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FIELD REPORT

Conflict Prevention Strategies in Northern Ghana: A Case Study of the Ethnic Conflicts in Kpemale

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Abstract:

This case study report focuses on a protracted interethnic dispute between the Konkombas and the Bimobas at Kpemale in the Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo district in the Northern Region of Ghana. The objectives of the study were to explore the root causes of the conflict and to examine the efficacies of the strategies adopted in addressing its causes. The study participants identified mutual disrespect between ethnic factions, controversy over land, and a culture of violence as the reasons for the conflict. Early warning systems, force, dialogue, and mediation are explored here and are identified as strategies that have been helpfully employed to de-escalate the conflict.

Keywords: Ghana, conflict prevention, ethnic conflict, land disputes.

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Introduction

In Ghana, interethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts have become more frequent, intense, and widespread since independence was gained in 1957. Northern Ghana in particular has experienced over twenty-three recurrent ethnic conflicts between the 1980s and 2005. For example, the Konkombas and the Bimobas, whose land conflict this paper is about, fought wars in 1984, 1986, and 1989 which resulted in over sixty deaths and several houses being destroyed. These two ethnic groups, like others in the region, have engaged other tribes in violence over land and chieftaincy and in bids to win recognition and respect. This kind of conflict sparked the worst violence in modern Ghana: the so-called Konkomba and Nanumba guinea-fowl war of 1994-5 resulted in more than 2,000 deaths and the displacement of over 200,000 people (Pul 2003).To address the recurrent violent conflicts in the region, a number of programmes for conflict prevention have been undertaken over the last decade in Kpemale in north-eastern Ghana. Nevertheless, despite these continued efforts, direct and sporadic violence still recurs in some communities, especially between the Konkombas and the Bimobas in the area.

This report attempts to unearth why these conflict prevention efforts have not been successful, and it has two primary objectives.[1] Firstly, it seeks to clarify the root causes of the conflicts in this area. Contrary to many external researchers' assumptions it finds that the root causes are structural and that quests for political autonomy and the impartial distribution of socio-economic power by marginalised groups arise in conditions where there is a culture of disrespect and condescension. Secondly, the article identifies three strategies that were being used to address the conflict by the state security apparatus, religious actors (churches), and civil society groups at the time of this research: these were peace operations and peace education; early warning and early response systems; and dialogue. This report focuses in particular on outlining the specific strategies adopted in these programmes, and on evaluating their effectiveness.

The report's author conducted a field study between 1 October 2014 and 30 November 2014. Qualitative research methods, social constructivist theory, and a phenomenological data inquiry methodology were employed, and an open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from a target population of men and women. These respondents came from the relevant conflict factions and communities, and, along with state and civil society actors, formed part of a random sample of ten interviewees. This report will now offer an overview of the origins and development of the conflicts in Kpemale and of the gaps that exist in the

existing academic literature on them. It will then share the project's research data, focusing on people's responses as they explore the root causes of the conflicts. It will also discuss the effectiveness and limitations of the three types of conflict prevention programmes currently in use.

Overview of the Conflict in the Northern Region of Ghana

Kpemale is a community in the Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo district which is located in the north-eastern corner of the Northern Region of Ghana, West Africa. Bunkpurugu is the district capital. The district's population is 122,591 with an annual growth rate of 2.8% compared to 2.9% for the entire region. The population is made up of 60,240 men and 64,351women (Ghana Statistical Service 2012). The average population density is 97.5 persons per square kilometre, and there are 192 communities in the district. Five urban settlements each have populations of 5,000 or above, and so people in urban settlements constitute about 18.1% of the total population of the district; accordingly, 81.9% of the population is based in rural areas.

Nakpanduri is a suburban community located about twenty-two miles west of the district capital, while Kpemale is about three kilometres west of Nakpanduri; indeed, Kpemale can be recognised as a section of Nakpanduri. The population of Nakpanduri (including Kpemale), Bimbagu, and Nasuan is estimated to be 119,736, a figure which represents 49.98% of the district's population. The dependent population is 46.9% – children of school-going age make up 40.1% of this figure – and this increases the financial pressure on the community. The economic mainstays of the area are peasant farming and the rearing of small livestock (Ghana Statistical Service 2012).

For decades, the Bimobas and Konkombas in Kpemale have engaged in sporadic intercommunal violence over issues connected to land and a disputed demand for autonomous chieftaincy.[2] The conflict started in 1984 at Bimbagu, another town close to Nakpanduri.[3] It was triggered by a quarrel between a Bimoba man from the Tamong clan and a Konkomba man from the Komba clan over the price of a mango fruit in a market (Brukum 2000). A second escalation of violence ensued when the Konkombas considered the attitude of the Bimobas disrespectful towards the chieftaincy skin occupied by a Konkomba; this was seen as a reflection of their broader disregard for the Konkombas' claim to the land in the area.

The outbreak of violence in 1989 was fuelled by the chief of the Mamprusi Traditional Area when he requested that Jandan Toitor, a Bimoba chief, should hand over the chieftaincy regalia to Naabi Tam, a Konkomba and an older person than Jandan, so that Naabi Tam could be installed as chief of Bimbagu (Assimeng 1990). What triggered the violence was the relocation of Naabi Tam and his subjects to the Bimoba territory and the denial of the Bimoba's access to their farmlands which were located on the Konkomba side.[4] The conflict extended to Jimbale during 1985 and 1986 (Pul 2007), and again in 2007 (GNA 2007a, 2007b). There it became a conflict over interethnic chieftaincy and land; it expanded again to include Kpemale in 1995 and, in this instance, land was the source of the conflict.

Overall, it is estimated that 144 people died in the violence between 1984 and 1987 (Adjapawn 2010) and that more than seven major incidents of violence occurred after 1995.[5] According to one respondent, the sixth of these was a six-year dispute that ran until 2011 between one Konlan Baguor (a Bimoba) and the current Kpemale Konkomba chief over another parcel of land. In this dispute, the Nakpanduri chief sided with Baguor and endorsed his own brother, rather than the Konkomba chief, as the legitimate lessor of the land for development. The majority of the respondents concurred that the violence recurred on about 3-4 June 2012, on 6 March 2013, in May 2013, and from 3-5 April 2014.[6]

Although there have been academic debates about the effectiveness of the strategies employed in resolving this conflict, these studies have achieved only limited success in uncovering either its root causes or strategies for terminating the chain of violence. *Pul (2003) suggests that these conflicts or violence have mostly coincided with regime changes in Northern Ghana. In his view, neither regimes nor intra- and inter-group associations have proved effective in preventing conflicts in the region. Similar commentaries suggest that, when conflict parties are affiliated to political parties, they have a sense that they have political backing to revive conflicts (See Lund 2003, Ladouceur 1972).*

While these insights are helpful, existing studies on the area have largely been ethnographic, evaluative of development programmes, or anthropological, and have failed to provide the kinds of empirical evidence that would illustrate the root causes and catalysts of these conflicts. While the factions persist in carrying out this cycle of violence, little concrete research has been developed to unravel its root causes and to design appropriate strategies that would help to curtail its recurrence. Assimeng (1990) conducted a study which focused on the causes of the conflict and the prevention of violence in the area from a sociological perspective. He made the case that there have been no conscious efforts to understand these armed conflicts, but his study was itself too brief in discussing the relationships and attitudes that exist between the Konkombas and the Bimobas.

Kendie *et al.* (2014) attempted a conflict mapping of Northern Ghana for the National Peace Council (NPC), and their report highlighted ethnic identity, and control over resources and territory, as some of the reasons for the general Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo conflicts. This study also acknowledged the complementary roles that state and non-state actors can play in addressing the proximate causes of each conflict. Similarly, Awedoba (2009) presented a brief profile of the conflicts in the area, and offered some possible solutions. Although the discussions in these studies are insightful, these findings were written in rather brief and unsystematic styles and did not provide an empirical examination of either these conflicts or any related conflict resolution efforts. To address the limitations of the existing research literature, this article, based on the author's field research, is one of the first studies to represent how local residents in the area answer two key questions: why has the conflict over land between the Bimobas and the Konkombas in Kpemale been so protracted, and how can current conflict prevention initiatives best address the ongoing conflicts?

Theoretical Overview of 'Conflict Prevention'

Conflict prevention has been the preferred peacebuilding approach in recent decades (Melander and Pigache 2007) because its benefits far outweigh those of violence or 'negative peace'.[7] While some critics argue that violence is necessary to influence development or promote peace, its negative effects far outweigh those that emerge from nonviolent approaches (Lederach 2003). Apart from direct effects such as the loss of life, injury, and the destruction of property, violence negatively affects infrastructure and the economic and social development of a people. Conflict prevention is, therefore, the preferred option in efforts to reduce levels of vulnerability to violence (Emma 2008). Kofi Annan, a former United Nations (UN) Secretary General, was assertive about this focus in his injunction that the UN should move from a culture of reaction to one of prevention. He was particularly concerned with the best ways to transit from the conceptualisation to the implementation of conflict prevention mechanisms (Melander and Pigache 2007).

However, despite a clear emphasis on the importance of conflict prevention, there is yet to be a consensus on its definition (Swanström Niklas 2005). A variety of definitions exist that describe the goal of prevention. Those definitions focus on issues such as violence reduction, resolving the incompatibility between contending parties, the length and appropriateness of an intervention, and the means that will be employed to prevent conflict which can differ considerably in terms of the levels of coercion they involve (Wallensteen and Möller 2003). There is also a debate about whether the term 'conflict prevention' is new (Bjurner 1998), or simply revives an old subcultural debate that dates back to the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and was also evident in the writings of Sun Tzu (c. 403-221 BC) (Swanström and Weissmann 2005).

Despite this lack of consensus, the term is commonly understood to refer to 'the practical efforts that prevent conflict and deter conflict recurrence'. In other words, preventive actions in conflict are understood to be tailored either to resolve, manage, or contain disputes before they escalate into violence, or to reduce their escalation (Walker and Walter 2000). This definition implies that peace actors need to understand and recognise the various stages of the conflict cycle in order to determine the appropriateness of the strategies they plan to employ. In the conflict cycle, 'primary prevention' can take place in the short phase before violence occurs. As the conflict cycle progresses, there are options for 'secondary prevention' during the violent period, and then for 'tertiary prevention' which occurs after the ceasefire or settlement of the conflict (Melander and Pigache 2007).

At the response level, 'direct prevention' (Melander and Pigache 2007) is aimed at the immediate problem and might, for instance, take the form of mediation to prevent conflict escalation. The second level, 'structural prevention', tries to address root causes and the environment that give birth to the conflict (Annan 1999); this type of response deals with latent conflicts and its final goal is to ensure human security, wellbeing, and justice while also encouraging broad stakeholder participation (Carnegie Commission 1998). The third level is 'systemic prevention' and this approach aims to treat the global effects of conflicts, bearing in

mind that conflicts transcend borders, negatively affect the global village, and deserve global attention (Annan 2006). Practical strategies for the direct prevention of conflict include fact-finding, monitoring, negotiation, mediation, and confidence-building work, as well as early, rapid, or proactive responses to early warning information.

These discussions about conflict prevention and the various stages of the conflict cycle should encourage peacebuilding actors in the Kpemale conflict to revisit fundamental questions that relate to their own conflict prevention strategies. For instance, did the actors recognise and seize the opportunities for conflict prevention at appropriate junctures, and did they utilise appropriate strategies during their interventions? Have the strategies suitable to each stage of conflict prevention been applied? More importantly, have the fundamental issues, such as the structural power relations which lie behind the conflicts, been properly taken into consideration in their strategies? Ironically, in the context of Northern Ghana, the strategies implemented are the ones least likely to address the specific structural concerns of conflicts (Azar 1981), even though disputes are known to be generated most often by the structures of the societies in which they occur (Bucham 2008). For instance, the violence in Kpemale is not occurring in a vacuum. The un-addressed structural difficulties (root causes) negatively affect social relations again after periods of peace, and that creates the cycle of conflict.

Findings of the Research (Part One): Key Factors That Promote Conflicts

The phenomenological study undertaken in this report's research phase first explored the local communities' understanding of the conflict and its root causes and catalysts. The research participants in Kpemale highlighted three main issues in their responses to the kinds of questions posed above.

Cultural Disrespect

The lack of mutual respect between the Bimobas and the Konkombas – the two ethnic groups involved in the conflicts – was singled out as the most important factor that leads to difficulties. The Bimobas tended to consider the Konkombas as nomadic, uncivilised 'bush' people, and so stereotyped them as people who are aimless in life, live in hamlets, and lack leadership potential. One male Konkomba respondent said that 'the denigration is too much', whereas a Bimobaman commented that, 'you know, these people are illiterate bush people and are difficult'. Such statements were echoed by respondents from both factions and were corroborated by non-faction members. One respondent said that the stereotype operates to the extent that any 'uninformed' behaviour by non-Konkombas is met by the sarcastic question, 'are you a Konkomba?'

A Bimoba woman remarked that 'even if a Konkomba man becomes the President of Ghana, I would not marry him.' It was also clear that Bimobas believe that the Konkombas lack leadership, despite evidence in the literature which shows that Konkombas are conventionally led by their headmen. The apparent contradiction here may stem from the expectations around leadership in the Mamprusi, Dagomba, Nanumba, Gonja, and Ashanti ethnic groups, among others in Ghana, in which chiefdom – a historical dynasty structure

where the chiefs or kings rule over the entire ethnic group – operates on a larger scale than the minute 'headmen' structure.

Although by no means a fundamental cause of the conflict, cultural insensitivity between the two groups reinforces resentment between the two sides. According to one respondent, the stereotype makes Konkombas shun the Bimobas and spurs them to demand autonomous chieftaincy for all Konkomba settlements, even those beyond the Bimoba/Konkomba jurisdictions; this is because Konkombas prefer paying homage to the Mamprusi chiefs. They also make requests for the elevation of Konkomba chiefs to statuses demanding of respect, and have been pursuing an affirmative agenda in their competition for political power space. They believe that, over time, the Bimobas have purposefully utilised public leadership positions to perpetrate structural violence against the Konkombas. It seems then that structural and cultural forms of violence in the Kpemale situation have generated communal violence because the Konkombas are seeking to secure respect, often by violent means.

Mutual discrimination produces other effects, and respondents argued that it has a clear relationship with the historical migration of Konkomba people. Some respondents explained that the dispersed nature of settlements, especially among Konkomba communities, offers one reason for inadequate infrastructural development. The lack, or inadequate provision, of social amenities such as schools, clinics, and portable water in Konkomba communities promotes behaviours that foster cultural stereotypes and unrest, and the Konkombas interviewed for this project felt that these inadequacies had been fostered deliberately. They alleged that while Konkombas strive to increase literacy, education, and living standards in their communities, the Bimobas prefer the status quo. At least three respondents indicated that the Bimobas seek to sustain the current state of affairs in order to maintain class privilege and perpetrate psychological violence.

In sum, this study has found that cultural insensitivity between the different tribal groups is an important factor that catalyses the cycle of violence and challenges the sustainability of peace in Kpemale. In this situation, the land question becomes one avenue through which people can vent and express their feelings. The question then arises, what is it about this land that generates so much conflict?

The Controversy over Land

Another outstanding issue that arose in the project's interviews was the controversy over land from both historical and economic perspectives. All over the world, communities pride themselves on being able to trace their histories; however, depending on how the historical narratives are constructed, and the significance as well as the purpose of telling those stories, they can either serve as an incentive or a disincentive to peace. In the context of the dispute between the Konkombas and the Bimobas in Kpemale, controversies surround such historical narratives with each group using its narrative to try to gain advantage over the other. The Bimobas challenge the Konkombas' claim that they were the first to settle at Nakpandol (now Nakpanduri).[8] The Bimoba respondents argued that the Tamong clan of Bimobas was the first to have arrived in the area, followed by the Bauk and then the Puli clans. These clans settled

along the border between Ghana and Togo, and they went on to migrate inland. The Bimoba respondents added that, to the present day, both Konkomba and Bimoba kinsmen and kinswomen continue to migrate into Ghana, and this migration increases the pressure on the land.

Controversy around the land frequently goes beyond the historical narrative, and, in these conflicts, title to land has become an identity and value issue. A respondent from one of the factions who wanted to stress this point suggested that 'a chief is not one who is wealthy but one who has people and land.' According to this view, a Konkomba or a Bimoba chief and his subjects are not respected if they do not own and control land. This might seem to confirm the idea that land is the problem in this dispute, and it also re-emphasises the point that natural resource scarcity, or greed in relation to natural resources, can lead to grievances. The controversy over land increases the desire of both factions to acquire more land, by whatever means, including violent methods.

Land is also controversial because of the role it can play in empowering people in economic and social terms over generations. The competition to amass more arable land and secure the economic security of future generations is a core dimension of the conflict. It reflects concerns about the title and control of land, and acts as a reminder about communities' senses of superiority or inferiority. For instance, the continuous harvesting of fruits from farms and the wild by Mamprusi women is a constant reminder of Mamprusi land ownership. While the Konkombas have no problem with this arrangement, the Bimobas feel that their long tenure of the land automatically grants them title. As one research participant confirmed, it also poses questions regarding the governance of natural resources. In the specific case of Kpemale, title to land has a relation to basic needs such as food and shelter.

The Culture of Violence

Many research participants were deeply concerned by their sense that a culture of violence is being developed and regenerated in Kpemale through the protraction of this conflict. A vicious cycle is triggered when a violent incident provokes revenge and counter-attack. While these two main tribes are in conflict, intra-Bimoba and intra-Konkomba conflicts have further complicated the processes aimed at resolving their hostilities over the last two decades. For example, after the conflict at Bimbagu, the Tamong clan from Gbankuone attacked the Puli clan from Kambatiac (also Bimoba) for not participating in that fight against the Kombas. Similarly, Konkomba-Konkomba violence took place at Temaa.[9] The respondents pointed out that such situations prepare the participants for future conflict in Kpemale.

During a long sequence of violence, people tend to teach their children that their counterparts in any given conflict (either from other clans or ethnic groups) are uncivilised, aggressive, and disrespectful; divisions between indigenous and 'settler' identities are also cultivated. This orients children towards violence even at a young age, and the study's participants believed that this indoctrination reinforces the cycle of violence. They felt that identity issues were being mobilised as tools for confrontation, denigration, and insult; they also foster superiority and inferiority complexes and class systems for both factions. The

question of entitlement to land ownership can be settled by whose great-grandparents or grandparents first settled in the area. Genealogy also has a relationship with entitlement to traditional leadership roles such as the chieftaincy. It reminds a group – ethnic, tribal, or clan – of its past superiority, inferiority, or glory, and, no matter how socially or economically powerful a faction has become today, history can be used to weaken its pride.

It is notable too that the culture of violence is being exacerbated by the involvement of external groups. In the responses to a question about which other actors were involved in the conflict, it became clear that there was a widespread belief that the Mamprusi ethnic group – a 'chiefly'[10] group in the area – sometimes participated in the violence against the Bimobas. Three accounts were given of their involvement. In one account, the Mamprusis were said to have been drawn into the violence after suffering heavy casualties in incidents between the Bimobas and the Konkombas: their actions might be understood as vengeful. In another account, the Konkombas and the Mamprusis became allies after the Konkombas supported the Mamprusis in combat against the Bimobas. A third source recounts that, during a land dispute at Yunyoo (a bigger settlement than Kpemale), the Yunyoo chief passed judgement in favour of the Konkombas against the Bimobas. The Nayiri – Overlord of the Mamprugu Traditional Area – upheld the judgment in his final determination on the case.

To sum up, the original violence in Kpemale has created a culture of violence there and in the neighbouring villages. This culture has developed because intra-tribal violence and struggle provide fertile training grounds for intertribal engagements. The decades-long indoctrination of children increases negative perceptions about opposing factions and promotes a cycle of violence which attracts and involves other tribes which become involved because of relationship and power issues.

Key Findings (Part Two): The Effectiveness of Conflict Prevention Strategies

The second goal of this study is to identify the effectiveness of the three types of conflict prevention strategy which have been adopted in the Kpemale conflict. These include security sector operations by the state; education carried out by civil society groups such as churches and non-governmental organisations; and conflict early warning and response systems together with facilitated dialogue, which are led by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding supported by international funding organisations and the district assemblies.

Security Forces: Law Enforcement and Diplomacy

As in every militarised security arrangement, the police have been responsible for maintaining law and order in Kpemale since the re-escalation of violence. The key actors include the Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo District Assembly, the Bureau of National Investigations (BNI), the district police, as well as the Northern Regional Security Council (REGSEC) and the Ministry of the Interior; together they have made collaborative use of intelligence, force, and diplomacy to manage the conflict to date. The Ministry of the Interior has increased the number of police in the area while the military command has, since the violence began, sent about three contingents to protect Kpemale, a fact disclosed by participants from the Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo District Assembly and military troops at the time of the research.

In the first instance within a conflict situation, urgent methods for security stabilisation are deployed as the police and military embark on patrols and enforce curfews. The police also arrest people found breaking the law. Military personnel, for their part, despite some notable exceptions, have no tolerance for noncompliance: they show their readiness to counter violence with violence, and, while curfews are being enforced, they display their military machinery and weaponry to deter factions from engaging in further violent acts. Their superior force and tactics cannot, however, always be easily deployed. The military commander in charge at the time of this project's field visit was worried because sometimes his troops are confronted by civilians who fire sporadically from sophisticated weapons such as AK47 assault rifles, G3s,[11] M3s,[12] and revolvers. As the use of force is regulated for military personnel, the contingent under attack must wait for direction from their superiors before embarking on any counterattacks.

A second core type of peace activity involves efforts being made to build military and police relations with civilians through community diplomacy and peace sensitisation efforts. Through these means, military personnel work to transform people's belief that the army is an institution to be 'dreaded'. Individuals from within the military troop have been particularly engaged in 'door-to-door' peace talks on non-violence, and threats have sometimes been identified through this process. Together with the communities, military personnel make proposals to address problems that emerge. The military also consults local chiefs, district assembly staff, and people from specific localities when tensions increase in order to propose strategies and work with civilian stakeholders. Its personnel appeal to young people not to engage in violence and educate them about the effects of violence including the fact that they can lose their lives at a young age or jeopardise their futures. They also convene forums to sensitise people to the benefits of living in a peaceful community and society. In Northern Ghana, peace education and sensitisation are effectively interlaced with military operations, and this may be a consequence that arises from efforts to provide the civilian component in military activities that is required by the United Nations.

Thirdly, together with the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO), the military negotiates with the main conflict protagonists in order to agree on the specific needs of victims of the conflict; the District Security Council (DISEC) members also engage individually in public peace sensitisation activities, such as durbars and peace matches, which are supported by civil society and some of the district assemblies. These activities suggest that there is collaboration among the various peace stakeholders within government and that appropriate interventions are introduced with the help of other stakeholders at different stages of the conflict cycle.

Research participants confirmed that operations led by the police and military have resulted in stability, but they argued that this has been achieved through suppression as well as through the use of trust-building activities. The different factions are confident that the military, setting aside its military might, is neutral in its peace interventions, unlike the police. An Afrobarometer survey produced by the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) indicates that Ghanaians have more confidence in the military than in other institutions with

regard to corruption in the country (Afrobarometer 2014). However, the research respondents stressed that while the military is effective in attaining its primary objective of subduing violence, its strategies are not capable of addressing the real reasons for the violence; instead the military works to reduce casualty levels and deter violence through the presence of its personnel. The respondents further assert that this approach is found fault with because it does not seem to address issues of respect, discrimination, and power imbalances beyond the land question. Nonetheless, the military's efforts are regarded as being appropriate at certain levels of the violence and are seen to enable an environment in which peace education and dialogue can take place.

It should be noted that a challenge exists in relation to the capacity of the military to support peacebuilding because only a few of its personnel have some knowledge of, and are able to adopt, peacebuilding approaches. Its trained personnel are fully conversant in what they need to do, but face challenges in their day-to-day operations: the need to meet the demands of traditional protocols can be a hindrance because the technical arrangements for state funding of security operations do not ordinarily allow for peacebuilding approaches. One respondent disclosed that in some instances the military has found it difficult to satisfy traditional protocol because it is not the style of the state to provide funding for the military delivery of non-militarised operations like peacebuilding. In practice, the simple failure of the police and military representatives to present traditional items such as 'cola' to a chief can suggest enough disrespect to derail cooperation with the traditional leaderships.[13] One such incident almost rewound the clock of the peace process.

The presence of the military has the potential to be counterproductive because the direct parties to the conflicts might view them as executing the plan of 'the powers that be' within governments. This is because the conflict has been politicised and, depending on which political party is in power, the faction aligned to it is perceived to have some backing from the government. The present military detachment is believed to be neutral and civil in its operations but the situation remains uneasy: while the presence of the military and police means that the factions cannot perpetrate violence, the underlying quest for violence and revenge remains.

It is clear that the approach taken by the military detachment was influenced by the persona of the troop commander at the time of this research. One strategy in use to create better acceptance of their intervention involved the military in sometimes threatening other actors, and especially some of the chiefs, that they would withdraw their services if the factions were reluctant to comply. This strategy forced these chiefs to instruct their subjects to cease fire because the chiefs themselves feared being attacked if the violence continued.

Churches: Peace Education and Sensitisation Activities

The religious institutions and civil society peace actors that make interventions in the conflict form another important strand within the conflict prevention strategies in Kpemale. Key religious groups include the Navrongo-Bolgatanga diocese of the Catholic Church, which covers parts of the Northern Region, and the Church of Pentecost. As their close collaborator, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, Ghana (WANEP-Ghana), is also deeply involved in

the process. These three stakeholders have some commonalities in terms of their approaches to resolving the conflict. From the field responses collected for this report, it is clear that the institutions have been collaborating and have sometimes communicated in ways that allow one group's activities to inform future activities organised by the other institutions. This helps to ensure that they avoid duplication, combat resentment and fatigue in the factions they work with, and maximise their collective impact. Their collaboration is based on areas of expertise as well as their other capacities.

WANEP-Ghana most often provides technical and financial support including early warning information through its Community Monitoring system; it also advises others on when it is appropriate to intervene, as well as on how to manage the dynamics of the resolution processes engaged in by other actors. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, provides logistical support, making contacts that help to mobilise groups and representatives, providing neutral venues for programmes, and using its leverage as a religious institution trusted for its impartiality to bring parties together without resentment. It has also funded some activities and items from its budgets. The Church of the Pentecost became dormant when the conflict became more turbulent and complex, especially after it attempted to be independent in its efforts. However, these three institutions have enjoyed goodwill from all parties because of their perceived impartiality and their show of empathy towards the different factions and victims.

The Navrongo-Bolgatanga Diocese of the Catholic Church came into the picture in 1984 during the violence at Bimbagu when it provided relief items. All through the recurrences of the conflict, this church has been prominent in the Kpemale conflict; it started to intervene on 6 June 2012 when it made an appeal to the Konkomba and Bimoba factions to eschew violence, spend their energies in productive ventures, and end the proliferation of arms and ammunitions. It also advised community members not to accept the negative roles offered to them by their powerful brothers and sisters in the conflict, and by others who stand to profit from the violence.

Before making a direct intervention, the Catholic Church conducted an assessment of the conflict to determine its status and causes; it then designed an intervention, and it has since held two dialogue sessions. However, the participants in this research said that the church, during the assessment phase, tended only to identify and address proximate causes, rather than offer an in-depth study that would reveal and confront the deep-rooted causes of the conflict. It has also failed to assess past interventions in order to inform the church's current approach. Despite these limitations, its strategies seem to be providing different parties with opportunities to interact, air grievances, and buy time for tensions to reduce.

More recently, the church has formed what it calls a 'Peace Management Group', solely Catholic in composition, and a 'Council of Churches' which includes representatives from other Christian denominations. These groups engage with and facilitate mediation processes and educate members of Kpemale, as well as communities related to the conflict, about the need to eschew violence and co-exist peacefully. These activities seek to empower

community peace animators as 'critical yeast' to spread the message of peace and non-violence; they also equip them to own and sustain their peacebuilding activities when the church is no longer directly involved. The church intends to use members of these two groups as community peace promoters who will engender change through self-transformation. When one youth spiritual mentor was asked about the current situation, he said that the culture of non-violence must be imbibed by the children and young people so that they can live it throughout their development.

While the Catholic Church has focused on this approach, the groups it has formed have unfortunately been met with limited enthusiasm by the key participants, and attempts to involve Muslims have not received much of a response. To address these challenges and sustain its efforts, the church has decided to partner with the Justice and Peace Group of the District Assembly in order to increase participation in its activities and ensure the enforcement of agreements that rely on the official capacities of assembly personnel. One priest said that, even though it is constantly discouraged because the conflict remains protracted and characterised by sporadic violence, the church has not relented in its efforts to prevent conflict in the area. As a part of its new efforts, it has formed Parish Peace Clubs, Community Peace Committees, and Parish Peace Committees, all of which are engaged in peace education and sensitisation activities such as peace dramas and public forums. The aim is to spread the message of peace widely and to the lowest levels of the conflict-affected communities.

When asked about the church's capacity to intervene, respondents noted that it has some ability to contribute through the work of both the Diocesan Development Office and some parish priests who have built capacity in terms of their own experience with the conflict; however, it is not in a position to lead the outreach, peace education, mediation, and dialogue processes it undertakes. One study participant quoted the bible to pose the cynical question, 'Can a blind man lead a blind man to be effective in peacebuilding?', but all factions believe that the church's activities have helped to reduce direct violence in the area.

Notwithstanding the activities of the churches, I found that there was still lots of speculation among local people about the proliferation of arms financed by farmers and powerful relatives who live outside the district. Interviewees confirmed that the acquisition of guns increases the tendency for violence. One male respondent in particular noted that, in a year when there is a bumper harvest, violence is more likely to occur because more guns will have been acquired. It was speculated that some ex-servicemen train their kinsmen in combat engagement, and there is also a high level of adherence to the instructions of chiefs who wield power and can choose to start violent activities.

Civil Society Interventions: Early Warning and Peace Mediation

This section presents the works of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, Ghana group, known as WANEP-Ghana: this is a non-profit civil society organisation located in Ghana which first came into the picture when the then Northern Regional Minister, Honourable Bede Ziedeng, spoke on the radio in 2012 and called on WANEP to intervene in the conflict. It has

since developed two key programmes which create early warning procedures and facilitate peace, dialogue, and mediation.

WANEP had already been focused on developing conflict early warning systems in the area. In 2009, WANEP-Ghana had begun to implement a human security early warning mechanism adapted from the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) early warning mechanism and WANEP's Warning and Response Network (WARN). The WANEP-Ghana mechanism was launched on 10 September 2009 in Tamale and is known as the Ghana Warning and Response Network (GHANAWARN). It is one of three components of the organisation's Ghana Alert Project (GAP).

The structure is a community early warning mechanism with an interactive electronic database system and online interface which allows various stakeholders to interact. It also has parallel interpersonal ways of collecting information from various stakeholders and the public, by phone and text, for example. It has Community Monitoring Teams (CMTs), one of which is located in the Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo district, where Kpemale is located. The team comprises a comprehensive community group of five members with a team leader and a civil society mentoring organisation. Having been trained and having gained experience in collecting information, this group had already fed WANEP-Ghana with information that led to the prevention of about four violent situations in the Kpemale conflict. The WANEP-Ghana early warning mechanism resembles continuous research but it is not exploratory in the sense that it could unearth the core reasons for the Kpemale conflict. The system is able to pick up open threats to security, conduct analysis, and build an understanding of security nuances, but it lacks inputs from a broad spectrum of the population and any facility to probe the core reasons for the conflict. When the CMT participants in this research were asked if they knew about the structural reasons for the conflict, they only gave their personal opinions as community members. When asked why they did not report these views to WANEP, they indicated that they did not have any opportunity on the electronic system to submit information from key members of the factions, and they were hoping to have face-face interactions with WANEP to explain the potential value of such a facility.

In collaboration with the security commands and district assemblies, WANEP conducted two pre-dialogue sessions and mediations after the Northern Regional Minister called on WANEP to intervene (Zamana and Adjei 2014, GNA 2013) while the rapid response level remained the prerogative of the state departments. One main dialogue was conducted on 15 May 2013 in Tamale, followed by a post-dialogue session attended by representatives selected by the factions themselves. These dialogues provided a space in which both factions listened and responded to grievances surrounding land issues. The events were interlaced with peace education training sessions at neutral venues. A communiqué was drawn up after the negotiations, with timelines for implementation. The implementation of the agreement was monitored and threats to its implementation, including reactions from the communities involved, were proactively addressed to prevent attempts to derail the process.

WANEP also facilitated a dialogue meeting that provided the first opportunity for the military factions to meet face-to-face. As might be expected, this process enabled the parties to bring

up the issues around the land, but the six-item communiqué drawn up through the WANEP-Ghana process did not have an item that addressed the underlying power imbalances and disrespect identified in this research. During the dialogue, no mention was made about the fact that either group was more impoverished or more informed than the other because of access to key positions which allow the dominant group to perpetuate discriminatory tendencies. Such a discussion was necessary because, in a situation where trust is lost, truth-telling is not the cultural norm. Moreover, people's anxious desire to address the proximate issues overshadows attempts to dig more deeply into the conflict. As one key informant astutely explained, 'the WANEP process was good but you see, my brother, when we are back here, what we hear and see, we do not discuss those [things] during the dialogue. We only talk about land, history and who has right and who do not have.'

Another example of this obfuscation was evident in a durbar of chiefs, elders, politicians, and civil society figures which was facilitated by the Nayiri and the Northern Regional Coordinating Council (NRCC) and was held at the Nayiri on 21 June 2014. Here, the young people and chiefs from the Konkomba and Bimoba factions as well as the Mamprusis chewed symbolic cola in a pledge to denounce violence. The spiritual connotation attached to this is interesting as the people believe that the gods will punish those who violate such pledges. Still, one youth member soon afterwards remarked, 'I have told the youth not to fight, but I have also advised them not to sit idle and be killed'. A second respondent at the same forum suggested that 'people are only coming here to express their oratory abilities. Mr., … the real issues cannot be addressed here. This is a waste of time.' These responses suggest that this process, like the WANEP dialogue, also failed to address the core issues of the conflict in favour of discussing the proximate ones.

In a sense, the WANEP-Ghana process has been working. The durbar eventually produced messages calling for peace and solidarity, as well as a number of important agreements between the key participants. However, it is questionable for how long such a pledge will be effective. These dialogue and mediation processes fall short of discussing the fears, mistrust, and issues regarding respect, quest for political autonomy, and concerns around development imbalances that have been uncovered by this study.

To address this problem in my research interviews, the last question I posed asked whether the WANEP process had identified these key concerns and gone on to initiate the appropriate strategies to tackle them. This question was asked against the backdrop of recurring violence in Kpemale (Sannie 2014a, 2014b) which is influenced by the continuation of disrespectful and denigrating attitudes that cause rancour in the relative peace achieved through the efforts of state and non-state actors such as the police and military, political and traditional leaderships, the churches, and WANEP-Ghana. While relative peace prevails, various chiefs and their factions visit each other's jurisdictions and trade in markets, but these interactions are conducted with caution because of continuing fear and mistrust.

My final question prompted all of the respondents to agree that the strategies in current use are providing space for healing and increased understanding among the factions. For instance, one of the interviewees remarked that 'with time, pain and anger subside for

reasoned communication. My only worry is that if they do not stop the disrespect, violence will occur again.' This hope remains under threat because of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and this is coupled with fear about whether there is enough security available to counter this proliferation. In the meantime, the District Assembly as well as central government funds are drained by the costs of sustaining the troops.

Conclusion

To summarise, this report has examined the key factors that have sustained the violent intertribal and interethnic conflicts in the Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo district in the northern region of Ghana. It has also reviewed the efficacy of the strategies employed in addressing these conflicts. A qualitative strategy design was used in the research process which relied on social constructivist ideas. The first objective was to discover the root causes of the conflict, and the second was to identify through field work the efficacy of strategies used to counter violence in this specific conflict case.

The residents of the area's communities identified three core catalysts of armed conflicts: mutual disrespect between ethnic groups, controversy over land, and an endemic culture of violence. These catalysts might not be the fundamental causes of conflict here, however, people are convinced that they have made substantial contributions towards escalating and sustaining the violence in the area. This conclusion has the potential to be ground-breaking, and the findings of this first empirical study based on interviews with people in the area will be of use for future studies that aim to examine conflict in the region.

This study also offers insights into the achievements and limitations of conflict prevention programmes operated by the state, church, and civil society. The respondents made it clear that existing efforts have been relatively successful in de-escalating the level of violence. Nevertheless, in evaluating the achievements of conflict resolution and prevention, Talentino's points about long-term strategies are insightful. He asks 'whether conflict-generating structures have been identified and is there a plan to alter conflict? Again, has the salience of group identity been decreased in the political and economic realms?' (Talentino 2003, p. 73). When these questions are considered in the context of Northern Ghana, it is clear that conflict prevention has failed to prevent or terminate conflicts, and trust and reconciliation between different social groups have not been effectively implemented.

In terms of proposals for future development, various issues have been raised as challenges to be addressed: these include the peacebuilding actors' limited agendas, the rigidity of strategies chosen, the decreasing enthusiasm of key participants, and a lack of coordination. In addition to these issues, although it has not been extensively discussed above, it should be noted that a lack of political will represents a fundamental barrier that has significantly hampered the effectiveness of all of the foregoing efforts for conflict prevention. Most of the research participants noted that, although political leaders openly express willingness to end the conflict, the reality is that successive governments have focused instead on maximising political capital through their local representatives. According to the respondents, individual

will, the morality of state and political leaders, and the government's political motives at local or national levels have determined the dynamics of the conflict; moreover, civil society peace efforts are frequently challenged when there is no or low political will shown by key personalities within the state structures involved the conflict.

Notes

1. The author acknowledges that the final output of this field report (an abridged version of his MA research) owes a debt to the support received from SungYong Lee, Chuck Thiessen, Miho Taka, Michaelina Jakala, and Rev. Fr. Clement M. Aapengnuo. Rev. Fr. Thaddeus Kuusah and WANEP are also recognised for their contribution here. Finally, he appreciates the contributions of all those who supported him in the field: the police, the military, the District Assembly, the Northern Region Peace Council, WANEP-Ghana, the Church of Pentecost, the Catholic Church, and his primary respondents: the Konkomba, Bimoba, and Mamprusi representatives involved in this research.
2. Chieftaincy in Ghana is formulated around social identities which are a source of power and recognition for a social group. It is a legal institution in the country.
3. Information was given by one interview participant from each of the key Konkomba and Bimoba communities.
4. Assimeng (1990) in his CUSO Project report indicates that the Konkomba chief had the support of the then PNDC District Secretary of East Mamprusi, J. H. Wuni, who was also a Mamprusi sub-chief.
5. Interview data from the key Konkomba respondent.
6. This information is also contained in a WANEP-Ghana community monitor's (name withheld) report on Kpemale.
7. Johan Galtung (1996) explains 'negative peace' as the absence of violence. The term 'negative' is used because it implies that something undesirable, such as violence or oppression, has ended, without something positive having taken its place.
8. One respondent explained that Nakpandol, in Konkomba, means hunters' residence or hunters' village. He said the Konkombas had lived by hunting and gathering, and had migrated from Nabole, through Gbintiri and Kojawen, and first settled at Nakpandol which is good for game because of the Gambaga escarpment.
9. The violence at Tema occurred on 22 March 2010 and again on 28 May 2011.
10. 'Chiefly' groups have traditionally organised leadership structures, and members call the leader 'chief'.
11. The G3 is a 7.62×51mm NATO battle rifle. It was developed in the 1950s by the German armament manufacturer Heckler & Koch GmbH in collaboration with the Spanish state-owned design and development agency CETME.
12. The M4/M4A1 5.56mm carbine is a lightweight, gas-operated, air-cooled, magazine-fed, selective-rate, shoulder-fired weapon with a collapsible stock.
13. 'Cola' here means a symbolic token which can take the form of actual cola, liquor, or money. These tokens are presented to show reverence to the chief or king when a visitor is about to leave the meeting venue. Upon arrival, the chief himself presents actual cola to indicate welcome.

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