

# Stewardship Behaviour in Social Entrepreneurship Among Indigenous Village Heads

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**Abstract**—Vision, sensitivity, governance based on traditions, mutual trust, consistency, openness, and transparency are traits/attributes of stewards. Based on these stewardship traits, a quantitative survey was conducted on 300 village heads and 900 community members from five districts of Garo Hills, Meghalaya, to explore the social entrepreneurial traits among the A'king Nokmas, head of the Garo tribes, an indigenous tribe inhabiting these districts of Meghalaya, India. This paper illustrates and maintains that A'king Nokmas can justly be termed as social entrepreneurs who possess stewardship traits. They are visionaries who inspire and influence their supporters to a vision which leads to socio-economic change in their community; Are sensitive, empathetic, responsible, and accountable to the community needs as well as to the needs of their Clan and family; Are firm on traditional customs and beliefs, dignity and basic rights of the community members and adheres to the moral and ethical principles in their governing process; Builds up mutual trust and promotes dialogue in the community; Are consistent in self-respect and in meeting the strategic objectives to achieve the community welfare deficiencies. As steward leaders, they are open to public scrutiny, have intelligible governance, keep no secrets, and make information about governance available to the community. The results have validated the assumption that the A'king Nokmas possess the stewardship traits at a greater level. Their vision steers to socio-economic changes, sensitivity leads to cohesiveness and altruism in the community, adherence to tradition directs to have moral principles in governance, mutual trust manages to have a dyadic relationship with community members, their consistency of strategic objectives eradicates welfare deficiencies, and openness brings intelligible governance in the community

**Index Terms**—Stewardship, A'king Nokmas, Entrepreneur, Social Entrepreneurship

## I. INTRODUCTION

Stewardship behaviour is an antecedent factor that enables the provision of desired sustainable solutions in social entrepreneurship. Stewards are public managers. In organisations, stewardship behaviour leads to a stewardship culture, where the social entrepreneur allows members to be part of the decision-making process, reducing power distance and creating a sense of collective decision-making (Hayek, 2015). Further, it is noted that apart from resource considerations, stewardship is also an important behavioural consideration for social entrepreneurial activities (Basu, 2014). This study is focussed on the stewardship traits in A'king Nokmas namely, stewards ability to mobilize the stakeholders to their vision (Cossin, 2015), sensitivity to the needs of community and organization (Hoffman, 2018), governance based on traditions (Mkanda, 2014) and trust (Volker, 2011), consistency (Hernandez, 2012), openness and transparency (Gil-Garcia, 2020) in executing social entrepreneurship.

## II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

From time immemorial, the institution of Nokma remained the sole monitor and caretaker of the assets, yet no one has ever depicted the institution as a steward in the community. Delving into the stewardship nature in social entrepreneurship, this paper seeks to provide a translucent insight into the stewardship traits of the Nokma institution.

## III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A thematic review of literature on the basic concepts of stewardship, stewardship nature of A'king Nokma, and stewardship traits is undertaken before describing the findings of the research.

### Stewardship

Stewardship is defined as attitudes and behaviours expressed in the long-term interests of the groups rather than self-interests (Hernandez, 2008), where individual goals and motives are aligned with the objectives of their authorities (Davis, et al., 1997). The managers with a stewardship nature are pro-organizational and collectivistic rather than individualistic and self-serving (Davis et al., 1997). They are expected to possess reciprocity, by which the organization demonstrates its gratitude for supportive beliefs and behaviours; responsibility, where the organization acts in a socially responsible manner to those who have supported it; reporting, a basic requirement of accountability; and relationship nurturing (Kelly, 2001). The people who support the organisation appreciate the qualities of reciprocity, responsibility, reporting, and relationship nurturing (Waters, 2009).

### A'king Nokma, an Indigenous Steward

The literature on the Institution of A'king Nokma speaks volumes on their stewardship nature in the Garo community. They are custodians and supervisors of A'king land, (Chattopadhyay, 1985; K. R. Marak, 1999; J. R. Marak, 2000; H. G. Joshi, 2004; Thomas, 2005, Karlsson, 2011);-interpret customary laws and deliver free, fair, speedy and impartial justice, (Sangma, 1979); Chattopadhyay, 1985; Ladia, 1993; H. G. Joshi, 2004; Roy, 2007); cater to the material needs of the community (Burling, 1963; Chattopadhyay, 1985); promote fisheries, provides road connectivity, transport agricultural products, facilitate roadside stalls, start permanent cultivation and plantation (Mathew and Adsule, 2017); do not strive for personal and economic benefits (Karlsson, 2011; Sangma, 1979) and oriented to the best interests of the community (Mathew, 2017a). He / She is the principal person responsible for legislation, administration and justice, and security of the community (Sangma, 1979; Chattopadhyay, 1985). He / She occupies a high and respectable place in the Garo society and the pivot of the village organisation through whom the basic network of the entire society is woven (Chattopadhyay, 1985). The system of administering justice and settling disputes amicably by the Mahari of the respective contending parties is followed in the Nokma court (Ladia, 1993; Roy et al., 2007). The village courts under the Nokma depended

heavily on the opinion of the elders, facilitated discussion, and encouraged the Assembly to reach a consensus (Ladia, 1993). The Nokmas possess the sterling qualities of head and heart and are proficient enough in oratory, military commandship, and fulfilment of other responsibilities (Joshi, 2004). He is actively involved in the construction of roads, bridges, and their maintenance. Besides, he also regulates jhum cultivation and participates with the villagers in all public and social works and functions (Sangma, 1979). The Nokma is the person best suited to facilitating development and preventing land alienation as well as to controlling insurgency and maintaining the peace in his respective village (Karlsson, 2011). As a matter of fact, the Nokma cannot be compared to a chief who exercises his political authority with various social and economic advantages. The Nokma is more a social and economic representative of the village without having an advantage or authority (Sangma, 1979).

Though the Nokmas have the authority to govern people yet they do not have complete autonomy in their governance. In the matter of sale, transfer, or mortgage of the A'king Land or any part thereof to any person, either moveable or immovable property, an adherence to traditional laws, consistency, and transparency in behaviour is expected from the Nokmas by their Chra and Mahari (J. R. Marak, 2000).

### Stewardship Traits

Cossin et al. (2015) in their study have stated that a steward leader leads with impact, influence, mobilizes stakeholders around a compelling vision, drives social and economic impact (e.g., thought leadership, business success), and inspires in character.

Hoffman et al. (2018) have argued that the stewardship activities of a leader tend to have a collaborative process and facilitate a greater sense of belonging, pride, connectedness, interaction, a greater sense of common needs, provide a more productive and cohesive link between residents, and greater empathy with each other, frequent contact with other individuals and the community at large.

Corbetta and Salvato (2004) have assumed in their study that family firms tend to exemplify the tenets of stewardship theory. Further, Corbetta and Salvato (2004) and Lubatkin et al. (2007) contend that the practices in stewardship, such as altruism and the motivation to serve others, are more evident in family

businesses. Davis et al. (2010) claim that in family firms, a good steward is “a decision maker who is a caretaker of a family’s assets” (P. 1093), which in fact benefits a superior outcome of greater innovation and performance in family business (Neubaum, 2017).

Mkanda et al. (2014) claimed that the indigenous stewards are firm on laws, traditions, beliefs, customs, and values that are governed in the community context. They have held on to cultural stories and traditions (Michael, 2020), basing on dignity and basic rights (Roy, 2005), traditional knowledge of place and region (Winthrop, 2018), contribute to tribal identity (Michael, 2020) with perception of their tangible qualities (Winthrop, 2018) and adheres to moral and ethical principles to deliver responsible decision-making process (Cossin, 2015).

The value held by a steward, as argued by various authors, is trust as the basis of a relationship in stewardship orientation, which realizes consistency and authenticity in their face of adversity (Cossin, 2015), and is built on trust and commitment (Volker, 2011). Further, the mutual trust and connecting strategies are important for eventual outcomes in stewardship governance (Schillemans, 2019). Hayek et al (2015) suggest that dyadic relationships are created by mutual trust, respect, and obligation in the context of stewardship. Torfing and Bentzen (2020) note that the role of stewards (public managers) is to absorb risk by enhancing trust through the promotion of dialogue, empowerment, and joint learning.

The past literatures note steward is the one who holds consistency in actions (Hernandez, 2012; Cossin, 2015), has a self-concept (Hernandez, 2012), ability to meet the strategic objectives of the organisation for the benefit of its owners and other stakeholders to alleviate public welfare deficiencies (Menyah, 2013).

The traits of transparency in a person are a lack of secrecy (Sharon, 2010), availability of information (Meijer, 2013), and an openness to public scrutiny (Sharon, 2010; Meijer, 2013). Further, Sharon (2010) comments, when ‘usefulness’ has dominated over stewardship, the true value of transparency can be diminished. In governing any organisation, the authors consider transparency as one of the dimensions of open government, understandable and useful for different beneficiaries (Gil-Garcia, 2020).

After having dealt in detail with basic themes of stewardship, A’king Nokma, an indigenous steward and stewardship traits, the study further proceeds to

measure stewardship traits in indigenous village heads of Garos of Meghalaya

#### IV. HYPOTHESIS

A’king Nokmas possess stewardship traits, defined by the theories of stewardship, and have a positive relation with their year of experience, in their Social Entrepreneurship

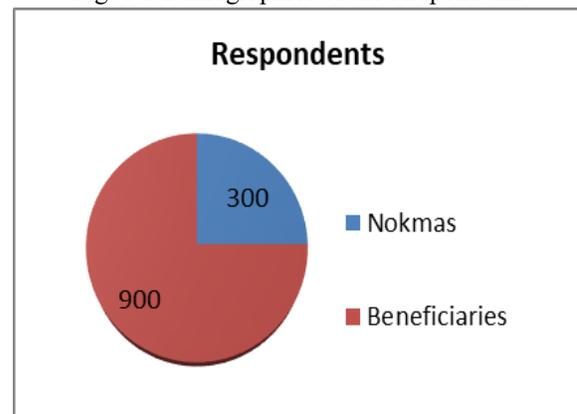
#### V. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

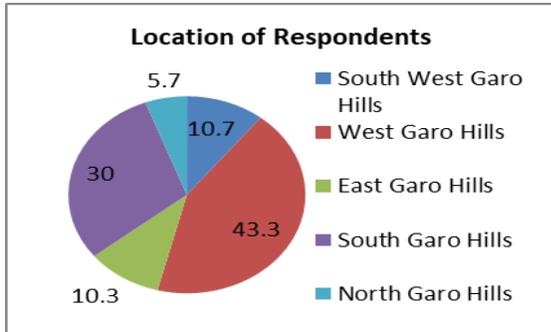
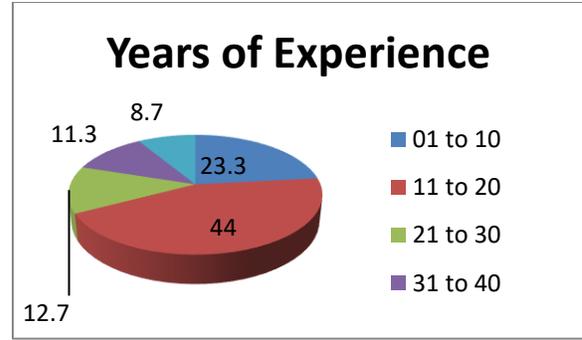
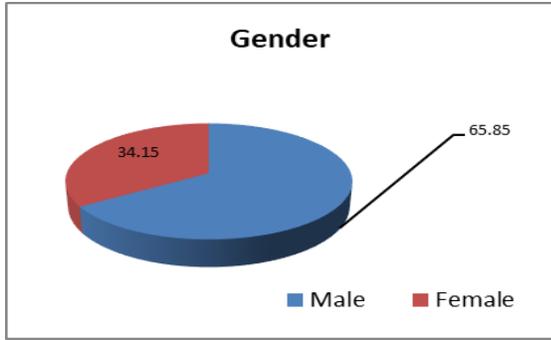
To find out stewardship traits in A’king Nokmas and their relationship with the year of experience of Nokmas, in their Social Entrepreneurship.

#### VI. METHODOLOGY

Review of literature has unearthed seven traits of stewardship, namely the ability to mobilize stakeholders to a vision, sensitivity to the needs of the community and organisation, adherence to traditional governance, trust, consistency, and transparency. With these traits, seven questions were employed to assess the stewardship behaviour in A’king Nokmas. A proportionate representation of samples from each cluster (geographical area, five districts) was ensured in the process of data collection. Further to verify the truthfulness of the answers, a sampling ratio of 1:3 (1 Nokma: 3 Beneficiaries) was executed. The researcher constructed the research instrument that is derived from the objectives of the study and applied the Likert scale, one of the most fundamental and frequently used psychometric tools in social sciences research, for statistical treatment (Joshi et al., 2015).

Fig. 1.1 Demographics of the Respondents





The research was undertaken among 300 Nokmas and 900 beneficiaries. Of these, 68.85% were males and 34.15% females. It was located in South West Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills, South Garo Hills, and North Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya. The respondents' years of experience as Nokma were 23.3% between 1-10, 44% between 11-20, 12.7% between 21 to 30, 11.3% between 31 to 40, and 8.7% were 41 and above.

Table 1.1: Perception of Stewardship of A'king Nokma in the Community (Combined Value in %)

Stewardship Behavior	Mobilize stakeholders to a compelling vision	Sensitive to the needs of the community	Sensitive to the needs of the organization	Actions governed by tradition	Trust is the value most	Consistency in actions	Be open and transparent
Strongly Disagree	1.2	0.67	0.5	1.2	0.5	0.5	0.5
Disagree	11.8	10.4	10.17	11.6	11	10.39	11.3
Neither agree nor disagree	7.5	5.39	5.333	7.4	5.44	5.722	5.28
Agree	43.2	48.9	48.28	42.6	42.6	49.39	49.8
Strongly Agree	36.3	34.6	35.72	37.2	40.5	34	33.1
Mean	4.0	4.06	4.086	4.0	4.12	4.06	4.04

V. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1.1 presents the perception of stewardship behaviour of A'king Nokmas in the community context. The following paragraphs will present the data in detail.

The data shows 36.3 % strongly agree, 43.2 % agree, 7.5 % neither agree nor disagree, 11.8 % disagree, and 1.2 % strongly disagree on the question of A'king Nokmas' mobilization of the stakeholders to their vision. The mean value is 4.0. Concerning their sensitivity to the needs of the community, the respondents have rated as 34.6 % strongly agree, 48.9 % agree, 5.39% neither agree or disagree, 10.4 %

disagree, and 0.67 % strongly disagree. The mean value is 4.06.

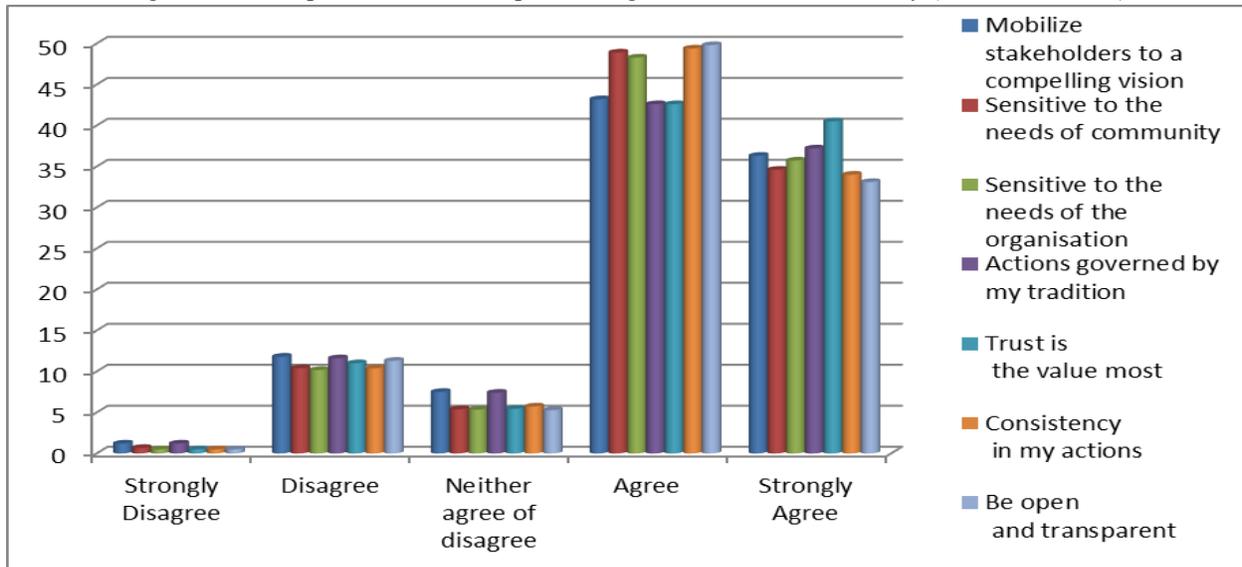
The perception of the respondents on the sensitivity of the Nokmas to the needs of the organization has been rated as 35.72 % strongly agree, 48.28 % agree, 5.33 % neither agree nor disagree, 10.17 % disagree, and 0.5 % strongly disagree. The mean value is 4.09. With regard to their governance based on tradition, it is rated as 37.2% strongly agree, 42.6% agree, 7.4 % neither agree nor disagree, 11.6% disagree, and 1.2 % strongly disagree. The mean value is 4.0.

The value of trust is regarded in their governance as 40.5% strongly agree, 42.6 % agree, 5.44% neither agree nor disagree, 11 % disagree, and 0.5 % strongly

disagree. The mean value is 4.12. The Consistency in actions is rated as 34 % strongly agree, 49.39 % agree, 5.72 % neither agree nor disagree, 10.39 % disagree, and 0.5 % strongly disagree. The mean value is 4.06.

The transparency and openness of them are graded as 33.1 % strongly agree, 49.8 % agree, 5.28 % neither agree nor disagree, 11.3% disagree, and 0.5% strongly disagree. The mean value is 4.04.

Figure 1.2: Perception of Stewardship of A'king Nokma in the Community (Combined Value)



## VI. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

Figure 1.2 presents graphically the perception of the respondents' ratings of stewardship traits of A'king Nokmas in their social entrepreneurship. The seven traits shall be presented, discussed and interpreted in detail in the following paragraphs.

### Mobilizes the Stakeholders to a Compelling Vision

Table 1.1 and Figure 1.2 show that 43.2 per cent of respondents assented and 36.3 have strongly assented that the A'king Nokmas mobilizes the stakeholders (community members) to a compelling vision in the community context. The past studies have stated that a steward leader leads with impact, influence, mobilizes stakeholders around a compelling vision, drives social and economic impact (e.g., thought leadership, business success), and inspires in character (Cossin, 2015). Further, the study focused on A'king Nokmas has noted that the attitudes and behaviours that placed a long-term best interest of the community, by venturing into the fishery, legal services, education, promotion of agriculture, market, trade, and tourism (Joshi, 2004).

Based on the response of respondents and literature, it is to be noted that the A'king Nokmas have the

character of a steward leader who inspires and influences the supporters together to a vision which leads to a socio-economic change in the community.

### Sensitivity to the Needs of the Community

Table 1.1 and Figure 1.2 present the sensitivity of A'king Nokmas to the needs of the community have received a very high positive assent from the respondents (48.9 per cent agree and 34.6 per cent very strongly agree). Referring back to the renowned authors' statements, it is noted that stewardship have a greater sense of belonging, and a cohesive link between residents and greater empathy with each other and the community at large (Hoffman, 2018). The literature on A'king Nokmas as a steward feeds the community members on festivals (Burling, 1963), takes responsibility in protecting the natural resources by controlling jhum cultivation, by conducting reporting sessions in the meeting of the Mahari and village elders, by being accountable, and by nurturing relationships with members of the A'king and neighbouring communities (Mathew, 2017b).

The primary data and literature imply that the Aking Nokmas are empathetic, responsible, accountable, and connected in his or her activities in the community

environment has created a cohesive feeling and sensitivity to the needs of the community members.

#### Sensitive to the Needs of the Clan or Family

The analysis has noted (Table 1.1 and Figure 1.2) that 48.28 per cent agreed and 35.72 per cent of them have very strongly agreed to the enquiry on the sensitivity of Nokma to the needs of the organisation. Referring to various studies on the sensitivity of family firms tends to exemplify the tenets of stewardship theory (Corbetta, 2004). Further, many scholars contend a good steward practices altruism, is motivated to serve others, makes right decisions (Corbetta, 2004; Lubatkin, 2007), and by being a caretaker, the family's assets (Davis, et al., 2010, p. 1093) have benefited a superior outcome, greater innovation and performance in family business (Neubaum, 2017).

Hence, from the data derived and the past literature depicted, it is obvious that the A'king Nokmas possess altruism, motivation to serve others, superior and greater innovation, and performance in community affairs.

#### Actions Governed by Traditions –

The analysis (Table 1.1 and Figure 1.2) of the data of the study has confirmed 42.6 per cent agree and 37.2 per cent strongly agree that A'king Nokmas' actions are governed by the traditions. The literature of past has argued that the indigenous stewards are firm on laws, traditions, beliefs, customs and values (Mkanda, 2014), cultural stories (Michael, 2020), basic dignity and rights (Roy, 2005) traditional knowledge (Winthrop, 2018) tribal identity (Michael, 2020) with perception of their tangible qualities (Winthrop, 2018) and adheres to moral and ethical principles to deliver responsible decision making process (Cossin, 2015) in the tribal context.

Hence, it has been proved that the A'king Nokmas, indigenous stewards, are firm on traditional customs and beliefs, dignity, and basic rights of the tribal community and adhere to the moral and ethical principles in their governing process.

#### Trust as the most Cherished Value

The combined value received from the study (Table 1.1 and Figure 1.2) notes that 42.6 per cent agree and 40.5 per cent strongly agree that A'king Nokmas cherish trust in their stewardship. Trust is the value that orients stewardship relations, which realizes

consistency and authenticity in the face of adversity (Cossin, 2015). Commitment (Volker, 2011), mutual trust, and connecting strategies are important for eventual outcomes in stewardship governance (Schillemans, 2019). Other authors (Hayek et al., 2015). suggests that the dyadic relationships are created by mutual trust, respect, and obligation in the context of stewardship. The role of stewards (public managers) is to absorb risk by enhancing trust through the promotion of dialogue, empowerment, and joint learning (Torfinn, 2020).

The clear assent from the respondents denotes that A'king Nokmas builds up a mutual trust in the community context, builds dyadic relationships, promotes a dialogue, empowers people, and remains authentic in the village community

## VII. CONSISTENCY IN ACTIONS

The data received from the respondents (Table 1.1 and Figure 1.2) have shown that 49.39 per cent and 34 per cent affirmed and strongly affirmed, respectively, that Aking Nokmas holds consistency in actions. The past literature has spoken on the character of a steward as one who holds consistency in actions (Hernandez, 2012; Cossin, 2015), self-concept (Hernandez, 2012), and meeting the strategic objectives of the organisation for the benefit of its owners and other stakeholders to alleviate public welfare deficiencies (Menyah, 2013). When concretely executed in a community context, they are consistent in self-respect and in meeting the strategic objectives to achieve the community welfare deficiencies.

The highly positive response from the respondents indicates that A'king Nokmas have a self-concept, tries to meet the strategic objectives of the organisation, and show consistency in their behaviour.

#### Expects Everyone to be Open and Transparent

The data received from the analysis (Table 1.1 and Figure 1.2) transparency and openness of the A'king Nokmas has been 49.8 per cent and 33.1 per cent assented positively and very positively respectively. The mean value of 4.04 is also high. The renowned authors argue that transparency is a lack of secrecy (Sharon, 2010), the availability of information (Meijer, 2013), and an openness to public scrutiny (Sharon, 2010; Meijer, 2013). When 'usefulness' has dominated over stewardship, the true value of

transparency can be diminished (Sharon, 2010). In governance, transparency is one of the dimensions that makes governance understandable and useful for beneficiaries (Gil-Garcia, 2020)

The assent from the respondents and the past literature on the transparent character of steward noted that one

could rightly conclude that Nokma as steward leader keeps no secrecy; information of governance is made available to the community, open to public scrutiny, and has intelligible governance.

Table 1.2: Pearson chi-squared test Crosstab – Years of Experience with Stewardship traits

Characteristics	Year of experience	Pearson chi-squared test	P Value	Cramer’s Value
Mobilize stakeholders to a compelling vision		(16) = 28.5021	0.028	0.1541
Sensitive to the needs of the community		(8) = 16.6360	0.034	0.1665
Sensitive to the needs of the organization		(16) = 28.5021	0.028	0.1541
Actions governed by my tradition		(8) = 10.0548	0.261	0.1295
Trust is the value most		(16) = 28.5021	0.028	0.1541
Consistency in my actions		(8) = 10.0548	0.261	0.1295
Be open and transparent		(12) = 7.9149	0.792	0.0938

The statistical test was conducted to determine the significant relation between years of experience with the stewardship traits. The result shows that the P value in mobilization stakeholders to a compelling vision, sensitivity to the needs of the community and organisation, and the value of trust are below 0.05. Hence, it could be concluded that there is a significant relation between years of experience with four stewardship traits, as proved with the data. The traits such as adherence to tradition, consistency in actions, and transparency have shown a higher P value, which denotes a less significant relation with the years of experience in Nokmas. Perhaps these traits may not depend on greater or fewer years of experience. Moreover, past literature notes that there is a set of principles of governance that are enforced by the Chra, the ultimate decision body of the institution of the Nokma.

VIII. CONCLUSION

With the seven basic traits, namely mobilization of the stakeholders to the vision of Nokma, sensitivity to the needs of the community and the organization, governance by tradition, mutual trust, consistency in actions, and transparency emerged from the past studies, the A’king Nokmas were tested. Based on the literature and current data, different authors have argued that the A’king Nokmas have inspired and influenced the Garo community members to a vision

that led to the socio-economic change in the community positively. They have shown a sense of belonging, they are empathetic, responsible, accountable, and connected in their activities in the community environment. These traits have created a cohesive feeling and sensitivity to the needs of the community members. As a steward leader, they possess altruism, motivation to serve others, with superior and greater innovation and performance in community affairs. As indigenous stewards, they are firm on traditional customs and beliefs, dignity, and basic rights of the tribal community, and adhere to the moral and ethical principles in their governing process. The mutual trust that they have valued and built up in the community context shaped into a dyadic relationship and promoted a dialogue in the village community. Their consistency and self-respect in meeting the strategic objectives in the community context have removed welfare deficiencies in communities. As steward leaders, they have neither kept secrecy nor evaded information of governance to the community, but have always been open to public scrutiny and provided intelligible governance. Further, a Pearson chi-squared test denotes a significant relation between years of experience and stewardship traits.

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