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# Role of Civil Society Organizations in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Ghana

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## **Role of Civil Society Organizations in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Ghana**

### **Abstract**

Ghana is both locally and internationally described as an oasis of peace and stability on a continent circumvented by conflicts. The country has not experienced any form of large-scale violence or civil war since independence in March 1957. Nevertheless, it is faced with pockets of relative violence, including chieftaincy conflict and land dispute, killing several people and destroying many properties. In an effort to help resolve these conflicts, the Ghanaian government ends up prolonging it due to its position in some of the conflicts. However, the review of secondary data revealed that many of the conflicts in Ghana have often needed the intervention of civil society organizations to end them, or to bring relative peace since warring parties often, do not see the government as neutral. The author recommends that government should create the enabling environment for the civil society organizations to operate smoothly in their quest to resolve conflicts and to promote peace without the civil society organizations compromising their neutrality and objectivity.

**Keywords: Civil society organizations, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, chieftaincy, Bawku, Dagbon, Ghana**

## **Introduction**

Ghana is among the few African countries that have not experienced any form of large-scale violence or civil war since independence in March 1957. This is why the country has often been described at both the local and international levels as an oasis of peace and stability on a continent besieged by conflicts. Ghana is considered one of the most peaceful countries in West Africa because, since 1992, the country has witnessed peaceful politico-democratic transitions. The peaceful general elections that were held in 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016 have made Ghana a beacon of hope for democracy, good governance, peace and stability in Africa. The elections in December 2008 and December 2016 for instance, represented the second and third time, respectively, that democratically elected incumbent presidents uninterruptedly handed over power to the opposition political party. What is equally significant is that in the past decade, the Ghanaian electorates have freely ensured a turnover of government between the two main political parties, New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) without violence (Arthur, 2010).

Moreover, Ghana plays a significant role in resolving conflicts and maintaining peace in the West African sub region and beyond. For instance, the Ghanaian Armed Forces (GAF) have been at the forefront of peace in Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Mali and Cote D'Ivoire among others. The GAF has been instrumental in peacekeeping assignments in Rwanda, Lebanon and Cambodia. In addition, Ghana has accepted and hosted a significant number of refugees from some West African states like Liberia and Cote D'Ivoire. It is for this and other related reasons that the American Fund for Peace in 2009 was prompted to describe Ghana as the most peaceful and stable country in Africa (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013).

In spite of the international acclamation and praises as well as the flourishing democracy in the country, Ghana is faced with diverse forms of violence emanating from chieftaincy conflicts, land disputes, ethnic violence and the like. As stated by Aapengnuo (2008, p. 1) “there are more than 200 internal conflicts around tradition, chieftaincy authority, land and politic”. These conflicts, though localized, have had dire consequences on the lives of people, destroyed properties worth of thousands of Ghanaian Cedis, and above all affected the development processes of these communities, especially the Bawku and Dagbon communities. For example, several people were murdered in the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict in Northern Ghana, including the King, Na Ya and some elders in 2002 (Aikins, 2012).

In effect, the Ghanaian government spent over Seven Billion Cedis (US \$9 million) to maintain the fragile peace in Dagbon (Issifu, 2015). In the Konkomba verses Nanumba, and the Dagomba verses Nanumba conflicts in 1994/95, over 2000 people died and a good deal of property was destroyed (McCandless, Bagu, Oyedele, Gordon-Mensah, Osei & Charlick, 2001). Besides, 18,900 animals, as well as over 500,000 tubers of yams destroyed and 60,000 acres of crops set on fire owing to the conflicts (Mahama, 2003). Although Ghana is described as a peaceful country, violence occurs from time-to-time, which involves the protagonists from various ethnic, religious, economic and political backgrounds.

In an attempt to help ensure sustainable peace in violence prone communities in Ghana, the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) cannot be overemphasized. In recent years, there has been increased recognition of the role CSOs can play as partners with government and intergovernmental organizations in the conflict resolution and peacebuilding agenda (Barnes, 2006). CSOs have been instrumental in ensuring some level of stability in conflict-shattered areas, especially in the Northern regions of Ghana, where a number of post-

independence challenges have conspired to create pockets of relative instability and armed conflicts (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). The Ghanaian government, in a bid to resolve some of the conflicts, ended up prolonging it due to the perceptions of some feuding parties about the government's position in the conflict (Bombande, 2005; Ahiave, 2013). According to the scholars; Yakubu (2005), Awedoba (2009), Ahorsu and Gebe (2011), and others, government's interference in the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict, for instance, started right from the first year of colonization to date. The problem of government interference in the majority of the conflicts in Ghana tends to make CSOs the preferred option for peace mediation in the country (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). According to Arthur (2010), Ghana's young democracy agenda has been helped with the activities of the CSOs in the country, especially the media, serving as the preferred peace actors. The media has been instrumental in safeguarding Ghana's democratic principles by performing its watchdog and monitoring functions. In particular, it has acted as a check on the government and public office holders by raising issues of transparency and accountability relevant for peace and security (Arthur, 2010).

Drawing an inspiration from Arthur (2010), Bukari and Guuroh (2013) add that many of the conflicts in Ghana have often had to involve the mediation efforts of CSOs to end them since factions often perceive the government biased. In cases where the CSOs intervened, stability prevailed (Irobi, 2005). Parties in a conflict often see CSOs as neutral and trustworthy compared to the government (Irobi, 2005). Bombande (2005) also adds that, "civil society has the unique role to accompany communities at various levels to build trust through dialogue because in many situations, governments and politicians are not trusted by the communities" (p. 35). This trust gives CSOs the advantage over state institutions to achieve the successful resolution of conflicts in Ghana (Bombande, 2005). A typical example is the

joint efforts of the Permanent Peace Negotiation Team (PPNT) and the Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI) in Ghana. The PPNT made up of a consortium of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and the NPI helped to resolve the protracted ethnic conflicts between the Konkomba and Nanumba/Dagomba, and the Gonja and Nawari/Konkomba in Northern Ghana, by bringing the warring parties together through mediation, which the Ghanaian government failed to do (Mahama, 2003).

According to Awinador-Kanyirige (2014), had it not been for the timely intervention by the PPNT and other CSOs through a series of peace talks and peace education the Konkomba and Nanumba/Dagomba, and the Gonja and Nawari/Konkomba conflict in Northern Ghana could have become protracted. The most positive results of the efforts were the February 1996 Peace Agreement by the NPI between the Dagomba on the one hand, and the Konkomba and Basare on the other; and between Nanumbas and Konkombas, which has had a positive impact till now (Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

Also, when it was finally realized that the 1994 Nanumba-Konkomba conflict had engulfed most areas of Northern Ghana, including parts of the Brong-Ahafo and the Volta regions, the PPNT ensured that the conflict did not escalate into violence in those areas (Mahama, 2003). The PPNT carried out a community sensitization program to educate people about the effects of the conflict on development, and the need for peaceful coexistence (Mahama, 2003; Awinador-Kanyirige, 2014). In addition, the effort by these two agencies, PPNT and NPI, resulted in the Kumasi-Accord signed on 30th March, 1996, between the Dagombas and the Komkonbas/Nanumbas. Additionally, peace accords, were signed between the Konkombas and Nawuris; the Gonjas and Komkonbas; the Gonjas and Basaris, all by initiative of the PPNT and NPI (Brukum, 2001). The Foundation for Security and

Development in Africa also donated metal detectors to the Ghana Police Service to help track down illicit arms and ammunitions that contribute to the violence in the Northern region (Ekiyor, 2008).

Lipchitz and Crawford (1995) postulate that using CSOs and local NGOs in mediation is normally the best solution to effective conflict resolution. To them, CSOs are able to set up early warning systems and get to the underlying issues of the conflict. For instance, the Inter-Faith Dialogue made up of Churches and the Muslim communities provided early warning signals to the appropriate security agencies to set up conflict prevention mechanisms that prevented the Bawku chieftaincy conflict from escalating in the neighboring communities (Lipchitz & Crawford, 1995; Bukari, 2013). On like the 1994 inter-communal conflict between the Nanumba and Konkomba, where the violence was compounded by the smuggling of small arms from Burkina Faso and Togo, the CSOs in the Bawku conflict worked to ensure that the smuggling of small arms was adequately checked using the early warning signal to the security agencies (McCandless et al., 2001; Bukari, 2013). The use and involvement of CSOs in conflict resolution have been essential and successful in Ghana because they are often seen as neutral, and understands the local dynamics and the roots of the conflicts (Agyeman, 2008).

The tremendous roles of the CSOs in conflict resolution and peacebuilding have made these organizations important partners in contemporary peace efforts. The paper seeks to explore the role of CSOs in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Ghana, particularly the protracted Bawku chieftaincy conflict and the intractable Dagbon chieftaincy crisis. The paper is organized as follows: section one discusses conceptual issues, section two presents an overview of the Bawku chieftaincy conflict and, the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict, while the role of the CSOs in each of these conflicts is discussed in section three. The impacts and

contributions of CSOs, and the factors enabling their acceptance in Ghana are discussed in sections four and five. The challenges facing CSOs, followed by a conclusion and recommendations, are provided in section six of the paper.

### **Conceptualizing Issues**

In Ghana, most of the conflict resolution methods by the CSOs have ensured a sustainable peace because of their neutrality: they take into account the cultural needs of the feuding parties and goes deep down to underlying the structural causes of the conflict, and to provide a holistic win-win solution (Bukari, 2013). Like conflict resolution, peacebuilding is the process of providing the conditions necessary for preventing conflict from reoccurring. In his *An Agenda for Peace*, Boutros Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding as “action to solidify peace and avoid relapse into conflict” (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). Building on Boutros-Ghali’s definition, Porter (2007) added that CSOs are working in the field of peacebuilding that build positive relationships, heal wounds, reconcile antagonistic differences, meet basic needs, enhance equality, instill feelings of security, empower moral agency, and are democratic, inclusive and just. The CSOs in Ghana are working in the field of peacebuilding as described by Porter in 2007.

According to Barnes (2006), examples of the civil society groups that have a stake in peacebuilding include social movements, business associations, trade unions and professional bodies, cooperatives and self-help initiatives. In addition, CSOs, including NGOs, media, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) are very active in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Ghana. I have discussed below the conflict



resolution and peacebuilding roles played by the CSOs in the Bawku chieftaincy conflict as well as the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict in Northern Ghana.

### **The Bawku Chieftaincy Conflict**

The Mamprusi and Kusasi chieftaincy conflict in the Bawku Traditional Area (BTA) reflects the general phenomenon of ethnic tensions and conflicts that has engulfed the African continent in the last fifty years (Longi, 2015). The root causes of this conflict are largely traceable to the introduction of secular political authority/chieftaincy in areas, which before colonialism, were described as stateless or Acephalous societies (Longi 2015). However, the actions and inactions of the post-colonial Ghanaian governments such as, the interference in chieftaincy matters more than any factor set the stage for the intractable Mamprusi and Kusasi conflict in the Upper East Region of Ghana (Longi, 2015). Bukari and Guuroh (2013) affirm that the conflict is identity-based and revolves around the claim for traditional political power (chieftaincy) between the Kusasis and Mamprusis in the BTA. Since the 1930s, the conflict has taken different dimensions and has remained intense and unresolved.

The primary actors in the conflict, the Kusasis and the Mamprusis, have both taken entrenched positions, making the conflict protracted (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). The first clash between the two groups occurred in 1957 and between 1980, 2000 and 2010 the two groups have clashed several times, leading to devastating consequences (Longi, 2015). For instance, according to the Police Intelligence Report for 2009, there were 12 murder cases, 32 robbery cases, and 40 cases of arson related to the conflict (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). It was also revealed in the same report that, from 2007 to 2010, the total number of deaths recorded was 78, but some deaths may not have been recorded (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013).

Nevertheless, frantic efforts have been made in resolving the conflict since its inception. The Ghanaian government and some political parties have intervened with the aim to create some stability in the area. However, their actions seem to have degenerated into conflict (Longi, 2015). Bukari and Guuroh (2013) have confirmed the two warring ethnic groups in the conflict align themselves with the two key political parties in the country; the NDC being on the side of the Kusasis, whereas the NPP supports the Mamprusis. The political interference in the conflict makes it more unresolvable because when any of the political parties come into power and attempt to resolve the conflict, they end up favoring their sides, which leads to an opposition against the outcome of the other group (Bombande, 2005).

Following the interference of political parties and the inability of the government to resolve the conflict, a number of CSOs had to come in to help resolve the conflict since they are perceived trustworthiness (Bombande, 2005). In congruence, Bukari and Guuroh (2013) maintained that the government does not have the political will and the trust by the parties to mediate in ending the conflict because of its perceived alignment with one faction. The CSOs through a series of community-based peace education programs, and awareness creation on conflict effect and sensitization programs on the costs of the Bawku conflict motivated the feuding parties to sign the Bawku Peace Accord as well as the Damongo Peace Agreement (Bombande, 2005; Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). These efforts have led to the conflict resolution and the creation of a relative peace in the BTA (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). The next section discusses in details the roles played by the CSOs in the Bawku chieftaincy conflict.

### **The Role of CSOs in the Bawku Chieftaincy Conflict**

The role of CSOs in peacebuilding in the Bawku conflict has been significant, especially in ensuring some level of relative peace in the area. Bukari and Guuroh (2013) have argued that a number of CSOs since 2001 made efforts at mediating to end the conflict through peacebuilding processes and conflict resolution mechanisms. For instance, a consortium of CSOs, including Action Aid Ghana, WANEP, Advocacy Peace Group - IBIS (Ghana) spearheaded the Bawku Peace Accord that was signed between the stakeholders in the conflict at the Damongo Peace Agreement (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). Moreover, the Catholic Relief Services has been essential in ensuring the relative peace, which is currently enjoyed in Bawku through the provision of relief services, including sleeping mattress, temporal shelter, foodstuffs, malaria drugs, treated mosquito nets and the like. Other CSOs, including the Christian Council of Ghana and the Bawku East Women's Development Association (BEWDA) have also been instrumental in bringing peace to the area through a community based peace education programs (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013).

Also, it is on record that NGOs, together with the National Peace Council (NPC), a body established by law to promote peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the country, mediated and orchestrated a roadmap to peace in the area (Bukari, 2013). In addition, CSOs with the factions in the conflict formed the Bawku Inter-Ethnic Peace Committee in 2010 to help resolve the conflict. The effort of the CSOs in the conflict has been helpful in curbing violence in the area (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). More so, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), an international organization [not a CSO per say, but working to support the mainstream CSOs] has been supporting the NPC financially through the Ministry of Interior so that they can equip the military and police forces to help keep peace in the areas

(Draman, Mohammed & Woodrow, 2009). Just like most of the mainstream CSOs, the UNDP mediated to end the conflict and build capacity for peace processes by funding peace activities (Draman et al., 2009).

Specifically, these are the roles played by the CSOs/NGOs in the peacebuilding process in the Bawku chieftaincy conflict. First, WANEP facilitated the Damango Peace Talks in June 2001 that brought about the Bawku Peace Initiative. Apart from that, it facilitated the Kumasi Peace Talks in 2010 and provided funding for the peace process. WANEP is currently coordinating the peace actions of all CSOs in the conflict. Second, the BEWDA mediates among all the feuding factions, organizes peace education and sensitization in local communities, and coordinates the peacebuilding activities at the local level. Third, World Vision-Ghana collaborated with WANEP to facilitate the Kumasi Peace Talks in 2010 and prior to that helped to bring the Bawku Peace Initiative in 2001, and currently provides peace education to the disputing groups (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). Fourth, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) collaborated with WANEP to facilitate the Kumasi Peace Talks in 2010 and provided funding for the peace process as well as helping to bring the Bawku Peace Initiative in 2001. UNICEF in addition, advocates for the protection of children in the conflict zone. Fifth, the Northern Development Forum (NDF) played an advocacy role in demanding for peace between the factions serving as a pressure group for peace in the area, and actively participated in the Kumasi Peace Talks in 2010.

The Centre for Conflict Transformations and Peace Studies (CECOTAPS) participated in the Damango Peace Talks in June 2001, which brought about the Bawku Peace Initiative, and also played advocacy role in the peace process. Finally, the Catholic Diocese, Christian Council of Ghana, Muslim Council of Ghana and the Presbyterian Church-Ghana, all

participated actively in the Damango Peace Talks in June 2001, paving way for the Bawku Peace Initiative and the Kumasi Peace Talks in 2010. Currently, they are providing peace education and sensitization in local communities as part of the post conflict peacebuilding measures (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). The current relative peace in Bawku could not be possible if the CSOs had not intervened (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). The peacebuilding approaches employed by the CSOs in the Bawku conflict, including the peace education, sensitization activities on peacebuilding, organization of inter-ethnic games, and the signing of peace agreements has created a relatively peaceful coexistence between the two feuding parties in the conflict.

Bukari and Guuroh (2013) affirm that the role of the CSOs in the Bawku conflict has been very helpful in stemming the spate of violence in the area. They reiterate that because of the persistent violence, the total number of deaths recorded from 2007 to 2009 was 78 (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). However, involvement of the CSOs in mediation talks with the feuding parties, and the community-based peace education and training, as well as the participatory peace campaigns helped to reduce the spate of violence in the area (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). Particularly, the WANEP played and still playing mediation, peace campaign and training roles, which has contributed to the relative peace in the area (Annan, 2013). Agyeman (2008) states that since the Fourth Republic in the early 1990s, CSOs have helped Ghana, particularly in the flashpoint communities in Northern Ghana, including Bawku in managing and resolving conflicts through the organization of participatory inter-ethnic and tribal games to build peaceful coexistence among the factions in the conflict.

WANEP through a community based peace education and the awareness creation programs on the effects of the conflict, which was organized for the youth, opened their eyes

to see the huge socio-economic cost of the conflict, hence making them to eschew from participating in the conflict. For instance, the peaceful nature of the 2012 election campaign in the Bawku area compared to previous election years, where the feuding parties clashed frequently on political lines, bear testimony to the fact that the youth in the area are now refraining from taking active part in the conflict (Kendie, Osei-Kufuor & Kwaku, 2014). Due to the youth's active participation in the series of the community-based peace education programs organized by the CSOs they are now being fed up with the conflict (Kendie et al., 2014). The youths are currently refusing to take up arms, and some have become informants and early warning signal providers to the military and police to intensify security in the area (Kendie et al., 2014).

Additionally, the desire of the youth in Northern Ghana, including Bawku in recent times, not to take part in the conflict is linked to the effort of the Community Development and Youth Advisory Centre (CODEYAC), the Northern Region Youth and Development Association (NORYDA), Ghana Association for Private Voluntary Organization in Development (GAPVOD), the Northern Ghana Network for Development (NGND-the "Network"). They educated the youth through peace campaigns and awareness creation on the socio-economic and environmental effects of conflict in Northern Ghana, and the need for a peaceful coexistence (McCandless et al., 2001). Although these groups are intermediary level and work only in Northern Ghana, youth-based networks such as NORYDA are particularly important because they have demonstrated in their peace activities that the youth can play a central role in securing and maintaining peace through local CSOs (McCandless et al., 2001). Currently, in general, there is a relative peace in the area, which CSOs and NGOs

have played a key role to that effect. Like the Bawku chieftaincy conflict, CSOs have also played a crucial role in bringing a relative peace in Dagbon.

### **The Dagbon Chieftaincy Conflict**

The manifestation of the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict was in 1954 when the Ya Na Abudulai III from the Abudu royal gate succeeded his father (Na MahamaBla III) (Mahama, 2003). After fifteen (15) years, Ya Na Abudulai III died and an attempt by some elders succeeded in imposing Mahamadu Abudulai IV, a regent from the Abudu gate as successor to his late father. Meanwhile, the Mion Lana Andani, a regent of Mion was the right person to succeed the late Ya Na Abudulai III based on the rotation system (Aikins, 2012). Consequently, impartial Kingmakers deskinning Mahamadu Abudulai IV to allow the Mion Lana Yakubu Andani from the Andani gate enskinned. Eventually, if the regent, Mahamadu Abudulai, had been installed this would have been the third time since 1948 that the Abudu gate would have occupied the throne to the rejection of the Andani gate (Aikins, 2012).

After the enskinment of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II, there was a form of relative peace in the area until a misunderstanding between the two gates led to the Ya Na's killing (Issifu & Asante, 2015). Like the Bawku chieftaincy conflict, the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict has also taken a political dimension; the NPP and NDC parties have aligned to the Abudu and Andani royal gates respectively (Issifu & Asante, 2015). The motive is for them to score cheap political points that in turn prolonged the conflict. It is argued that, the late Ya Na Yakubu Andani II, for instance, was healthily alive during the regime of the NDC government. However, he was killed in cold blood on March 27, 2002, during the era of the NPP

government (Brukum, 2001; Ahiave, 2013). The Andani gate and their sympathizers believe the NPP government had a hand in the death of late Ya Na Yakubu Andani II (Ahiave, 2013).

Current and recent past governments through the National, Regional and District Security Councils, Commissions and Committees, Court, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior (police and the military) have attempted to resolve the fight, but the conflict kept reoccurring (Bombande, 2005). A myriad of factors have been identified as challenges to the resolution of the conflict and key among them was perceived as political interference. As Ahiave (2013) rightly confirms, “there are several documentations about government interference in the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict since the colonial period to date” (p. 28). Also, Issifu (2015) in his study found that, “manipulations of historical memories to evoke emotions such as fear, resentment and hatred by some politicians and conflict entrepreneurs into the minds of the younger generation have contributed to the intractable nature of the chieftaincy conflict in Dagbon” (p. 36).

Politicians have been blamed for not showing a strong political will towards resolving the conflict since they were not courageous enough to deal with issues that would lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, which obviously, would not give them the needed political capital (Alhassan, 2007). The perceived lack of political will coupled with political interference has contributed to the intractable nature of the Dagbon conflict (Brukum, 2001; Yakubu, 2005). Reasons why the government is not seen as a neutral mediator or a forerunner in securing a lasting peace in the area is that some politicians would not like the conflict resolved completely because of the desire to score cheap political points (Ateng & Abazaami, 2016). These conflict entrepreneurs see the efforts of the CSOs to resolving the conflict as a direct opposition to their political gains (Ateng & Abazaami, 2016). The Dagbon conflict has



been complicated by the influence of some politicians and political parties in Ghana (Tsikata & Seini, 2004). This is why CSOs had to intervene to ensure that peace and stability prevailed in the area.

The WANEP-Ghana has played and is still playing a useful role in ending the conflict in the area. In 2007, the WANEP implemented radio programs on peace and stability in the Northern region of Ghana, where Dagbon is located. The radio program became an outreach opportunity to continue sensitizing the people on various peace activities in the area (WANEP Annual Report, 2008). The resulting impact of the radio peace program was that, as Tamale, the Northern regional capital, was one of the host cities for the 2008 African Cup of Nations, a radio program was aired aimed at sending conflict prevention and early warning messages throughout the tournament. The program emphasized the need for all the feuding factions in the region to bury their hatchets during the period to provide a safe environment for visitors coming from all over Africa and the world to enjoy the tournament. In effect, peace and stability was achieved before, during and after the tournament (WANEP Annual Report, 2008).

### **The Role of CSOs in the Dagbon Conflict**

It has been further found that CSOs have played diverse but important roles in mitigating the adverse effects of the Dagbon conflict. One of such CSOs include the Yendi Peace Centre (YPC), a faith-based organization run by the Catholic Dioceses of Yendi whose role members of both feuding gates acknowledged are neutral and trustworthy (Ahiave, 2013). Aside the YPC, other CSOs, FBOs, NGOs and specialized United Nations agencies on their own initiatives and sometimes in collaboration with the state played major roles in mitigating the adverse effects of the Dagbon conflict (Ahorsu & Gebe, 2011). Apart from the provision

of relief services to the displaced during the conflict, they also engaged in sensitization programs aimed at educating people on the need for peaceful co-existence in Dagbon. Most of the CSOs during the Dagbon conflict provided relief and humanitarian assistance in the form of food, assorted drinks, shelter, and mattresses, cooking utensils, water and the like. In addition, some of the CSOs engaged in direct or indirect negotiation with the feuding parties for the first time (Ahorsu & Gebe, 2011).

The YPC organized over ninety (90) meetings, including workshops, seminars, and fora that brought both members of the Abudu and Andani gates as well as youths and women's groups together in peace making process (Ahiave, 2013). Again, the aim of the YPC was to involve all the stakeholders in the peace process in Yendi for the swift development of the area. According to Ahiave (2013), the YPC is, thus, recognized as the first organization to bring the feuding factions together for peace making. In addition, the role of the Federation of Moslem Women Association of Ghana (FOMWAG), UNDP, Community Life Improvement Program (CLIP) and the Ghana Danish Community Association (GDCA) was vital in the Dagbon peace process. They engaged the people in activities, including peace education, awareness creation on the effects of conflict, peace sensitizations, and community based economic support aimed at improving their socio-economic standards in the peacebuilding process.

More so, the role of traditional civil society groups made up of Kings, local chiefs and opinion leaders like family heads, sectional leaders, *Tindaanas*, and community elders have been instrumental in creating an avenue for peace in Dagbon. Generally, the existence of chiefs in Ghana has helped to ensure relative peace and order as well as regulate the conduct of people (Annan, 2013). For example, the Committee of the Four Eminent Chiefs led by

Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Ashanti King, with the responsibility of finding a durable solution to the chieftaincy dispute in Dagbon has been essential (Issifu & Asante, 2015). After a long period of deliberations and a series of negotiations initiated by the committee, representatives of the two battling gates in Dagbon signed a “Roadmap to Peace” on 30th March, 2006. The “Roadmap to Peace” enumerated five major benchmarks in the conflict resolution and peacebuilding process in the area. These five major benchmarks to peace in the area include: first, to perform the burial of the late Ya Na Yakubu Andani II; second, the installation of the regent of the late king; third, the performance of the funeral of the deposed Mahamadu Abdulai IV; fourth, the performance of the funeral of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II; and finally, the selection and enskinment of a new Ya Na for Dagbon.

The roadmap has been able to ensure the burial of the late Ya Na Yakubu Andani II and the installation of the regent of the late king as well as the performance of the funeral of the deposed Mahamadu Abdulai IV, which at least has brought some degree of relative peace in Dagbon (Issifu & Asante, 2015). As a result of a preliminary agreement reached through the formal process: “Roadmap to Peace”, the Ya Na was finally buried on April 10 2006, and on April 21, his eldest son, Kamkanpuya-Na Abdulai Andani, was enskinned as regent of Yendi, and this has contributed to a relative peace in the area (Draman et al., 2009).

In addition to working with traditional civil society groups, the Committee of the Eminent Chiefs, and the UNDP, supported the work of other CSOs to promote peace in Dagbon by funding workshops for various socio-cultural groups such as the artisans (*macheli*), butchers (*nakohas*), youth chiefs (*zaachis*) and leaders of women groups (*magazias*) who are all key stakeholders in the area. The UNDP supported consultation workshops that brought key persons from the Andanis and Abudus for the first time and for

finding a lasting peace in the area (Draman et al., 2009). These efforts by the CSOs have all contributed to the relative peace currently seen in Dagbon. This indicates that, without the peace and mediation activities, as well as the independent and neutral role of CSOs, the relative peace currently enjoyed in Dagbon would have been in shambles.

### **Impacts and Contributions of CSOs in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Ghana**

CSOs participation in conflict in recent times has seen a major reduction in the severity, and the number of conflict cases in Ghana. Without their involvement in contemporary conflicts, most of the protracted violent conflicts, including Bawku and the Dagbon chieftaincy conflicts could have led to a serious violence as realized in the 1994 Kokomba-Nanumba vicious conflict, which 5,000 people died (Bombande, 2007). One of the key reasons for Ghana's current stability in general and the relative peace in Northern Ghana in particular can be attributed to the impacts and contributions of the CSOs. The UN in recent times has made some effort by supporting and collaborating with the CSOs who have been involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Ghana (Bombande, 2007). From the two conflict cases discussed above, CSOs through awareness creation, sensitization, education, dialogue, workshops, seminars, fora, mediation, peace initiatives, financial and technical assistance, and other activities have positively impacted largely in chieftaincy related conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Ghana.

Again, CSOs have made and are still making a significant contribution in the Ghanaian policy terrain by calling for and ensuring transparency in the political and policy-making process (Arthur, 2010). During the 2000 elections, several CSOs groups such as Ghana Alert, Ghana Legal Literacy Resources Foundation and the Coalition of Domestic

Election Observers (CODEO) recruited, trained and deployed more than 15,000 observers to cover events and developments that occurred at about half of the more than 20,000 polling stations in Ghana (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). This was followed with the deployment of 7400 observers in all 10 regions of the country to observe the presidential and parliamentary elections (Arthur, 2010) so that, in the case of electoral dissatisfaction that can lead to conflict, evidence can be provided in a resolution. The attempts by CODEO and other CSOs have contributed positively to Ghana's peaceful atmosphere and the international admirations as the doyen of democracy in Africa, with accompanying benefits and international support.

Ghana's growing international prestige has helped bring a substantial external aid and assistance to the country (Arthur, 2010). These benefits and recognitions could not be obtained without the active role of the CSOs in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and democracy in the country. As Bukari and Guuroh (2013) asserts, since Ghana's democratic transition in 1992, the country has made significant efforts to consolidate its democracy, and there have been a number of significant changes and improvements in its democratic system influenced largely by the CSOs in the country. Ghana is widely regarded as an example of democratic success in the West African region, partly because of the progressive CSOs activities (Oxfam Research Reports, 2013).

### **Factors Enabling the Acceptance of CSOs in Ghana**

The acceptance of CSOs in Ghana, particularly, in the Northern regions is attributed to a number of key factors, including issues such as neutrality and impartiality, and the traditional peacebuilding approach of CSOs in the peace process. CSOs in their quest to intervene in conflict situations remain neutral and impartial. On like the Ghanaian government

using a formal court system, where win-lose approach to conflict resolution is often seen, CSOs focus on the root causes of a conflict, and as such, are able to provide a win-win solution and recommendations to address the conflict permanently. Agyeman (2008) suggests that the use and involvement of local CSOs and NGOs in conflict resolution is necessary in Ghana and other African countries since they understand the local dynamics and the roots of the conflicts, and are therefore in good positions to mediate a conflict successfully.

This approach has made the work of the CSOs legitimate and acceptable to parties and communities in the conflict (Ateng & Abazaami, 2016). According to Fitzduff (2004), CSOs have embedded neutrality and impartiality in their course to supporting peacebuilding activities and therefore they are much freer than governments in deciding to which of the parties they will talk with, and have used this opportunity to talk to those who are often outside the reach of governments in most conflicts. This is the case of the CSOs in Ghana. As argued by Brukum (2001), Ahiave (2013) and Issifu (2015), the neutrality nature of the CSOs in Ghana, has made them trustworthy in the peace making processes in Ghana. The basic approach by the CSOs in Northern Ghana, for example, was the creation of platforms, guided by the neutrality principle of active participation. They involved of all the stakeholders; primary, secondary and tertiary into the peace making process. The platform, according to Ateng and Abazaami (2016), allowed the parties/stakeholders to own the resolution processes.

The grassroots approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding by the CSOs encourages conflicting parties to free participate and to identify their needs and interest in the conflict (Agyeman, 2008). This has been the approach of the CSOs in the Bawku conflict (Kendie et al., 2014). The active participation of the youth promoted the ownership of the whole peace process as well as the people having confidence in whatever is being done. The

ownership of the conflict resolution process also creates the enabling atmosphere for a sustainable peace because it is from within the people's worldview.

Supporting the same viewpoint, Okrah (2003) opines that, CSOs applies traditional systems of conflict resolutions, such as truth-saying, win-win conflict outcomes, and culture and belief systems in conflict resolution and peace making. Local CSOs such as WANEP and BEWDA among others, are accepted in the Northern regions, because they are guided by the traditional approaches to peacebuilding, which focus on the principles of restorative justice rather than retributive justice, restitution of friendship rather than fault-finding, dialogue rather than blame, and cooperativeness rather than assertiveness (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013). Despite their acceptability, CSOs are also bereft with certain challenges, as the article discusses next.

### **Challenges Facing Civil Society Organizations in Ghana**

Although CSOs/NGOs in Ghana have played and continue to play a key role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, they are also faced with criticisms. For instance, lack of accountability is a key challenge facing the CSOs in Ghana. The majority of these groups often do not have accountability measures and oversight mechanisms, which ensure that their actions are regulated both by the state and by the populace (Annan, 2013). There are limited mechanisms to hold them accountable. The accountability of certain CSOs vis-à-vis the local communities are generally low, as well as their transparency. As legal frameworks do not provide accountability mechanisms, some fraudulent CSOs take advantage of this vacuum to defraud communities (World Bank 2005, p. 16).

Besides, other CSOs have developed higher responsiveness upward to donors than downward to beneficiaries. This raises concern as their activities have the potential to create

tensions. Despite some key concerns with the role of CSOs in Ghana, the cases discussed above suggest that, given their traditional relationships and perceived neutrality, their role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding has been indispensable.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In an effort to help build peace in conflict prone areas, the government of Ghana attempted to resolve the conflict through state the apparatus, but their intervention is often seen as biased by the disputing parties, hence prolonging the conflict and making resolutions a far-reaching aspiration. However, when CSOs intervened, they ensured peace and created avenues for a sustainable peacebuilding. Despite their positive impacts in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, the state has not created the enabling environment for them to operate smoothly even though they [CSOs] are considered the preferred choice for resolving conflict.

It is recommended that the Ghanaian government should assist CSOs financially in their quest to resolve conflicts and to promote peace without the CSOs compromising their neutrality and objectivity. CSOs should continue the sensitization and peace facilitation programs. They should, however, continue to remain neutral, trustworthy and resolute in their mediation efforts to sustain their acceptability. Again, the Ghanaian government should work hard to restore hope in the populace regarding its neutrality in conflict issues in the country. This can be done through a strong institutional framework, including a robust law available to deal with the unscrupulous politicians found using conflicts to score cheap political points. This will ensure that the unethical politicians and government agents who double as conflict entrepreneurs would be mindful of their pronouncements on conflict issues.



More so, there should be some legal mechanisms put in place to make CSOs accountable. This will ensure that CSO's actions are regulated, but not unnecessarily influenced by the state and some politicians.

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