

Perceptions and Attitudes of the Local Community towards the Dagbon Conflict Management in Northern Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The existence of ethnic conflicts dates back hundreds of years. Indeed most of these ethnic conflicts are characterized by lot of bloodshed and Dagban ethnic conflict in northern Ghana is no exception. The principle of conflicts management recognizes the threat of conflicts to socio-economic development. For this reason, conflict resolution is key and its success is very much dependent on the attitudes of the parties involved. The broad aim of this study was to assess the perceptions of the Local Community towards the Dagbon conflict management since 2002. In view of this, a social survey with a sample size of 212 males and females comprising 200 community members, 6 traditional leaders and 6 members of the Regional Security Council (REGSEC) were selected for the study. Structured and in-depth interview was used. The study revealed that social relationships between Abudus and Andanis were very bad, serious security implications still persisted, the two royal families had damaging negative perceptions about each other, and serious human rights abuses in relation to the conflict abound in Dagbon still prevails. It was also revealed that the conflict remained unresolved because of the entrenched positions taken by both parties. Politicians should be decorous in dealing with chieftaincy matters as well as the Dagbon conflict. Government should also exercise strong political will by taking bold steps to identify and deal with the perpetrators of the Yendi incident to serve as deterrent for other. These among others would pave the way for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Keywords: Local community, Conflict Management, Dagbon, Northern Ghana

1. Introduction

The issues of conflicts and conflict management have indeed become serious concerns to the international community. The United Nations Organization (UNO), the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), Association of South Eastern Asian Nations (ASEAN), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and many others have engaged themselves in the prevention and management of conflicts which have become commonplace in the world especially the developing world including Africa, Asia and Latin America. Conflict prevention has been on the top of the agenda of the United Nations (UN) and the defunct Organization for African Unity (OAU) since their creation (Martinson, 2002; Davies and Gurr, 1998; Martinson, 2002; and Mahama, 2004; Babbie, 2007).

The conflicts in Ghana, especially Northern Ghana, are mostly inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic and even though they do not assume national dimensions as in other countries, their proliferation, and destructive nature have become increasingly disturbing. Some of the well known inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts in the northern Ghana include the Konkomba wars against the allied "majority" groups of Dagomba, Nanumba and Gonja between 1981

and 1994 (Yakubu, 2005) and the violent dispute between the two rival gates in Dagbon in March, 2002 respectively.

According to Tonah (2007) these kinds of conflicts can be explained as resulting from the contest over land and other resources, the quest for political autonomy and liberation by the oppressed minority groups, disregard of traditional authority and property rights, the existence of an inferiority/superiority complex, competition for power among the youth and the elite as a result of the decentralization and the democratization process, religious intolerance among others.

Conflicts and their concomitant consequences have aggravated the plight of developing countries such as Ghana (Tamakloe, 1931). The Northern Region of Ghana has been identified as one of the disadvantaged regions in Ghana in terms of development. Illiteracy, poverty and underdevelopment are the main issues of contention of government and other stakeholders interested in development issues in the region. Communal and internecine conflicts which are partly blamed for these development constraints have become commonplace in the area (Brukum, 2001; Tonah, 2007).

These conflicts have resulted and continue to result in the loss of lives, destruction of property and infrastructural facilities such as community centers, schools, clinics and markets among others, displacement of people, maiming of people and insecurity among several others. These have enormous socio-economic implications for the region. Experts and professionals who contribute to the development of the region move out to other regions because of the prevailing insecurity. Again, investors and other development partners such as the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) withdraw their services from the region or refuse to go there altogether. Also, it is worth-noting that some of these conflicts have the tendency of spilling over into other neighbouring countries resulting into inter-state conflicts with dire consequences (Best, 2006).

Furthermore, colossal sums of money are spent in the maintenance of security and peace in the area. For example, Yakubu, (2005) reports that as a result of Dagbon conflicts, government spends about two hundred thousand new Ghana cedis (GHS 200,000) every month in the maintenance of security in Dagbon. These resources could have been used for the provision of infrastructural facilities and social amenities for the enhancement of the living conditions of the people in the Dagbon community.

The cumulative effect of conflicts in general and that of the Northern Region in particular is that people live in perpetual insecurity which affects productivity thereby further retarding the development of the area. In the light of these, among others, this study is set out to assess the perception and attitude of the local community towards the Dagbon conflict management process in northern Ghana and to make recommendations that will inform policy decisions to improve conflict prevention and management in Ghana. The sensitive, delicate and complex nature of conflicts, particularly the March 2002 Dagbon chieftaincy crisis, informed this study in order to understand the dynamics of the Dagbon conflict management.

2. Related Studies

2.1 Ethnic Conflicts and the Economic Development

Ethnic conflict is concerned with any conflict that arises from different ethnic groups with opposing interest or as a result of power struggles (Burton, 1990; Basedau 2011; Gurr, 1970; Faleti, 2006)

Ghana is considered to be enjoying stability within the West African sub region, yet faces human security and economic development challenges, most especially at the northern part of Ghana. Some of these challenges could be adduced to inter and intra- ethnic conflicts in the northern Ghana (United Nations Ghana, 2012).

Ethnic conflict significantly threatens peace and security, freedom, democratic governance and the rule of law. Indeed most ethnic conflicts are characterized by a lot of bloodshed as was in the cases of Rwanda, Sri Lanka and Bosnia. These areas suffer economic growth and stability since no investment would want to invest in conflict prone countries (Basedau 2011; Cocodia 2008 and Olawale, 2005). Bossey and Oshita (2007) on their part delineate that inter ethnic conflict is as old as the states have been in existence, and to that extent, their causes are also not new. Political interference has been cited as a major factor that has been undermining conflict

management in Africa. The issue of ethnic conflicts adversely affects human security and the socio- economic development as well as a threat to fundamental human rights.

The ethnic conflict is a global concern. In Africa there have since the mid 1960s been several protracted inter and intra ethnic conflicts. It is a contributory factor to African economic development problem and that the time has come for African to take holistic approach to addressing the situation (Jinadu, 2007; Oviasuyi and Uwadiase, 2009; Gultung, 1990). The assertion continues that ethnic cooperation can be strengthened by firm, fair and progressive leadership.

2.2 The Dagbon Chieftaincy Crisis of 2002

One of the most devastating and shocking conflicts in Ghana is the Abudu-Andani Chieftaincy crisis in the Northern Region, popularly referred to as the Dagbon Crisis, which occurred on the 27th of March, 2002 in Yendi and resulted in the death of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II, the King of Dagbon and about 40 others.

The skirmishes actually began during the preceding Eid-ul-Adha festival when the Regent of the late former Ya Na, Naa Mahamadu Abdulai IV, and the Bolin Lana performed the Eid celebration for the first time. The Ya Na was not happy about this as he perceived it as an affront to the authority of the Ya Na as King of Dagbon. It is alleged that both sides therefore paraded some weapons and decided that the Fire festival would determine who really controlled Yendi. The simmering tension forced the District Security Council to impose a curfew on Yendi on Sunday, March, 2002. The curfew was lifted by the then Regional Minister after consultation with the Ya Na (Martinson, 2002; Yakubu, 2005).

The Abudus were embittered by the decision to lift the curfew that, they hooted at the Regional Minister when he paid a courtesy call on the Bolin Lana. They claimed that if they could not celebrate the Fire festival nobody else should; whilst the Ya Na also maintained that as Ya Na he was the only one with the mandate to celebrate the Fire festival. It will therefore be considered a humiliation if a curfew was imposed or if the celebration was cancelled (Yakubu, 2005).

According to Yakubu, (2005) the situation led to some shootings in Yendi shortly after the announcement of the lifting of the curfew which was re-imposed. Neither side was therefore able to celebrate the festival but the fighting had commenced and continued for about three days, eventually leading to the murder of the Ya Na and about 40 others on the 27th of March, 2002.

2.3 The Role of Government in Conflict Management in Northern Region since 1980

It is the concern and responsibility of every government to find solutions to conflicts when they erupt whether within the country or with other countries. This is to ensure that peace prevails in order that socio-economic activities are carried out to promote development. The government of Ghana has exercised this role in managing the many conflicts that have occurred in the northern region of Ghana since 1980 (Alhassan, 2007; the coordinated programme for the Economic and Social Development of Ghana 2006; Dagbon, 2006).

To begin with, the Peoples' National Party (PNP) government led by Dr. Hilla Liman constituted the Justice Lamptey Committee when the Konkomba-Nanumba war erupted in 1980, to investigate the underlying causes and make recommendations to avert any future occurrence. In like manner, Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Law 99 was passed placing all land in dispute under the control of government when the Mamprusi-Kusasi war occurred in 1988 (Brukum, 2001).

In addition, the Northern Regional Administration banned all youth activities in the region when it was clear that the Gonjaland Youth Association meeting which was scheduled to take place at Kpandai in April, 1991 would end in chaos. In defiance of the ban, war still broke out in April, 1991 in Kpandai between the Gonjas and Nawuris making the government to dispatch a peacekeeping force to the area to prevent further disturbances. The government followed up with the setting up of the Justice Ampiah Committee to investigate the causes of the conflict (Brukum, 2001; Yakubu, 2005).

Furthermore, when it was finally realized that the 1994 Nanumba-Konkomba war had engulfed most areas of northern, part of Brong/Ahafo and Volta regions, the government set up a Permanent Peace Negotiation Team (PPNT) on northern conflicts. This was to ensure conflict prompting, prevention and resolution in the area. Again, the government encouraged an inter-NGO consortium and the Nairobi Peace Initiatives (NPI) to organize and

facilitate a series of peace and reconciliation workshops among the warring factions in northern region (Bonbande, cited in Tonah, 2007).

Also, as a result of the efforts made by these two agencies, the Kumasi-Accord was signed on 30th March 1996. The agreements were between Dagombas on one hand, and Komkonbas and Nanumbas on the other. Others were between Komkonbas and Nawuris, between Gonjas and Komkonbas and lastly between Gonjas and Basaris. Even though Nawuris refused to sign any agreement with Gonjas, they recognized the fact that there were differences between them and the Gonjas. This could be the reason why there has not been any break out of a war between them since 1995 (Brukum, 2001).

Similarly, in respect of the violent clashes at the Gbewaa palace in Yendi in March, 2002, the government set up the Wuaku Commission to investigate the underlying causes and make recommendations as to how to avert such future occurrences (Brukum, 2001).

In addition, the government set up a three-member Committee of Eminent Kings including the Asantehene, Nayire and Yagbunwura to organize and facilitate peace and reconciliation talks between the Abudus and the Andanis. Among other things, the committee has facilitated the drawing of a road map to peace in the Dagbon Traditional Area (Wuaku Commission Report, 2002). These show the efforts various governments have made since 1980 to manage conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana.

2.4 Challenges to the Management and Resolution of the Conflict

A myriad of factors have been identified as challenges to the resolution of the conflict and key among them was perceived political interference and/or lack of political will. According to Brukum, (2001) politicians are perceived to be manipulating the conflict to their own advantage. That politicians discouraged chiefs who contributed favourably to the resolution of the conflict by making them to know that some of the measures were not to their political advantage. Since most of the chiefs are vulnerable and had allowed themselves to be supported in chieftaincy matters in one way or the other, they have to dance to the tune of these politicians.

In addition, politicians have been blamed for not showing a strong political will towards resolving the conflict since they were not courageous enough to deal with issues that would lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflict which obviously, would not give them the needed political capital (Alhassan, 2007). This perceived lack of political will coupled with political interference contributed to the conflict not being resolved (Yakubu, 2005; Brukum, 2001). This assertion is confirmed by Scarborough (1998) that in situations where existing structures are tilted in favour of one group while putting the other(s) at a disadvantage, the chances are that conflict will emerge and escalate if nothing is done to correct such anomalies.

Another reason cited is that some key selfish individuals and politicians would not like it resolved though they were pretending they wanted it resolved. For example, a chief alleged that some individuals and politicians within and outside Dagbon are taking advantage of the conflict by amassing wealth for themselves through financial support they receive surreptitiously to resolve the conflict, but rather perpetuate it thereby impoverishing the masses. He added that some politicians depended on the conflict for votes and wealth. Those who benefit from chaos as majority of the populations suffers are referred to as conflict entrepreneurs (Jeong, 2000; Collier, 2003; Yakubu, 2005).

Furthermore, the entrenched positions taken by the two royal gates posed a serious challenge to the resolution of the conflict. They have made up their minds on how the conflict should be resolved and if it is not done in that strict-jacketed manner, then the conflict cannot be resolved. Any other suggestions different from what they had prescribed would not be accepted. For instance, the Andani royal gate's prescription is that perpetrators of the unfortunate incident should be identified, arrested and dealt with appropriately. The Abudu royal gate does not disagree with this so much. What they do not agree with the Andanis is their prescription that a person from the Andani royal gate should be installed Ya Na.

The Andanis argue that the late Yakubu Andani II had his reign cut short and therefore should be succeeded by no other gate other than the Andani gate. On the other hand, the Abudu royal gate wants the funeral of the late Mahamadu Abdulai III to be performed at the Gbewa palace to qualify his children for the Ya Na skin. The Andani royal gate is vehemently against this decision and would do everything to prevent such a decision from being

executed. These various positions are very much grounded and they are not ready to change their minds. As a result, all efforts made by the Northern Regional Security Council (REGSEC), the Regional House of chiefs and peace building experts have failed. In situations where multiple groups share a common resource that is fixed in nature, the chances that each will attempt to eliminate, neutralize or injure the 'other' (Rosati, Carroll, and Coate, 1990) or monopolize such a resource is as high as the tendency to enter into a negative relationship (Ross, 1993).

Another factor working against the resolution of the conflict is that regents who are expected to be peace brokers are rather using the conflict for their own benefits. There are a lot of regents in the Dagbon state as a result of the absence of a Ya Na. If a new Ya Na is installed, most of the regents will be removed and therefore in order to perpetuate themselves in power they would do everything possible to frustrate the peace talks (Brukum, 2001; Tonah, 2007).

The media was not left out. The media is expected to educate and inform the people. In this direction REGSEC as well as all well meaning people expected the media to inform and educate the people especially on the measures taken to manage and resolve the conflict. They particularly mentioned the 'roadmap' which they thought the people were not informed about (Leviton and Greenstone, 1997; Burton, 1990). However, the media particularly in Tamale have rather misinformed and therefore inflamed passions which created negative feelings in the people (Yakubu, 2005; Brukum, 2001).

3. Methodology

The study adopted qualitative approach and relied mainly on primary data. The primary data was collected through field survey using semi-structured and in-depth interview instruments. The institutions surveyed were the Traditional Authority, the Northern Regional Security Council (REGSEC) and the Larger Community of Tamale. These institutions were targeted to assess the views of respondents on the social relationships between the Abudus and the Andanis with regards to their perceptions of each other as well as security and human rights issues as a result of the conflict. The total number of people sampled was 212 consisting of 6 chiefs, 6 members of REGSEC and 200 from the larger community.

Administratively Tamale is divided into three constituencies namely; Tamale South, Tamale Central, and Tamale North. A list of these constituencies, electoral areas and polling stations was obtained from the Northern Regional office of the Electoral Commission (EC). In this regard, three (3) electoral areas each from Tamale South and Tamale North and four (4) from Tamale Central were purposively selected. A list of these ten (10) electoral areas consisting of fifty (50) polling stations was obtained and out of these polling stations, ten (10) were selected using the systematic sampling technique. By this, every fifth polling station was selected starting from number two (2) which was selected at random. After this, the stratified sampling technique was used to select twenty respondents each from the ten polling stations to represent respondents from the larger community. The researchers used Semi-structured interview to collect information from these respondents. In addition, the researchers selected twelve (12) respondents, six (6) chiefs and the six (6) members of REGSEC, using purposive sampling technique. These were selected because of their expertise and deep knowledge in the traditions, culture, and history of Dagbon and also the dynamics of the conflict. In-depth interview was conducted to solicit information from this category of respondents. The qualitative data collected were analysed and presented through deductions and inferences.

4. Results and Discussions

The Dagbon conflict management process were assessed in terms of the social relationships between Abudus and Andanis, security implications, the perceptions Abudus and Andanis have about one another and judicial/human rights issues in relation to the conflict.

4.1 Nature of social relationships between Abudus and Andanis

The study revealed that marriages between Abudus and Andanis were breaking apart and that it was difficult contracting new ones since many young people who had entered into relationships leading to marriage were abrogating them. Most of the couples, very passionate about the issue would either sack their wives or the wives

themselves would run away. If the couples were not willing to leave each other, parents and/or family relations passionate about the issue would cause them to separate from each other. With regards to contracting new marriages, parents or relations would have to do serious background checks of their children's suitors to ensure that they did not marry from outside the gate they belong to. This results in the abrogation of relationships with dire consequences.

They also agreed that it was difficult worshipping together in the same mosque. This is evident in the manner in which the people had divided themselves into particular mosques within Tamale. Some mosques are exclusively for Abudus and others for Andanis and those passionate about the issue would not feel comfortable or safe worshipping with others of the other gate in those mosques.

Almost every Andani supporter is also a follower of Alhaji Yusufu Ajura, a one-time radical cleric who returned to Dagbon with radical Islam (now called Sunni) in the 1960s.

Concerning business engagements, respondents were divided in opinions. Some indicated that Abudus and Andanis found it difficult doing business together. They would not agree to enter into any business venture with the other gate. They would not even agree to buy wares or particularly foods from members of the other gate for fear of being poisoned or bewitched. They would also not buy because the trader may become prosperous and use those resources to fight against them. But others said once it came to buying and selling they did business together without difficulties. The findings also revealed that, some landlords would sack outright residents who did not belong to their side or frustrate them until they left or would not even allow them to find accommodation in their houses. They pointed out that development was lagging in the area since management of the conflict was the prime concern of government and that even if government was not spending so much on maintaining security, that would be the excuse for failing to embark on development projects.

4.2 Security issues in relation to the conflict

On the issue of security in Dagbon, the survey revealed that some NGOs and other investors were reluctant to operate in the area. For instance, one of the chiefs was quoted as saying:

I am a chief without joy in my heart and I see myself presiding over a once respected ethnic group but which has now lost its respect and dignity. There is even no joy in the hearts of well meaning people of this land. The youth have no jobs to do even though most of them have wives and children; there is insecurity in Dagbon, scaring a lot of investors there is no progress and development. All these happen as a result of this needless and senseless conflict perpetuated by selfish individuals who benefit from it by impoverishing the masses.

NGOs and investors were reluctant to operate in the area for fear that their investments might be destroyed which was linked to the issue of non-availability of jobs for the youth. The teaming unemployed youths might be vulnerable and be available to be used to foment trouble for pittance to make a living.

4.3 Perceptions of Abudus and Andanis about each other

According to the study the two royal gates see each other as common enemies, they hate each other, and this seemed to be strengthened by political interference. These were the words of one of the chiefs; "We hate each other and therefore find it uncomfortable doing things together. We do not like the progress of the other side and would do everything to frustrate any efforts they make to better their lives". Chiefs of a gate are not given due recognition deserving of a chief by another gate.

Regarding the work of the Committee of Eminent Kings the views of respondents were quiet divided as they viewed the issue through political or partisan lenses. As one side saw the committee as doing its work, the other side, forming majority, saw it as a non-serious committee without any time limit within which to complete its work. According to them it had taken the committee an unduly long time to complete its assignment. They concluded that it had therefore failed to arbitrate between the two gates.

4.4 Human Rights issues in relation to the Dagbon conflict

Some human rights issues in relation to the conflict were also identified. The security agencies were blamed for non-prosecution of perpetrators. They argued that as professionals the security agencies should not have allowed themselves to be manipulated and influenced by government and its operatives. They should do their

work as professionals and that identification and prosecution of perpetrators of the Yendi incident on March 27th 2002, should have been a thing of the past. According to the study, the security agencies should be held responsible and not government.

Another human right issue identified concerned the right of individuals to belong to any group, association or identify with any other individual. Individuals were tagged either as Abudus or Andanis depending on which political party, group, association or individual they identified with. According to the study this does not give individuals the right and freedom to association which is against the fundamental human rights enshrined in the 1992 constitution of the Republic of Ghana. Again, tagging of individuals as currently done in Dagbon has serious security implications, it exposes such people to various forms of risks which have a turning effect on peaceful co-existence and development. It does not even help the efforts made at resolving the conflict.

5. Conclusion

The study brought up a lot of revelations in relation to the Dagbon chieftaincy crisis. It showed that social relationships between the Abudu and the Andani royal families were not good and has also affected economic activities to some extent. Again, this led to the formation of negative perceptions about each other resulting in hatred which is strengthened by perceived political manipulation. Again serious security implications and human rights violations still abound in Dagbon, further widening the already existing divisions between them.

The factors which made the conflict to remain unresolved since 2002 were that, Politicians had interfered and continue to interfere in the Dagbon chieftaincy institution relegating culture and tradition to the background. Also, the two royal families, the Abudus and Andanis had taken entrenched positions making all efforts made at resolving the conflict unsuccessful. The Abudus want the funeral of Naa Mahamadu Abdulai IV performed at the Gbewaa palace in accordance with the 'roadmap'. Contrary to this, the Andanis would not agree for the funeral to be performed at the Gbewaa palace and the reason being that he was not a Ya Na.

In addition, regents and some unscrupulous individuals were making wealth out the situation at the expense of the masses. It is evident that most of them may not be regents if a new Ya Na is installed. In order to continue on the skins and to continue to profit, they are frustrating all efforts made at resolving the conflict.

The results gathered indicate a seriously perceived political manipulation and interference for political gains. Some unscrupulous politicians and selfish individuals are perpetuating the conflict by amassing wealth for themselves. They do this by using the teaming gullible youths most of whom are unemployed to cause violence. It is also clear from the findings that governments have been afraid of losing votes from Dagbon thereby failing to take the appropriate measures to address the conflict. Also evident from the findings was the concern of many people in Dagbon that, those who committed the incident in Yendi have since not been found and seemed to undermining the conflict resolution process.

6. Recommendations

1. Steps should be taken by REGSEC and the committee of eminent kings to create opportunities for the two sides to interact and communicate more often. This will create in them positive attitudes towards each other resulting in the resolution of the conflict.
2. The government should make every effort not to manipulate or interfere with the Dagbon chieftaincy affairs or any other skin or stool in Ghana. Again collaborative efforts should be made by Dagombas and government to divorce politics from the traditional authority so as to allow it function independently and effectively
3. The government should also exercise strong political will in the mater. Bold and courageous steps should be taken to implement the Dagbon final peace agreement popularly called the Dagbon "roadmap" to peace. This should be done barring the fall-outs from the two royal gates. It is therefore recommended that opportunities be created for the youth to gain employment to prevent them from depending on the pittance from these selfish individuals in order to perpetuate violence. This will enable the youth to use their energies profitably for the development of Dagbon.
5. The security agencies, should therefore take serious measures to identify, arrest and deal with these perpetrators. This should be done solely by the security agencies without government's interference.

6. The Dagbon Traditional Council should be equipped and empowered to enable it perform its functions effectively. This is in view of the fact that the council has been dormant and has not met for several years now.
7. It also recommended that regents should not be allowed to stay on the throne for more than a year.
8. Succession to the Nam (i.e. Ya Na) should be well fashioned to allow for smooth succession.
9. The security agencies and personnel should be insulated from politics to enable them discharge their duties dispassionately without fear or favour.

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