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Skeptics are among those expected to attend a freethought conference to be held in Accra, Ghana this weekend. The event is the first of its kind - in the history of the country- and is expected to focus on issues and themes of interested to critical thinkers and some of the challenges facing skeptics in the world's most religious nation.

Like in other countries in sub Saharan Africa, skeptics in Ghana have an uphill task in terms of combating the negative influence of dogma, unreason and blind faith. Belief in superstition is strong and permeates the local thought and culture. Supernatural and paranormal beliefs are widespread, and impact negatively on the lives of the people.

One of the urgent superstitions in Ghana is the belief in witchcraft. Elderly women are often accused of using witchcraft and magic to cause diseases and deaths in their families. These women are attacked, exiled or lynched. In the northern region of Ghana, there are at least six make shift camps where some of these women take refuge to avoid being killed by local mobs, family or community members.

Recently the authorities in Ghana have come under immense international pressure to close down the camps following media report on the plight, abuse and exploitation of women living in these make shift shelters.

But the efforts of the government have so far not yeilded any result. This is mainly due to strong opposition and concerns that such a move would mean sending these women home only for them to be summarily executed.

In Ghana, the practice of witchcraft accusation is extended to girls in the country. Early this year, a 17 year old school girl who is exceptionally brilliant was accused of "bewitching and stealing the intelligence of her classmates." She was subsequently banished to one of the camps in the northern region. But it took the intervention of the government ministry and a local non governmental organisation to free the girl from the camp.

Witchcraft is not the only paranormal belief that people contend with in Ghana. Other irrational beliefs prevail in this West African nation.

One of them is the belief in juju and charms. Charms are magical substances which are believed can protect or enhance one's fortune. In Africa, the belief in juju, charms and amulets is quite pronounced in the area of foot ball. As Vishaal Loganathan pointed out: In Africa, where Juju is common among local people, the footballers are not that much different. Juju is "an object of any kind superstitiously venerated by West African native tribes, and used as a charm, amulet, or means of protection; a fetish. Also the supernatural or magical power attributed to such objects, or the system of observances connected therewith; also a ban or interdiction effected by means of such an object." African footballers have been known to go to great lengths in getting juju to work for them as they believe charms and spells help them become victorious and at times even work against their opponents.

Though Ghana has one of the strongest teams in Africa, it has not always won the African Nations cup and has never won the world cup. Last year, the captain of the Nigerian team acc used the Ghana team of using juju and amulets in a qualifying match which Ghana narrowly won. Meanwhile, a former coach of Ghana's Black Stars has attributed the team's failure to win the 2012 nations' cup in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea to indiscipline, internal wrangling and "some players' mentality about using black power to destroy themselves."

Skeptics in Ghana will not only have to engage in "changing" the juju mentality of the players and the Ghanaian public as a whole (as recommended by the coach), but they also have to contend with the health-related activities of the Ghana Association of Faith Healers and Traditional Birth Attendants , a group comprised of "healers, prophets and spiritualists of the Bible faith, herbalists and traditional birth attendants."

Surely, skeptics in Ghana have their job cut for them.

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