurene* people as established through the study. These products are patronised by many basketry lovers within and outside the shores of Ghana. This creates employment opportunities for the manufacturers, leading to income generation, foreign exchange earnings for the country and the promotion of tourism in the *Gurene* communities.

Equally, the findings showed that substantial economic gains are made by stakeholders such as; the Bolgatanga Municipal Assembly, raw materials sellers, transport owners, exporters, porters, middlemen, trade facilitators, product finishers and packaging materials vendors. This identifies the sector as an economically viable one, which should lead to an increased willingness by the Ghana Government and development workers to support and develop the sector, to maximize the gains.

Basketry-producing communities in the Bolgatanga Municipality, Bongo and Tallensi Districts in the Upper East Region must be encouraged to dedicate plots of lands within their communities to be used in cultivating plant species that are mostly used in the production of the basketry products. This would ensure the constant availability of vegetative raw materials, which could be accessed to produce the basketry articles. The communities could be assisted by the Forestry Commission, Ministry of Agriculture, Bolgatanga Municipal Assembly, and other development workers.

An annual, or bi-annual basketry show needs to be organized in the Bolgatanga municipality as well as Bongo and Tallensi districts to showcase innovative basketry items produced by the basketry manufacturers. This would engender healthy artistic rivalry among the producers, promote the basketry arts of the *Gurene* people, generate income for the artists, boost tourist inflow to the municipality, districts and the region, and allow basketry lovers and buyers to source basketry products of their choice. This programme can be championed by the Bolgatanga Regional Secretariat, Bolgatanga Municipal Assembly, Bongo District Assembly, Tallensi District Assembly, Ghana Tourism Authority, Basketry Exporters, Ghana Export Authority, Non-governmental Organizations and hospitality companies in the region.

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