

## CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING IN NORTHERN GHANA

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### Abstract

The complexity of contemporary violent conflicts requires a shift from the traditional notion that preventing conflicts and building peace reside within governments to include the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Using a qualitative research design with 20 in-depth interviews conducted with representatives of CSOs in northern Ghana, the study reveals three broad categories of CSOs namely Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) performing conflict prevention and peacebuilding roles. These CSOs respond constructively to conflict using dialogue and mediation in different ways by using multiple instruments such as early warning systems and peace education for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The study shows that, unlike the state, CSOs worked towards conflict prevention and peacebuilding through local initiatives and partnership with communities. The dominant philosophy guiding CSOs' work is the integrationist paradigm. One serious limitation identified in the conflict prevention and peacebuilding work of CSOs in northern Ghana is the lack of a common peacebuilding framework that can guide them to reduce the duplication of functions within the same space. The paper recommends that CSOs should forge a working partnership to roll out a comprehensive conflict prevention and peacebuilding activity to build sustainable peace for the development of the regions of northern Ghana.

**Keywords:** Civil Society Organisations, Conflict, Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Northern Ghana.

### Introduction

Current trends show that the nature of violent conflicts has changed dramatically in recent decades from interstate to intrastate involving diverse actors at different levels. Existing scholarly debate on violent conflicts indicates a complicated picture with many of these conflicts becoming more complex and protracted (PRIO, 2018; Szayna et. al., 2017). The increasing complexity of violent conflicts makes them particularly prolonged, deadly, and intractable. Several factors intersect and exert an influence on the nature and extent of violent conflicts (World Bank & United Nations, 2018; Watts, 2017). Whilst some have traditionally been underpinned by grievance-related drivers of conflict, such as poverty and inequality, others are driven by factors such as climate change, terrorism, extremism and instability (Avis, 2019).

The protracted and complex nature of contemporary conflicts pose a challenge for conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Szayna et. al., 2017). In many conflict situations, the responsibility is on

the state to intervene to stop the violence and to prevent it from further escalating or re-emerging. However, this traditional role of the state is gradually waning with limited success due to the complexity and the changing dynamics of these conflicts (World Bank & United Nations, 2018). Many of the state-led interventions fail to adequately consider the deeper structural, cultural, and long-term relational aspects of the conflict due to inadequate resources and the rush to reach agreements between the conflicting parties to establish some normalcy in the conflict area (Elfversson, 2015; Anumel, Kendie and Osei-Kufuor, 2021). Also, the state is often not considered a trusted and neutral party in resolving communal, ethnic and political conflicts. As a result, state intervention in conflicts that are rooted in structural and intangible issues, and underpinned by history of hostility has been poor (Braithwaite & Licht, 2020; Eze, 2016; Adejumobi, 2012; Väyrynen, 1991).

The complexity, scale and diversity of violent conflicts makes it impossible for a single entity, on its own, to ensure sustainable peace

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(Lederach, 1997; Weatherbed, 2012). Among state and non-state actors, CSOs are considered pivotal in the process of conflict transformation and prevention due to their ability to constructively engage with three core elements in any conflict: actors, institutions and structural factors, whose interactions influence the pathway to peace (Braithwaite et. a., 2020; Lund, 2009; Barnes, 2006). The emphasis on CSOs is not to relegate the role of state and other non-state actors in conflict prevention and transformation, but to highlight CSOs' ability to use "approaches that seek to encourage wider social change through transforming the antagonistic relationship between parties to the conflict" (Buckley-Zistel 2008, p. 21).

The value of CSOs in conflict prevention and peacebuilding is reflected in their potential to develop interventions that address the structural causes of conflict and further facilitate dialogue to establish peaceful co-existence among factions in conflicts (Barnes, 2006; Irobi, 2005). Furthermore, the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 16, has made CSOs valuable in driving progress towards achieving the targets which are crucial in conflict settings, where poverty and insecurity are intense. CSOs are instrumental in lending support to peacebuilding efforts both at the grassroots and middle levels due to their proximity to local and grassroots communities (Barnes, 2006; Weatherbed, 2012).

The character of CSO conflict prevention and peacebuilding interventions is based on their guiding philosophies and within a state system of institutional framework. Based on their motivation and values, CSOs consist of different actors that perform a variety of functions that range from provision of public goods or social services, act as a weathervane, and serve as watchdog (Krähenbühl, 2000). The values and interests advanced by CSOs are as diverse and highly variable across societies. Evidence indicates that CSOs have expertise in working closely with communities and providing a diverse range of services to meet the changing needs of their communities (Eze, 2016). Besides, CSOs interventions in conflicts help in transforming the behaviour and attitudes of conflicting parties as well as the structure and context of conflicts. Ideally, the activities of CSOs, as the conflict transformation theory posits, are to bring a change in the nature, issues, context and actors in a conflict through sustained dialogue and a process of engagement using conflict prevention, resolution and management strategies.

Realising the role of CSOs, global

organisations have underscored their important role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding such that both the United Nations Security Council and the African Union (AU) Assembly in 2005 and 2009 respectively in their peace framework highlight the importance of CSOs in building and sustaining durable peace (Nyuykonge & Singo, 2017; Vines, 2014; Wallensteen, 2012). Aside from their capacity for rapid response in post-conflict situations, CSOs have contributed in preventing violent conflicts through their participation in early warning and response activities, involvement in peace negotiations and mediations as well as peacebuilding (Ekiyor, 2008). Currently, CSOs are central to peace and security architecture of many countries due to their focus on the local level where the majority of the populations that are involved and affected by violent conflicts live and work. The nearness of CSOs to the grassroots level and most often conflict settings provide them with the greatest opportunity to support changes in how people respond to conflict and to direct attention to changing behaviour and attitudes within societies in conflict (Barnes, 2006).

Several CSOs operate in northern Ghana due to two main factors: the many violent conflicts recorded and poor development resulting in high levels of poverty and under-development. Northern Ghana is perceived to be particularly prone to violent conflicts that are often protracted and recurrent (Awedoba, 2009; Kendie, Osei-Kufuor & Boakye, 2014; Tonah, 2012). The characterisation of CSOs in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding in northern Ghana reveals different types performing numerous roles with different levels of effectiveness (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013; Kendie et. al., 2014). These include conflict prevention through education and early warning system, promoting intra-community dialogue to reframe perceptions of initial conflict, mobilising constituencies for peace, and helping to address the structural causes and consequences of violent conflicts (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013).

Despite the presence of many CSOs in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding in northern Ghana, existing conflicts continue to erupt into violence with others becoming protracted over time. The conflict transformation theory is used to explain this situation in northern Ghana by examining the activities of CSOs in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Specifically, the study focuses on how CSOs interventions lead to the transformation of actors (in terms of behaviours and attitudes), issues, rules and structure some of

which are constantly changing and influencing each other within the conflict landscape. The works of Galtung (1961), Väyrynen (1991), Burgess and Burgess (1997) and Lederach (2003) meaningfully influence the conversation around conflict transformation. These authors conceptualise conflict transformation as a set of dynamic changes that result in de-escalation in violent behaviour, a change in attitudes and the altering of the contentious issues that are at the core of the conflict. The study drawing on the conflict transformation theory is guided by the following research questions: what are the conflict prevention and peacebuilding functions undertaken by CSOs in northern Ghana? How do CSO interventions address the content, context and structure of the relationships that underlie these conflicts? What guiding philosophies shape the conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities of CSOs in the area?

In the subsequent sections of this paper, the literature review and methodology are presented. These are followed by the discussion of the results, conclusions and policy implications.

## Review of related literature

### Conflict transformation theory

Conflict transformation theory draws on the theories of conflict as well as the concepts underpinning conflict management and conflict resolution, but shows a conceptual departure from the two concepts (Curle, 1990; Kriesburg, 1989; Rupesinghe, 1994). The theory considers the changes in the nature of contemporary conflicts and argue for a reconceptualisation in three areas. First, the theory states that violent conflicts are asymmetric, marked by disparities of power and status. Secondly, it assumes that contemporary conflicts are protracted, often escalating after periods of stability. Finally, that protracted conflicts modify the societies, economies and regions in which they are embedded resulting in complex predicaments fueled, on the one hand, by local struggles and on the other by external factors (Miall, 2004; Austin, Fischer & Norbert, 2004). This reconceptualisation is driven by the need for crucial changes in the nature of conflict response approaches that emphasise the reframing of positions and the identification of win-win outcomes.

The main argument of the conflict transformation theory is that the role and dynamics of contemporary social conflicts require processes of inducing change in the parties' relationship

through improving mutual understanding. The theory distinguishes itself from other theories of peace and conflict by first engaging in processes that bring about long-term change, secondly through changing power dynamics that drive violence, and finally focusing on changing behaviours, attitudes and the structural issues underpinning the conflict (Witt & Balfe, 2016). Inherent in the concept of conflict transformation is the notion that personal, relational and structural transformation is essential to deal effectively with conflicts. Miall (2004) explains that the very structure of parties and relationships may be embedded in a pattern of conflictual relationships that extend beyond the particular site of conflict. Therefore, conflict transformation is about the process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses, and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuum of violent conflict. The theory recognises that conflicts are transformed gradually, through a series of smaller or larger changes as well as specific steps by means of which a variety of actors may play important roles. Stressing the need for violent conflicts to be transformed means understanding how conflicts are transformed in dynamic terms with regard to the issues, actors and interests and using the information gathered to work towards finding a solution to mitigate or eliminate contradictions between them (Väyrynen, 1991).

Burgess and Burgess (1997) provide four ways in which conflict transformation happens. The first is actor transformation which refers to the internal changes in major parties to the conflict, or the appearance of new actors. This is followed by the transformation of the issues driving the conflict. The third is rule transformation which redefines the norms that the actors follow in their interactions with each other, and demarcates the boundaries of their relationship. Finally, structural transformation is the changes that may transpire in the system or structure within which the conflict occurs, which is more than just the limited changes among actors, issues and roles. Väyrynen (1991) also adds that while conflict transformation happens intentionally, it can also happen unintentionally.

Conflict transformation encompasses peacebuilding as the former focuses on bringing change in the characteristics of the conflict and further serves as a method for inducing change in the conflict parties' relationship (Merry, 2000; Lederach, 2000; Yarn, 1991). Peacebuilding refers to the process of creating self-supporting structures

that remove causes of conflicts and offer alternatives to violence in situations. In essence, peacebuilding involves all actions aimed at bringing about positive peace. This may include but not limited to conflict prevention, efforts to address the root causes of conflict and activities to promote reconciliation (Interpeace, 2010). Peacebuilding is therefore the means by which social order is built through creating the mechanisms, institutions, and structures that address the underlying causes of conflict and prevent their transformation into violence (Galtung, 1969).

Lederach (2003, p.14) considers “conflict transformation to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interactions and social structures, and respond to real life problems in human relationships.” As people exercise agency in response to the conflict situations that confront them, they change the conflict dynamics (Weatherbed, 2012; Barnes, 2006). The exercise of human agency makes conflicts susceptible to change even though change may seem elusive where conflict becomes seemingly intractable. Because the process of changing conflict dynamics is entwined with supporting changes in people, CSOs are well-positioned to roll out conflict transformation strategies in conflict affected society (Chigas, 2007; World Bank, 2006).

One of the greatest strengths CSOs bring to working with conflict is their capacity to support changes in how people respond to asymmetric, protracted and complex conflicts and to direct attention to the underlying causes of conflict that need to be addressed if a sustainable and just peace is to be supported. In applying conflict transformation theory, we seek to understand the conflict prevention and peacebuilding functions undertaken by CSOs in northern Ghana.

### **Civil Society Organisations, conflict prevention and peacebuilding**

Discussion on CSOs starts with an explanation of what constitutes civil society. Civil society refers to the network of social relations found in the space between the state, the market and the private life of families and individuals (Popplewell, 2015). Interwoven with the concept of ‘civil society’ is the idea of social capital: the values, traditions and networks that enable coordination and cooperation between people (Czike, 2010). Civil society therefore involves qualities associated with relationships, with values, and with organizational

forms (Barnes, 2005; Carey, 2017).

CSOs are defined as complex political and social systems that are not for profit making or part of the State (Green, 2008). According to Fisher (2006), CSOs are considered as non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Most often, CSOs take their form and character through associational groups. CSOs come in many forms, some informal and some as formal entities such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) (Schwartz, 2003). These groups consist of individuals who come together for a common purpose to fulfil a particular mandate driven by need.

A conflict is a dynamic situation and the intensity of a conflict changes over time. The conflict cycle is simply the various stages that a conflict goes through starting from rising tensions to confrontation leading to the escalation of violence and the post-conflict stage that emphasises peace and stability (Lund & Votaw, 2010; Barnes, 2006). Arguably, the conflict cycle constitutes a useful framework to document CSOs’ activities in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and conflict transformation (Paffenholz, 2014; Wohlfed, 2010; Barnes, 2005; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006). Unfortunately, the literature provides several models of the conflict cycle that often differ depending on the purpose and features presented. However, many of the conflict cycles recognise at least implicitly, a circular pattern to conflict. Studies on CSOs intervention in conflict prevention and peacebuilding use a conflict cycle where each stage has a specific characteristic. Consequently, the functions of CSOs vary tremendously based on the features considered at the different phases of conflict cycle (van Tongeren et al., 2005; Lund & Votaw, 2010). Similarly, the effectiveness of activities also varies substantially among CSOs depending on their capacity, resource availability and contextual factors.

The division of conflict into various stages or phases and the understanding of conflict as circular provides a starting point for understanding CSO activities in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. CSOs activities usually include early warning activities, preventive diplomacy through third-party intervention, facilitation of dialogue workshops and mediation, negotiations, networking and initiatives for cross-cultural understanding and relationship

building (Barnes, 2006; Fisher, 2006; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006). Article 33 of the UN Charter outlines the modes of peaceful third party action in this process, including “negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, [and] resort to regional agencies or arrangements.” The CBOs and FBOs due to their proximity to the sites of violent conflicts undertake a lot of capacity building and peace education, dialogue and mediation activities aimed at reframing the positions of the actors in conflict (Clarke, 2011). CSOs are noted to use analytical problem-solving approach to reframe the structural issues driving the conflict differently (Ross, 2000; Fisher, 1991; Burton, 1990).

In peacebuilding and conflict transformation, CSOs engage in different types of activities and work with different sectors of society with the overall aim of sustainable peace (Chigas, 2007). Peacebuilding is about the activities that concentrates on the drivers of the conflict, with the aim to transform these conditions and prevent the recurrence of the issues flaming the conflict. As a result, peace building is understood as a more comprehensive and long-term approach to peace that involves early warning, conflict prevention, advocacy work and humanitarian assistance (Lederach, 1997; Boutros-Ghali, 1995). Other extended components of peacebuilding include some aspects of peacekeeping, ceasefire agreements and post-conflict reconstruction (Reychler, 2001). Lederach’s (1997) model of hierarchical intervention draws attention to the three levels at which peacebuilding occurs and the different roles that can be played by the different actors. The levels are: the top level, the middle-range and the grassroots. CSOs are dominant at the grassroots level which involves the largest number of people and constitute the level where many of the conditions that generate conflict can be found (Lederach, 1997). However, effective peacebuilding also requires collaboration and partnership among the various actors in addressing the drivers of the conflict (Stephens, 1997).

In the peacebuilding processes, CSOs carry out activities that are crucial in helping people deal with the aftermath of the violence associated with the conflict (Stephens, 1997). CSO activities that are integral to peacebuilding aim at addressing direct, cultural and structural violence, changing unjust social relationships and encouraging conditions that can establish cooperative relationships and promote reconciliation (Chigas, 2007; Bigdon & Korf, 2005; Darby & McGinty, 2000). Peace education is one

such activity that empowers people with skills, attitude and knowledge to create a non-violent society at all levels starting from interpersonal to societal and global (Haris, 2007; Harris & Morrison, 2003). The focus of peace education as demonstrated by CSOs is to create enduring human consciousness about peaceful coexistence helping to transform human values to promote non-violence (Payne, 2020). In line with this, many Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) have entered into peacebuilding programming supplementing their development work with other activities that seek to prevent conflict and build sustainable peace. The grassroots nature of FBO conflict prevention and peacebuilding work has resulted in increased engagement with Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and different forms of partnership and collaboration with state actors (Duff, Battcock, Karam & Taylor, 2016). However, concerns have been raised about the appropriate forms of partnership that are beneficial to peacebuilding (UNHCR, 2014).

The area of operation of CSOs is often informed by the underlying operational philosophy and orientation towards conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In terms of operational philosophy, there are three basic orientations that motivate CSOs to work on conflict-related issues (Eze, 2006; Krähenbühl, 2000). First, the isolationist perspective considers conflict prevention and peacebuilding as not part of their core mandate. CSOs that fall into the isolationist genre are usually pre-existing CSOs that feel compelled to respond to the challenge that violent conflict poses for their constituents (Abiew & Keating, 2004). Secondly, the “nomadic” CSOs focus on addressing the structural causes of the conflict once there exists funding for that purpose. The main motivation of such CSOs is the availability of funding. These CSOs are into other sectors and not necessarily into conflict and peacebuilding related interventions. However, they shift their attention to the conflict and peacebuilding arena once there exist funding for such interventions (World Bank, 2005). Lastly, the integrationists CSOs draw on the inter-connectedness between peace and development to design strategies for their interventions (Appiagyei-Atua, 2002; World Bank, 2005). The integration perspective argues that violent protracted conflicts and rising levels of poverty and inequality, together and separately, account for many of the contemporary conflicts and as such there is a compelling need to address these issues in an integrated manner (Annan, 2006;

UNDP, 2002; McCandless & Abu-Nimer, 2002).

**Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the functions of CSO actors in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in northern Ghana. Based on this research design, the initial approach of this study was to visit all the conflict hotspots identified in Kendie et al. (2014) (see Figure 1)

and to engage with CSOs working at the conflict sites and possibly map both their locations and their activities. However, the outcome of the feasibility study forced a change in strategy due to the realisation that some of the CSOs that were in the original sampling frame only existed on paper and could not be traced either physically or even contacted via phone.

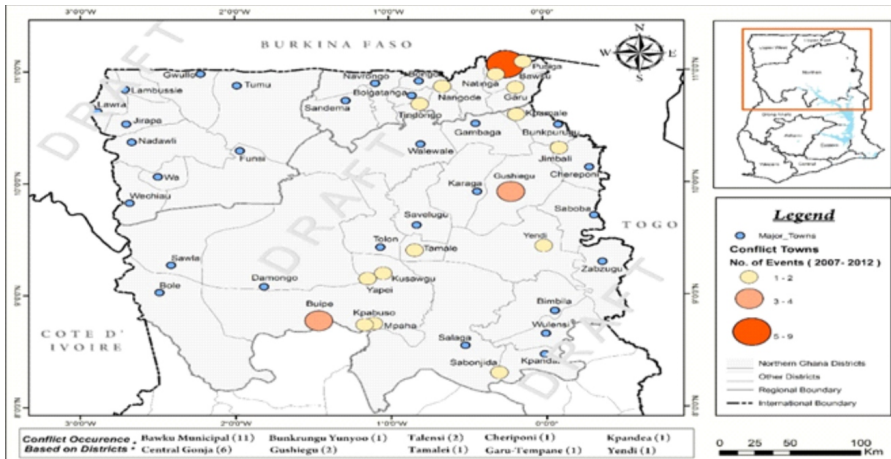


Figure 1: Conflict Map of Northern Ghana, 2008-2014  
Source: Kendie, Osei-Kufuor & Boakye, 2014.

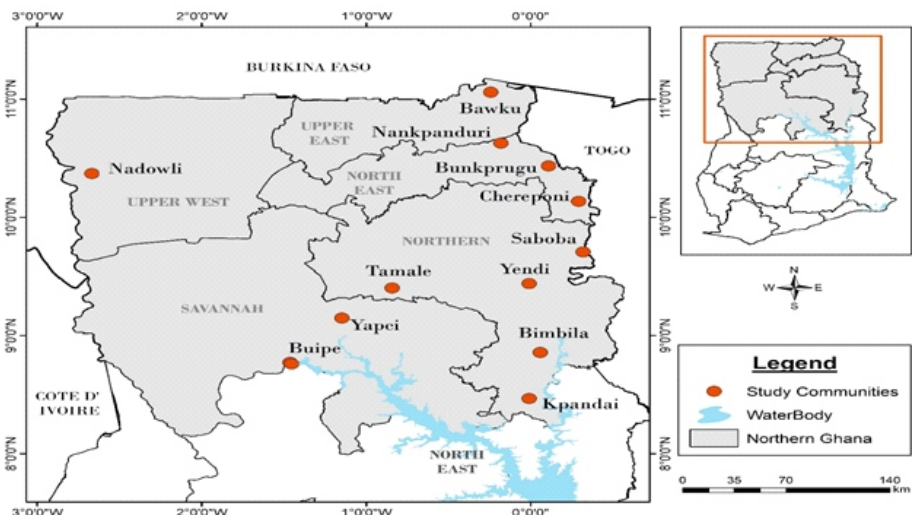


Figure 2: Map of the Study Areas  
Source: Cartography Unit, Department of Geography, University of Cape Coast, 2021.

Consequently, the study adopted a qualitative approach focusing on exploring the operational theatre of CSOs and their attendant experiences with respect to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The specific conflict areas selected in the five regions of Northern Ghana are shown in Figure 2. The qualitative approach allowed for deeper insights and discussions into the activities of the CSOs and enabled us to get a more nuanced discussion of the role of CSOs in northern Ghana. Using the purposive sampling method, a total of 20 respondents were selected for the study. The Northern Regional Executive Secretary of the National Peace Council (NPC) provided a detailed list of CSOs in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The NPC was contacted because the regional NGO association had a non-reliable list of CSOs. Besides, the NPC collaborated with CSOs in their peace work.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the representatives of the selected 20 CSOs in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It is worth noting that the study targeted CSOs that worked in conflicts in northern Ghana especially the Dagbon (Yendi and Tamale), Bawku, Bimbilla, Nadowli, Kpemale, Buipe, Yapei/Kusawgu, Chereponi, Bunkprugu, Kpandai, Nankpanduri and Saboba conflicts (see Figure 2). The narrative analysis method was used to analyse the content from the interviews. After the data were transcribed, we generated themes and concepts which were used for the analysis.

## Results and discussions

This section presents and discusses the ways in which CSOs deal with conflicts. It begins with a discussion of the philosophical perspectives of CSOs in conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities. This is followed by an analysis of the roles of CSOs in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The last section discusses the ways that CSO conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities result in conflict transformation.

### Philosophical perspectives of CSOs in conflict prevention and peacebuilding

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding is driven by numerous operational philosophies, many of which have been discussed in the literature. The study identified three distinct philosophies that drive CSOs conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities: the isolationist, opportunistic and the

integrationist viewpoints.

It was obvious from the interviews that the three perspectives have evolved over time with the integrationist viewpoint being the most recent and dominant paradigm. Early CSOs' activity in northern Ghana was development oriented due to the underdevelopment of the area. In Interviews with both the Head of the Ghana Development Communities Association and Network Coordinator of SEND-Ghana, they both noted that so many of the early CSOs' interventions were into social development focusing on provisioning of basic services such as education, health and food security.

The CSOs were reactionary in nature often responding to the eruption of violence with humanitarian and relief services. One of the respondents noted that:

The relief and humanitarian component of peace work was as a result of the numerous conflicts that occurred in the study area. For example, between 1980 and 2002, there were at least 23 conflicts centered on land, chieftaincy and ethnicity. With many of the NGOs in the north doing development work, the church based on its pastoral mission had to supply conflict affected communities with relief services in the form of provision of shelter, blankets and food (Interview with Coordinator of a Faith-Based CSO, 18/10/2016).

The narrative above shows that relief and humanitarian operations constitute peace work and cannot be separated from developmental work (Abiew et al., 2004). The relief and humanitarian aspect of peace work has not ceased among the CSOs with FBOs going to the aid of displaced individuals and communities when violent conflicts erupt. Violent conflicts drive about eighty percent of humanitarian and relief work (World Bank, 2021). Therefore, conflict prevention and peacebuilding cannot be isolated from relief and humanitarian activities. As a result, many CSOs in this study have moved from crisis management to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The underlying rationale, according to an interview with head of the Assemblies of God Development and Relief Services, is that the pathway to reducing violent conflict is by more effectively tackling the root causes of the tensions.

Some CSOs have also changed their focus due to the changing dynamics of these conflicts. Contextual dynamics and the changing nature of peace work has brought to the fore the need to shift from isolationist to integrationist perspective. The head of Centre for Conflict

Table 1: Overview of CSOs, their mandates and CPMR interventions

| Genre                                 | Specific entity   | Key mandate                          | Specific CPMR-related intervention   |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs)      | Catholic Church   | Evangelism                           | Capacity building, Enhancing dialogue, Direct mediation, Facilitating Engagement between conflict factions, Establishment of Justice and Peace Committees      |
|                                       | Assemblies of God Church                                    | Evangelism                           | Capacity building, Skills training, Direct mediation, Peace Education  |
|                                       | Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission                                    | Evangelism                           | Peacebuilding, Peace Education, Conflict prevention  |
|                                       | Christian Council of Ghana                                  | Evangelism                           | Peacebuilding  |
| Community-Based Organisations (CBOs)  | Yendi Peace Council   | Mediation in the Yendi conflict      | Conflict prevention and Early Warning, Peace Education, Conflict transformation  |
|                                       | Bimbilla Concerned Citizens                                 | Specifically into conflict mediation | Intelligence gathering and early warning systems, Conflict management  |
|                                       | Kpandai Peace Facilitators                                  | Peacebuilding                        | Training, Conflict prevention, management, conflict transformation   |
|                                       | Bunkrugu Peace Facilitators                                 | Peacebuilding                        | Training, Conflict prevention and Early Warning, Conflict management, Peacebuilding  |
| Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) | West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)               | Peacebuilding                        | Training, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning, Peace capacity building, Direct mediation, Intelligence gathering and early warning systems, Peace monitoring |
|                                       | Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA)   | Peace and human security             | Peacebuilding, Conflict Prevention   |
|                                       | SEND Ghana  | Socio-economic development           | Peace Education, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning, Development Programing   |
|                                       | Youth Empowerment for Life (YEL)                            | Socio-economic development           | Peace Education, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning, Development Programing   |
|                                       | Ghana Development Communities Association (GDCA)            | Community Development                | Peace Education, Collecting Early Warning Signals, Peace Education   |
|                                       | The Federation of Muslim Women Association of Ghana (FOMAG) | Community Development                | Peace Education, Collecting Early Warning Signals, Development Programing  |

Source Fieldwork, 2018

leadership also sends peace messages especially during election periods and religious festivals. In the Upper East Region, the inter-religious peace committees are intervening in different interfaith conflicts leading to changes within individuals' attitudes and perceptions. This finding reflects the views of other studies that

considers social change as an important element of interfaith dialogue as it enables people to know and accept each other and in the process build a relationship based on respect, trust and friendship (Greenebaum, 2014; Ahlstrand & Gunner, 2011; Abu-Nimer, & Augsburg, 2009).



An important feature of the Inter-Religious Dialogue group is the decentralisation of the activities to the district and community levels. The presence of the Inter-Religious Peace Dialogue across the different levels enabled them to draw on the services of state actors and vice versa to pursue peace (Duff et. al., 2016). For example, in Yendi and Chereponi, municipal authorities had to rely on the leadership of the Inter-Religious Peace Dialogue group to resolve conflicts that were driven by doctrinal issues. Dialogue was identified as a useful tool for conflict prevention and peace building in the Tamale, Damango and the Churic land dispute in the Northern, Savannah and the Upper-West Regions respectively.

Evidence revealed that in the area of intra-community conflicts, empowering and strengthening the capacities of individuals, communities, and institutions to manage conflicts is essential to peace building. The Inter-Religious Peace Dialogue group intervened in communal conflicts leading to peaceful coexistence. This role reinforces the position that the communal nature of religious leaders makes their peacebuilding activities relevant in conflict prevention and peacebuilding as their reach can surpass that of government (Ahlstrand et. al., 2011).

Another dimension to the FBO conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategy is to establish training institutions to bring people together for conflict transformation (Flanigan, 2013). For instance, the presence of CECOTAPS and the Satellite Peace Centres (SPC) by the Catholic Church provided the space for the training of the community volunteers for the early warning groups in the different communities within the study area. The CECOTAPS played a key role in facilitating both dialogue and mediation in the Bawku and Yendi Chieftaincy Disputes. Another notable training institutions is the Yendi Peace Centre (YPC) which contributed to the peacebuilding efforts in the Dagbon and Bimbilla Chieftaincy Conflict.

Available data revealed that the SPCs in particular have intervened in many of the intercommunal conflicts in the study area. Notable examples are the intervention in the Chereponi and Saboba land conflicts, the conflicts between farmers and herders in the Salaga Kpndai and Konkomba areas and the Kambatiak and Gbankoni communities in the Bunkprugu–Yunyoo district of the Northern Region. In the case of the Kambatiak and Gbankoni, the violence was over a disputed land which led to

the loss of lives and property on both sides. The conflict affected the socio-economic life of the community. For example, academic work in the schools in the area was halted while farmers were unable to visit their farms for fear of reprisal attacks. The conflict further led to broken family relations as wives left their husbands to be with family members on each side of the conflict. The intervention of the SPC facilitated a dialogue between the feuding parties that eventually led to both parties resorting to the use of peaceful non-violent means to resolve the conflict. This shows the persuading power of FBOs to influence the conflicting parties to accept peace-making initiatives that focus on changing attitudes and behaviour (Barnes, 2006; Flanigan, 2013).

A comparative analysis of the FBOs revealed that all of them have a close connection to individuals and communities and focus on empowering the former as a route to peace (see Clark, 2011). One of the greatest strengths of the FBOs working in the area of conflict is their capacity to direct attention to the underlying causes of the conflict such as land contestations, marginalisation, injustice and exclusion. A unique characteristic of the FBOs was their capacity to facilitate engagement between the conflict factions in areas such as Bolgatanga, Bimbilla and Gushiegu. As indicated in some studies, CSOs facilitate engagement between conflict factions. This is the case as the local people are often constrained to respond to all the dimensions and drivers of conflict on their own. In addition, the existing unequal power relations affect the agency of the community members to initiate action to bring the feuding factions together and the FBOs served as interlocutors in many of these peace initiatives (Paffenholz, 2014; Paffenholz & Spurk 2006; Van Tongeren et.al. 2005). As indicated by a respondent from one of the FBOs, “there is high regard for religious leaders and they are the guarantors of peace in these areas, so we initiate a lot of engagements among the parties in conflict.” This narrative concurs with other findings that suggest that FBOs have a unique position in peace work due to their ability to access and mobilise individuals and communities including both grassroots communities and high-level leaders (Barnes, 2006; Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

Drawing on Fisher’s (2006) classification, CBOs in this study constitute local organisations that served a specific population in a narrow geographical area. Examples of CBOs under this genre are the Yendi Peace Committee (YPC), Bimbilla Concerned Citizens Association and the

Peace Facilitators in Bunkrugu and Kpandai. CBOs were prevalent in all the five northern regions with their activities not so different from the FBOs. This is to be expected as like the FBOs, the CBOs were community focused and dealt with specific issues that are particular to their communities of operation. The activities of the CBOs cut across the areas of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

With the exception of the emphasis placed on faith and other religious doctrines, CBO conflict prevention and peacebuilding roles were similar to the FBOs. The CBOs as expected were active at the communal level and provided the space for collective agency towards sustainable peace. CBO activities cut across conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Within the ambit of conflict prevention, CBOs undertook early warning activities aimed at preventing further violence. In the early warning system established in many of the conflict areas, CBOs identified volunteers and with the support of some NGOs such as WANEP and SEND-Ghana provided training on the gathering of information on issues that are likely to lead to violence. In Bimbilla, just before the Supreme Court Ruling on the protracted chieftaincy conflict, it was detected that each faction was mobilising its supporters in response to the ruling. With this information passed to the NPC and forwarded to the security agencies, the Bimbilla Concerned Citizens Association were supported to undertake peace education. The violence that was immanent was avoided after the ruling. Some authors have demonstrated the usefulness of CBOs in early warning system especially its ability to detect impending violence and respond promptly (Eze & Frimpong, 2021; Ekiyor, 2008).

CBOs use peace education for transformative peacebuilding. For instance, the YPC with training support from the Catholic Church, the Municipal Security Committee and the National Peace Council (NPC) have used peace education to persuade the youth from both sides of the Dagbon conflict from engaging in violent acts that will disturb the peace in the area leading to relative peace and stability. The YPC organised over 104 peace related workshops, seminars and fora for the members of the Abudu and Andani Gates including the youths and women's groups. Recent evidence on the activities of the YPC indicates that they have started peace education activities to get the community members to accept the peace process after the mediation by the Committee of Eminent Chiefs.

The NGOs studied undertook a wide range

of activities which are in direct response to conflict and the situations that give rise to it. Dominant NGOs are FOSDA, SEND-Ghana and WANEP-Ghana. However, WANEP-Ghana was the NGO with peace work as the core activity. The activities of WANEP as indicated in the interview with the Executive Secretary cut across the conflict cycle with many activities in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. WANEP-Ghana has a strong working partnership with some state actors including the NPC and the Security Committees of the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs).

With the support of the Department for International Development (DFID), WANEP introduced the concept of Community-Based Early Warning System across the northern regions. The conflict early warning activities of WANEP is well noted in the study area as it shows the interactions between NGOs and CBOs. WANEP-Ghana since 2003 has introduced a well-structured programme that involves the use of regional peace committees to implement regional early warning and response platform for conflict prevention. Examples of early warning systems can be found in almost all the conflict hotspots in the study area. However, the system is more reliable in WANEP operational areas, especially in Kpandai, Nakpanduri and Salaga. WANEP, through local leadership, recruits at least five community members with interest and willing to work in peace to monitor and provide credible information on imminent conflict risks. The community informants are trained to pry and explore the possibility of threats that can lead to potential violence in the area. They then pass on any available hint of threat and impending eruptions to key stakeholders such as the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Security Committees or the security agencies. WANEP also has a toll-free number for any member of the community to call if there is any imminent threat of violence. Examples were given where WANEP has partnered with the NPC and the Security Committees of the Municipal and District Assemblies in Yendi, Damango, Bimbilla and Salaga to prevent the incidence of conflict. WANEP-Ghana is promoting dialogue between herders and crop farmers.

WANEP was identified to have the capacity to mediate directly in several conflicts. However, WANEP used FBOs and CBOs in their activities. This strategy was to enhance the inclusion of key conflict actors in the communities. Relying on the mobilisation capabilities of FBOs and the CBOs is considered essential for peacebuilding as it fosters inclusion, ownership and build trust (Bakker, 2001;

Pirozzi & Mikhelidze, 2008).

WANEP organised mediation sessions at the community level. Recent interventions were in Bimbilla and Nakpanduri. With respect to peacebuilding, WANEP has achieved temporal success in the Konkomba and Bimoba land dispute in Nakpanduri in the Bunkrugu YunYoo District of the North East Region. WANEP mediated the conflict and managed to bring the leadership of the feuding parties to a unification durbar at the palace of the Nayiri, the overlord of the Mamprugu Traditional Area in Nalerigu in the East Mamprusi District of the North East Region. Chiefs and the youth from the two feuding ethnic groups chewed a ritual kola nut from the Nayiri to seal their unity and peaceful coexistence with each other. The chewing of the kola nut symbolises the resolve of the factions to stop fighting and the invitation of the spiritual realm into peace-making among them. With the ritual performed, the Bimobas in Nakpanduri have agreed to welcome back the Konkombas to resettle at Kpemale after they fled the community to neighbouring areas following the conflict. However, others are yet to return as they await the 'blood burial ceremony' to be held on the land where the conflict started. The 'blood burial ceremony' is an indigenous ritual that is supposed to bring the conflict to closure. This finding supports Bukari and Guuroh's (2013) observation that WANEP is the most active NGO in mediating peace in northern Ghana, using the Bawku and Yendi chieftaincy conflicts as examples. In the West Gonja Municipality, WANEP-Ghana is promoting dialogue between herders and crop farmers

### **CSOs and conflict transformation**

Our study equally supports the argument that CSOs conflict transformation activities are slow in bringing about changes at the actor, relationship and structural levels (see Barnes, 2006). It was evident that in some conflicts, the hostile relationship between some feuding parties had improved with time but had not reached normal. Behaviour and attitude had seen some improvements in some of the conflicts. In the Bimbilla, Gushiegu and Yoyo Conflicts, the conflict factions through the support of WANEP and the National Peace Council had started to engage each other on the issues driving the conflict. In the Yendi conflict, both parties (gates) that were in conflict have started working on a new Dagbon Constitution to prevent any succession disputes in the future. Lederach (2003)

and Barnes (2006) both caution peace actors that, such activities take time and should be undertaken with circumspect as historical memories may come back to harm the restored peaceful relations.

In other conflicts, indigenous conflict mechanisms such as the ritual of blood bath had been performed to signify the end of hostilities. These ceremonies that were facilitated by WANEP had brought about gradual changes in attitude and relationships. Examples were given to demonstrate that ceremonies such as the blood bath had been performed to bring the conflicts to closure and restore the relationship to earlier times of peaceful coexistence. In the Nanton, Yendi, Bawku and Bimbilla conflicts, the set of actors continue to change but the issues, goals and relationship seldom change. A member of the Yendi Peace Committee noted that:

In many of these conflicts, the leadership that come for mediation changes depending on the availability of the person. As you are aware, the leaders also have to pursue their livelihood interest. Therefore, combining their role in the peace process and their livelihood was challenging (Interview with a member of the Yendi Peace Committee, 13/10/2016).

The narrative reinforces the position that changes of leadership are often crucial to achieving conflict transformation. This was supported in an interview with the WANEP representative who states that "When there are changes, the new leadership become very cautious in their decisions as they do not want to be perceived as weak in comparison with the previous leaders and this makes peacebuilding difficult." According to Miall (2004), changes in leadership comes with two outcomes: progress in transformation efforts or stagnation and decline. Alongside the change, leadership will have to be supported to reframe the issues driving the conflict anew. All these occurrences affect the transformation work of CSOs. For Miall, context, relationships and memories are all part of the tissue connecting the contradictions, attitudes and behaviours in the conflict formations, and their transformation cannot be measured in the short term.

Although CSOs working on conflicts in northern Ghana have achieved some degree of success in changing the behaviour and attitudes of protagonists, our study question this conflict transformation potential (see also Flanigan, 2013; Interpeace, 2010). A key position is that despite the presence of CSOs in northern Ghana, new violent conflicts continue to emerge with dormant conflicts

re-escalating. The implication is that work of CSOs rarely transform the structural issues driving the conflict. According to the respondent for SEND-Ghana and FOSDA, many of the conflicts are being managed with little transformation. This finding reinforces Ledarach's (1997) position that peacebuilding is a long journey and therefore it will be very difficult to measure short term success that are focused on the transformation of the underlying issues as well as changes in the context, behaviour and attitude of the conflict actors. For Barnes (2006), it is extremely difficult to determine the effect of specific initiatives on the wider conflict dynamic as transformation occurs across different domains: relationships, actors, leadership and structural.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored CSOs' operations in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in northern Ghana. CSOs were involved in all the stages of the conflict cycle playing roles in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. FBOs undertake a lot of peacebuilding initiatives with CBOs placing more emphasis on early warning activities. CBOs were seen as peace engines in the communities that had experienced violent conflicts in the past. The NGOs performed a wide range of activities which were in direct response to conflict and the situations that give rise to them. The study found that the CSOs are mainly involved in the primary and secondary levels of operational conflict prevention. CSOs have achieved some major successes in the operational zone, key amongst them is the creation of early warning and intelligence gathering systems. The study found that CSOs conflict transformation activities are dull and not much seen in the peacebuilding activities of the CSOs along the context, structural, actor as against personal changes. In terms of the philosophical perspectives and operations of CSOs, the integrationist philosophy was the most common among the CSOs operating in northern Ghana mainly because of the history of early CSOs being development-oriented due to the underdevelopment of the area. The partnership among CSOs for peace work was observed to be pronounced in the region especially between CBOs and NGOs. Theoretically, this study argues that transformation of conflicts involves changes in the context and the structural issues underpinning the conflict as well as the behaviour and attitude of the conflict actors. Therefore, CSOs role in transforming conflict must focus on all these key issues to ensure 'real peace.'

The study recommends that CSOs should draw on indigenous methods in their intervention activities to ensuring peace. This is because indigenous interventions often result in 'real' transformation of conflicts as they delve deep into totality of issues surrounding the conflict. Besides, early warning systems need to be developed by all CSOs in their conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities. CSOs can do this by working with state security agencies and MMDAs to institutionalise early warning systems into peace activities. CSOs must continue to educate citizens on the use of non-violence strategies for conflict prevention and peace education and continue to make it an integral part of their programming. CSOs must build their capacity to ensure working partnerships for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Finally, given the sensitive and costly nature of maintaining peace, it is recommended that active CSOs such as the Catholic Church and WANEP be supported by the state to roll out peace education to reduce the strains on the communities.

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