December 2023

The Role of Local Agency in Peacebuilding: The Case of the Bawku Inter-Ethnic Peace Committee

Gamel M. A. Aganah PhD
University of Professional Studies, Accra, gamel.aganah@upsamail.edu.gh

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Abstract

This article explores the failure of top-level interventions in the resolution of local conflicts and the role of local agency in peacebuilding. The article relied primarily on qualitative techniques and instruments to collect data to examine why top-level interventions by successive governments have failed to resolve the Bawku chieftaincy conflict. The article finds that top-level interventions have failed to resolve the conflict because they are introduced with little to no participation by local communities. These interventions are, therefore, unable to garner grassroot support and commitment. In contrast, the BIEPC led peace process has been more successful in the management of the conflict because it is a bottom-up approach with representatives from the various ethnic groups working together in an attempt to find common solutions to their differences. The adoption of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms provides inclusion and participation by the wider community, and also serves to restore communal harmony and relationship among the people, their ancestors and the gods of the community. In spite of recent setbacks in the peace process, the BIEPC offers the most promising route to the resolution of the structural causes of the conflict.

Author Bio(s)

Dr. Gamel Aganah is currently with the Centre for Peace and Security Research at the University of Professional Studies, Accra. He previously worked with the National Peace Council as a Programmes Manager, where among other achievements he designed and facilitated the Council's intervention that led to the revival of the Bawku Inter-ethnic Peace Committee and the Bawku Peace Process. Dr. Aganah holds a PhD in Advanced Policy Studies from the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, Tokyo. His PhD dissertation analyzes the effects of government policies on the dynamics of ethno-political conflicts, and explores state-society collaboration in peacebuilding.

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Gamel M. A. Aganah

The protracted chieftaincy conflict between the Kusasi and Mamprusi ethnic groups in Bawku highlights the pervasive nature of chieftaincy conflicts in northern Ghana, and the failure of top-down government policies in resolving these conflicts. The protracted and violent nature of the conflict has put Bawku on the national agenda since independence in 1957, attracting policy interventions from successive governments. The persistence of the conflict indicates the failure of these interventions and demonstrates the limited role of top-down interventions in the resolution of local conflicts. This leads this article to focus on examining why the peace process led by the Bawku Inter-ethnic Peace Committee (BIEPC) has been relatively more successful in the management of the conflict than top-down interventions.

The challenges related to the Bawku chieftaincy conflict have led various scholars to seek and provide a better understanding of the factors which have contributed to the protracted nature of the conflict. One group of scholars point to colonial manipulations of the native administrative structures to explain the conflict (Bukari, 2013a; Osei-Kufuor et al., 2016). For example, Kendie (2010) insists that the roots of the conflict were British attempts to reorganize the area for colonial administrative purposes. The Kusasis and Mamprusis largely lived peacefully together in precolonial times despite possessing distinct systems of governance and practicing different livelihood strategies. The Mamprusis practiced a centralized political system organized around chiefs appointed by the *Nayiri* (the overlord/king of the Mamprugu Kingdom to the North). The Kusasis on the other hand possessed a decentralized system with no centralized political authority. The Kusasis instead possessed *tendaanas*, earth priests who held and administered the land on behalf of the community (Staniland, 1975). The colonial administration interfered with this peaceful co-existence by reorganizing the territory for administrative purposes. The colonial administration brought the acephalous Kusasis under the control of the *Nayiri*, through the Mamprusi Bawku-Naba (Aganah, 2008). Proponents of this view contend that this rearrangement inadvertently sowed a seed of discord between the two groups leading to decades of conflict between them.

It is however important to note that attempts by the colonial administration to modernize local administration did not always lead to violent conflict. In the Builsa traditional area, for instance, the British colonial administration introduced an electoral college made up of heads of all households to select the paramount (head) chief of the area. This colonial intervention resolved the dispute over the selection of the chief by the *Nayiri* (Aganah, 2019).

A second group of scholars traces the source of the Bawku conflict to political interferences by Ghana's first prime minister Kwame Nkrumah, and attempts by the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) government to weaken the political base of the Northern People's Party (Bukari et al., 2021; Ladouceur, 1979; Longi, 2015); the extreme partisan approach adopted by the CPP and its attempts to undermine the political influence of the *Nayiri* are the source of the conflict between Kusasis and Mamprusis in Bawku. The CPP blamed the *Nayiri* for its abysmal performance in the 1954 and 1956 elections in the Mamprugu area. The party won only a single seat in 1954, and no seat seats 1956 in the Mamprugu area. The *Nayiri* was alleged to have instructed all divisional, sub-divisional and village chiefs to campaign for the Northern People's Party. According to Ladouceur (1979), the CPP sought to undermine the power and political influence of the *Nayiri* and to gain a political base in the Mamprugu area by granting traditional independence to the Kusasis in Bawku. This view, however, cannot explain why other paramountcies, especially those in Frafra areas such as Zaurungu and Bongo avoided conflicts despite similar interventions by the CPP administration.

Using insights from the liberal peace paradigm (Paris, 2004) and the local turn in peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997) as discursive lens, this article contends that to understanding the protracted nature of the Bawku chieftaincy conflict requires examining the dynamics of various interventions introduced in an attempt to resolve the conflict. This article argues that the tendency of successive governments to introduce top-down interventions, with little to no participation by mid-level and grassroot actors accounts for the protracted nature of the conflict. The lack of broader participation means that these interventions are unable to garner grassroot support and legitimacy. These interventions are introduced to tackle the proximate causes of the conflict, without addressing its underlying causes. This article argues that the BIEPC peace process has been more successful at managing the conflict because it is a bottom-up approach, making use of local agency and indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. Despite various challenges, as demonstrated by recent violent outbreaks (Sablah, 2023), the BIEPC peace process offers the most promising route to the resolution of structural causes within the conflict. This paper seeks to

peacebuilding literature by highlighting the role of local agency in managing ethnic and religious conflicts. This knowledge will be useful to the academic community, peace practitioners, policy makers, and international donors to develop tools promoting a sustainable peace agenda fulfilling the needs and interests of local populations and cultures.

The first part of this paper will explore chieftaincy and land conflicts, new forms of violent conflicts in Africa, and the failure of liberal peacebuilding projects in addressing these conflicts. This section will unpack the changing nature of these conflicts and explore practical and structural problems that hamper the ability of liberal peacebuilding projects to address these conflicts. The second part of the paper focuses on the protracted Bawku chieftaincy conflict. This section provides a brief background to the conflict, and explores various interventions introduced by successive governments to address the conflict. The third part of the paper unpacks the novel role of the BIEPC in the management of the chieftaincy conflict. This section also explores some the challenges that the Committee has encountered in its efforts to find a lasting solution to the structural causes of the conflict. Finally, the paper will reflect on the role of local agency and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in the management of the Bawku chieftaincy conflict.

Methodology

This study employed an ethnographic research method to examine various interventions introduced in attempts to resolve the Bawku chieftaincy conflict. Primary data was collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and participant observations in various communities in the Bawku East Municipality between June 2017 and December 2019. A total of 23 semi-structured interviews were initially held with traditional rulers, youth, opinion leaders, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), members of the BIEPC, and local government officials in the Bawku traditional area. Eight follow-up interviews were also conducted between July and August 2022 to capture recent developments in the conflict. These interviews lasted for an average of 35 to 45 minutes. Two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held, the first with 10 Kusasi youth at the Bawku Central Lorry Station on July 19, 2017, and the second with nine Mamprusi youth at the Central Market on July 20, 2017. Although these FGDs had been scheduled to run for about 60 minutes, the two sessions both ran for a little over 90 minutes. The focus of these interviews was to gain in-depth understanding of the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations, causes and impacts of violence, and the roles of state interventions and local participation in efforts to resolve the chieftaincy conflict.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Although nonprobability sampling was used, it was guided by the maximum variation principle which ensured that all groups were fairly represented (Suri, 2011). Due to the sensitivity of the study, all participants were given the opportunity to choose to be granted full anonymity or to withdraw from the interview at any time. To facilitate informed consent, all participants were also given full information on the design and the objectives of the study and the organizational affiliation of the researcher before the interviews began. This study also relied on data from reports of various commissions of inquiries and ad hoc committees, the Upper East Regional House of Chiefs, police reports and newspapers report on violent clashes in Bawku.

African's New Wars and the Local Turn in Peacebuilding

Conflicts around land and chieftaincy issues tend to be intertwined in Africa because in many parts of the continent chiefs are the traditional custodians of land, holding it in trust for their communities. Control of the chieftaincy institution, therefore, comes with the control of the land and other communal resources. In Ghana, for instance, over 80 percent of land is under the control of chiefs, despite the diminishing influence of the institution in the country (Campion & Acheampong, 2014). In many places in Africa, land is increasingly seen as a vehicle to gain authority and to attract clients, collect tithes, and benefit from agricultural development programs (Turner & Moumouni, 2019). Alimba (2014) observes that competition for land and chieftaincy are the major causes of communal conflicts in the northern Nigeria. In a study in Masisi, Congo Kinshasa, and Mararo (1997) also found that the struggle for land and power are intertwined because the conquest of political power is the *condictio sine qua non* for control over land. As competition for access to arable land, pastures and open land—caused by, among other factors, market development, population growth and mobility—become more common, chieftaincy conflicts are likely to become more intense on the continent. The struggle for traditional autonomy by minority ethnic groups in northern Ghana is linked to the quest for land ownership. The British colonial policy of indirect rule placed minority ethnic groups under the custodianship of chiefs of majority groups. This policy denied these minority groups any autonomous land rights because all land was vested in paramount chiefs (Lund, 2008).

In recent decades many parts of the African continent have been besieged by intra-state violence and conflicts. Most of these violent conflicts do not take the form of conventional wars (Gettleman, 2010; Straus, 2012). Not only are they not clashes between states, they are also not

conventional civil wars between a state government and an internal armed political opposition aimed at the overthrow of that government, regime change, or secession. Scholars refer to these violent conflicts as new wars in order to emphasis their non-conventional dimensions and point to specific features such as the transnationalization or regionalization of conflicts, their privatization and commercialization, and the accompanying proliferation of conflict parties (Duffield, 2014). Emphasis is also placed on the emergence of so-called war economies, with opposing groups clashing not over state-related issues (such as political power or secession), but over access to lucrative or essential resources (Boege, 2006; Straus, 2012).

These new wars involve a wide range of new players including non-state traditional actors and institutions. The motives and concerns of these players, their ways of conducting violence, and the sources of finance for these conflicts add an important dimension to these new wars (Gettleman, 2010; Reno, 2011). According to Volke Boege (2006), traditional social entities such as extended families, lineages, clans, tribes, religious brotherhoods, and ethnolinguistic groups become parties to these conflict(s), introducing their own agendas into the overall conflict setting. These agendas contrast significantly with traditional political aims and economic considerations. They instead include concepts such as honor, revenge or right to (violent) self-help. The motives for and forms of fighting of these traditional actors sometimes coincide with those of private actors (ibid). For instance, clan leaders might become warlords, tribal warriors might become private militias, the motives of honor and profit as well as the necessity of ensuring a livelihood, might be at work at the same time. Volke Boege (2009), thus, concludes that the hybrid nature of these contemporary violent conflicts needs to be considered in conflict prevention, conflict transformation, and post conflict peacebuilding projects.

Liberal peace has long been the dominant paradigm behind internationally supported peacebuilding efforts. The liberal peace debate mirrors the democratic peace theory, but also involves the proactive promotion of liberal values and principles such as the rule of law and good governance, promotion of human rights, economic and privatization reforms and the formation of institutions associated with modern states (Lemay-Herbert, 2013). Advocates of liberal peace claim that states with the above characteristics tend to be more peaceful, both in their domestic affairs and in their relations with other states, than states without (illiberal states). The focus of liberal peacebuilding, therefore, goes beyond managing instability between states, the traditional focus of international relations discipline, to an emphasis on building peace within states based on

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liberal democracy and market economies. These advocates focus on social engineering meant to constitute the foundation of a stable society rather than the mere absence of violence or war. The main objective of liberal peacebuilding is the creation of "a self-sustaining peace within... frameworks of liberal governance in which both overt and structural violence are removed and social, economic and political models conform to a mixture of liberal and neo-liberal international expectations..." (Franks & Richmond, 2008, p. 83). This brings together two previously distinct policy areas with different sets of actors and agencies: development and security. This security-development nexus essentially entails the transformation of societies to fit liberal norms and Western expectations (Duffield, 2014).

The abysmal performance of liberal peacebuilding projects in many parts of the developing world has become the biggest challenge to the model. (Richmond, 2012; Tadjbakhsh & Richmond, 2011). These interventions fail to recognize the changing nature of violent conflicts in Africa and other parts of the global South. Liberal peacebuilding interventions are unable to adequately address local dynamics and the historical and multifaceted nature of conflicts because they are essentially external solutions to internal problems (Daley, 2006). These interventions fail to address the root causes of armed conflicts or to respond to local priorities because they often do not engage with local actors who often become unwilling objects of the peacebuilding agenda (Millar et al., 2013). Interventions that only focus on state institutions risk alienating locals, who are likely to resist and reject such interventions (Brown & Gusmao, 2009; Hancock, 2017). Millar et al. (2013) further contend that societies emerging from conflict retain many structures, institutions and modes of survival, including patronage networks, tribal connections, traditional authorities, and unofficial or grey economies which are of great importance and usefulness to local elites and ordinary people alike. These local structures and institutions are persistent social forms that exist prior to, during, and after conflict, and, as such, tend to impact or interfere with international peacebuilding operations. In a study on the conflicts and peace processes in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Daley (2006) found that frameworks for peacemaking and peacebuilding premised on neoliberal peacebuilding models were unable to lay the foundations for necessary conditions toward sustainable peace. For Pickering (2007), top-down peacebuilding efforts fail to comprehend what is happening at the individual level and are therefore unable to tap into the potential of ordinary citizens in contributing to the rebuilding of their lives and communities.

Scholars and experts in peace and conflict studies have, in recent times, explored the role of bottom-up approaches and local agency in peacebuilding in response to the failures of the top-down, state-focused liberal peacebuilding projects (Hancock, 2017; Kappler, 2014; Richmond, 2012). This local turn refers to the range of locally based agencies present within a conflict and post-conflict environment, aimed at identifying and creating the necessary conditions for peace, and framed in a way in which legitimacy in local and international terms converge (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). According to Leonardson and Rudd (2015), the local "refers to the everyday acts of a diversity of individuals and communities that go beyond elites" (p. 833). Proponents of the local turn argue that peacebuilding should aim to restore and establish the political framework by being as inclusive as possible because local communities are the most important resource in the resolution of local conflicts (Leonardson & Rudd, 2015; Richmond, 2012). These local communities are best placed to comprehend the causes and nature of these conflicts and appreciate practical and feasible solutions. The promotion of local ownership attempts to address shortcomings concerning the legitimacy and sustainability of the liberal peace projects by giving greater emphasis to the role local actors should play in the design and implementation of peacebuilding strategies (Mateos & Solà-Martín, 2022). The new emphasis on the role of local ownership in peacebuilding is important both conceptually as well as in setting broader parameters for practical engagement which facilitates and supports local agency. It recognizes that including broad sections of the population and mobilizing local capacities is necessary for effective and sustainable interventions which better correspond to local needs and changing local contexts (High Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, 2015).

Proponents of the local turn also emphasize the adoption and use of indigenous and traditional mechanisms in peacebuilding to give such interventions increased legitimacy and accountability (Boege, 2006; Zartman. 2000). According to Zartman (2000), "Conflict management practices are considered traditional if they have been practiced for an extended period and have evolved within African societies rather than being the product of external importation" (p. 7). Traditional conflict transformation seeks to restore societal order and harmony following the disturbance of relations inflicted by conflict. Traditional conflict management generally follow the line of restorative justice instead of punitive justice because the aim is to guarantee cooperation between conflict parties in the future, rather than punish perpetrators for deeds done in the past. Reconciliation is necessary for the restoration of social harmony of the community in general and

of social relationships between conflict parties in particular (Boege, 2006; Faure, 2000). According to Gellman (2007), when space is given for communities to elicit their own conflict transformation models, they can bring cultural wisdom to the mediation table in a way that contextualizes both conflict and the potential means of resolution.

Traditional approaches to peacebuilding provide for inclusion and participation (Boege, 2006). These approaches are premised on the belief that a solution to conflict can only be achieved by consensus. All parties to the conflict must perceive resolutions as win-win outcomes, compatible with their individual interests. These interests do not always coincide with traditional political aims and economic considerations, but may also comprise issues such as honor, prestige, and saving one's face. Volke Boege (2006) observes that the adoption of an inclusive and participatory approach at all levels of a conflict has greater chances of success than approaches confined to elites and other top-level leaders, although the former might be more complex and time-consuming. These approaches are therefore nonlinear because they include multiple activities that take place at multiple levels of community, and helps to establish, reestablish, or strengthen relationships across the whole the community (Faure, 2000).

Traditional conflict resolution approaches also focus on the psycho-social and spiritual dimension of violent conflicts and their transformation (Boege, 2006). Traditional methods of purification and healing, carried out by customary healers, priests and other spiritual authorities are of utmost importance for the mental and spiritual rehabilitation of victims and perpetrators. These approaches provide mental healing for people deeply traumatized by the experiences of violent conflict. They also take into account that conflict transformation must involve the gods and ancestors because of the central position they occupy in the community.

Lederach's Theory of Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation is based on the idea that conflict is a natural part of social interactions (Paffenholz, 2014). The concept, therefore, focuses not on finding quick solutions to immediate problems, but rather on building creative platforms that can simultaneously address surface issues and change underlying social structures and relationship patterns. This is a core difference to conflict management (Bercovitch, 2019; Zartman, 1995), and resolution theories (Kelman, 1992; Fisher, 1997). Although the concept can be traced to the works of several scholars (Galtung, 1969; Fetherston, 2000; Miall, 2004), the most comprehensive and widely recognized

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approach has been developed by John Paul Lederach in a series of publications (1995;1997; 1999; 2005).

Lederach views peacebuilding as a long-drawn-out process of systemic transformation from violence to peace. To achieve sustainable peace, he highlights the need for changes in the personal, structural, relational and cultural aspects of conflict, brought about over different time-periods and affecting different systems levels. Lederach's theory places reconciliation at the heart of developing long-term infrastructures for peacebuilding within conflict affected societies. Lederach conceptualizes that reconciliation emanates from truth, justice, mercy, and peace. He, therefore, stresses the need to rebuild relationships affected by conflict, focusing on reconciliation within society and strengthening its peacebuilding potential. This highlights the need for a shift from international to local actors as the main resource in conflict transformation (Paffenholz, 2014). According to Miall (2004) the strength of Lederach's model lies in its broader view of conflict transformation, and reliance on the wider society as the main resource for peacebuilding.
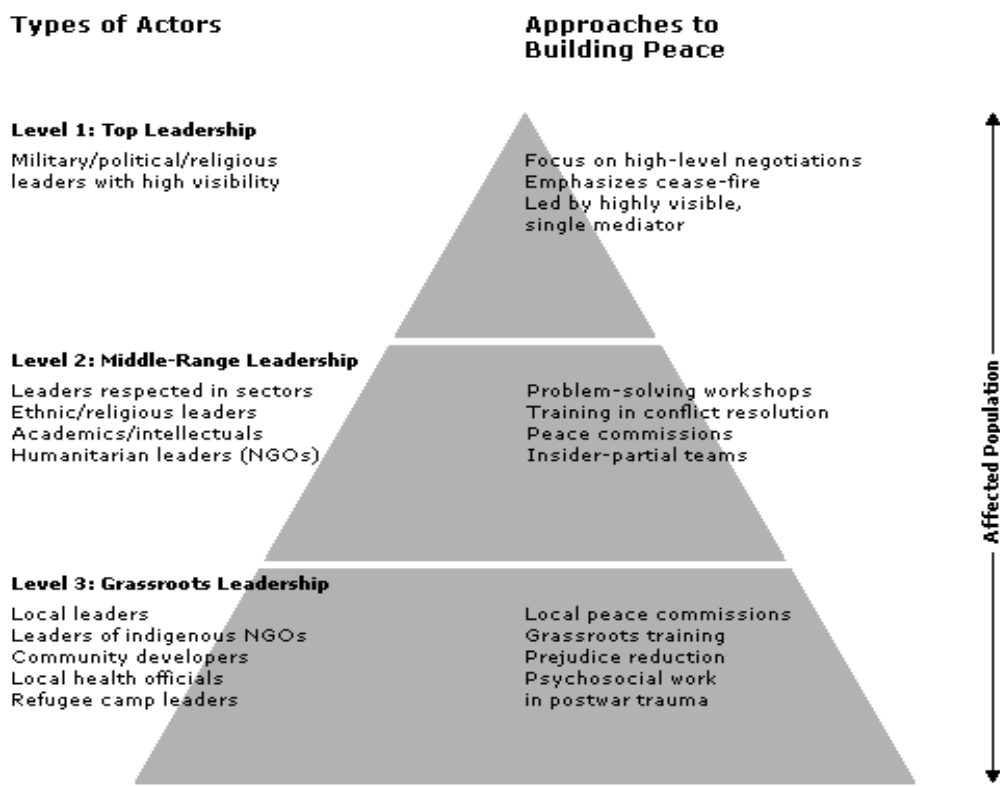
A core element of Lederach's focus on society's peacebuilding resources is his widely acclaimed peacebuilding pyramid that divides the conflict society into three levels of actors (see Figure 1). At the top of the pyramid is top-level leadership which comprises key political, military, and religious leaders. Though highly visible, this level represents the fewest number of people, in some cases just a handful of key actors. Top-level approaches to peacebuilding aim to realize a negotiated arrangement between the high-level leaders. These leaders are often locked into rigid positions regarding the substantive issues of the conflict. Actors at this level, therefore, find it difficult to shift from their publicly stated positions because they must maintain an image of strength.

The middle level is comprised of leaders of respected sectors such as ethnic or religious leaders, academic or intellectual leaders, and humanitarian leaders of major NGOs who derive their status and influence from their relationships with others. These leaders tend to have working relations with top-level leadership, and significant connections to the people at the community level. These leaders therefore serve as an important link between top-level leadership and grassroots leaders. Mid-level leaders also tend to have more freedom to maneuver than top-level leaders because of their lower visibility. Three important middle level approaches to building peace are problem solving workshops, conflict resolution training, and the development of peace commissions.

Grassroots leaders include communal leaders, community-based organizations, and leaders of various opinion groups. These leaders represent the masses, and witness at first hand their day-to-day struggle for safety and survival. Leaders at the grassroots level are also directly privy to the deep-rooted, divisions, hatred and animosity associated with conflict in the local communities. These leaders are therefore better placed to appreciate the local culture and deep-rooted issues that drive divisions between members of the community, and with their neighbors.

Figure 1

Lederach's peacebuilding pyramid

Types of Actors

Approaches to Building Peace

Level 1: Top Leadership
Military/political/religious leaders with high visibility

Focus on high-level negotiations
Emphasizes cease-fire
Led by highly visible,
single mediator

Level 2: Middle-Range Leadership
Leaders respected in sectors
Ethnic/religious leaders
Academics/intellectuals
Humanitarian leaders (NGOs)

Problem-solving workshops
Training in conflict resolution
Peace commissions
Insider-partial teams

Level 3: Grassroots Leadership
Local leaders
Leaders of indigenous NGOs
Community developers
Local health officials
Refugee camp leaders

Local peace commissions
Grassroots training
Prejudice reduction
Psychosocial work
in postwar trauma

Affected Population

Derived from John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 39.

Lederach opines that it is the middle level that holds the greatest potential for establishing an infrastructure that can serve as a source of practical, immediate action and can sustain the peacebuilding process over the long term (1997). This is because support to the middle level can influence and affect peacebuilding at both the top and grassroots level. In later works, Lederach has sought to replace the middle–out approach with a web-approach, in which peacebuilding

resources are the relationships and social spaces within a particular setting that have the capacity to generate constructive change processes (Lederach, 2005). Constructing social change is an art of seeing and building webs in an unpredictable environment. To achieve peace, Lederach (2005) thus opines that it is important to consider the spaces within which people operate, the resources that are available, and the attachment points that will make the process stick.

Data Presentation and Analysis: The Protracted Bawku Chieftaincy Conflict

The Bawku chieftaincy conflict remains one of the longest running ethno-political conflicts in Ghana. The conflict is a struggle for traditional political authority and ethnic superiority between the predominant Kusasi and Mamprusi ethnic groups in Bawku. Kusasis claim to be the indigenes of the Bawku traditional area and the owners of the land because they lived in the area for many centuries before the arrival of Mamprusis and other ethnic groups. Other minority ethnic groups in the area include the Bissas, Dagombas, Frafras, and Moshies. Bawku is also home to many migrants from other parts of the country and neighboring countries because of its commercial importance as a trading town.

The recent phase of the conflict started during the general elections in 2000 when violent clashes broke out between the two main rival ethnic groups. In the run up to the elections, there were rumors that if the New Patriotic Party (NPP), a party with historical links to Mamprusis, prevailed it would remove the Kusasi Bawku-Naba, Naba Abugurago Azoka II and assist Mamprusis in reclaiming the Bawku skin. The decision by the presidential candidate of the NPP to pay a courtesy call on the Mamprusi regent, a claimant to the Bawku skin, during his campaign tour of the area intensified suspicions that the opposition party was intent on supporting Mamprusi claims to the Bawku skin (Lund, 2003). A minor disagreement between NDC and NPP party functionaries on election day, degenerated into widespread violent clashes between Kusasi and Mamprusi youth on the streets (Okyere, 2000, p. 1). The clashes resulted in the death of more than 50 people, the maiming of about 150 people, and the burning of houses and other properties (Ghana Review International, 2001).

The government imposed a curfew to curb the violent clashes engulfing the Bawku traditional area. The government further deployed an airborne force to reinforce security personnel stationed in the area and imposed a ban on all persons in the Bawku municipal area, Zabugu, and Garu and their environs from carrying arms, ammunitions, or any offensive weapons (BBC News, 2001). The government also banned the celebration of all traditional and religious festivals because

of their tendency to devolve into violent clashes. The curfew and reinforcement of security personnel were successful in containing the violence but failed to address the underlying causes of the conflict including issues related to the disputed claims to the Bawku skin and confiscated farmlands.

In the run up to the 2008 general elections the lingering contentions between the Mamprusi and Kusasi ethnic groups resurfaced, leading to another round of violent clashes. These violent clashes claimed hundreds of lives, left thousands of people injured, and destroyed properties worth millions of dollars (IRIN, 2008). The government again imposed a curfew beginning January 1, 2008, in response to the renewed violence (Kpodo, 2008; Mensah & Abaane, 2008). In February 2010, the Ministry of Defence in collaboration with the Ghana Armed Forces, established a permanent military barracks at Baazua in the Bawku East Municipality to reinforce security in the area (Ghanaweb, 2010). The curfew was finally lifted on June 29, 2011 (Ghanaweb, 2011). The curfew and security reinforcement were however unable to contain the violent clashes for any sustained period, as the area continued to record frequent episodes of violence.

The Bawku chieftaincy conflict reveals the limitation of top-down policies in the management of local ethnic and religious conflicts. Top-level interventions, like the Chieftancy Act and extreme curfews, introduced by successive governments and other state actors have failed to find a permanent solution to the chieftaincy conflict. These interventions fail for several reasons. First, they are unable to adequately address local dynamics and the historical and multifaceted nature of the conflict because of the lack of wider participation, especially by grassroot actors and local communities directly affected by these interventions. Peacebuilding efforts that neglect local ownership have been found to be ineffective and unsustainable over time (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006). Pickering (2007) similarly observes that top-down peacebuilding frameworks fail to comprehend what is happening at the individual level, and are therefore unable to tap into the potential of ordinary citizens to rebuild their lives and communities. The imposition of curfews and other security measures, for instance, often lead to a temporal cessation of hostilities but ultimately fail to achieve peace on a sustainable basis. These interventions are designed to tackle the manifestations of the conflict without addressing the structural causes of the conflict. A Mamprusi youth leader pointed out that:

> The government has failed to implement the report of the Miller Committee of 1984 which recommended that all lands seized from Mamprusis by the Kusasi Youth Association be

returned to them. Many of our kin have, therefore, been denied the use of their farmlands and sources of livelihood for several decades. Until the land issue is fully resolved, it will be difficult to convince our young men to fully commit to any peace deal.

Secondly, local communities often feel alienated by these interventions (Hancock, 2017; Millar et al., 2013). As observed by Brown and Gusmao (2009), local actors often resist and reject peacebuilding interventions that focus only on state institutions and fail to engage them. An NGO activist and a member of the BIEPC observed that:

Although curfews imposed by the Regional Security Council have been important in managing the conflict in Bawku, they often add to the suffering of local people. When these curfews are imposed it brings economic activities in the area to a halt and disrupts peoples' lives. Traders find it difficult to carry out their business activities, and farmers cannot go to their farms. Because of these restrictions many people here do not support these curfews which makes it difficult for the police to enforce them.

In addition, top-down interventions lack support and legitimacy at the community level. These interventions are unable to tackle the root causes of the chieftaincy conflict because of accusations of partiality and political bias from both ethnic groups. Parties to chieftaincy conflicts in northern Ghana often do not trust interventions from the government because of perceived bias in favor of factions aligned politically to the government (Bukari et al., 2021). The Kusasis and Mamprusis have since the beginning of the conflict in the 1950s aligned themselves with political parties on opposite sides of the national political divide. The Kusasis supported the CPP and political parties that inherited the Nkrumaist political tradition, whilst Mamprusis were aligned to the United Party (UP) and later versions of that political tradition (Lund, 2003; Aganah, 2019). Interventions emanating from the state are, therefore, viewed with suspicion by both factions. In a statement released in 2014, the Mamprusi faction accused the then NDC led government of open bias against the group:

It is on record that the Government has been denying the Mamprusis their rights and liberties to practice their cultural festival as enshrined in Article 26 (1) of the 1992 Constitution since 2010. We wish to call upon the central Government to see the Mamprusis and Kusasis as true citizens of Ghana and give equal treatment to all…If you permit the Kusasis to observe the Samanpiid festival, also permit the Mamprusis to observe the Damba festival. This single move will go a long way to promote and improve our quest to restore peace in the

municipality. Any other move contrary to this will only deepen the mistrust and disunity and send us far away from the peace we are yearning to obtain. (Mamprusis Youth Group, 2014) Kusasis have similarly been suspicious of policies instituted by political parties aligned to the UP political tradition since the NLC administration removed Abuguragu Azoka as Bawku-Naba in 1966. In 2001, they accused Vice President Aliu Mahama of attempting to foment trouble in Bawku when he paid a courtesy call to the Mamprusi regent as part of his official visit to the area (Lund, 2003). The challenges associated with and the failure of top-down interventions to resolve the Bawku chieftaincy conflict led stakeholders to seek an alternative peacebuilding approach in the form of the BIEPC.

The Bawku Inter-Ethnic Peace Committee

As part of efforts to find a sustainable solution to the protracted chieftaincy conflict and recurring violence in Bawku, a consortium of NGOs, in partnership with the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC), formed a local peace committee—the Bawku Inter-Ethnic Peace Committee (BIEPC), to initiate the Bawku peace process in 2009. Members of the consortium included Action Aid Ghana, the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Advocacy Peace Group - IBIS (Ghana), the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Christian Council of Ghana and the Belim WUSA Development Agency (BEWDA). These stakeholders came to the realization that achieving sustainable peace included a need to engage with and empower local communities to explore indigenous solutions to the conflict. Previous attempts to resolve the conflict failed because they were imposed from the top with little to no local participation. Top-down peacebuilding efforts fail to involve local communities and are, therefore, unable to adequately address local dynamics and the historical and multifaceted nature of local conflicts (Daley, 2006).

The recurring violence in Bawku posed particular challenges to these various stakeholders. On its part, the RCC was concerned that the continuation of the conflict posed a threat to the peace and security of the entire region. According to the Executive Secretary of the Regional Peace Council, "It became obvious that there was the real risk that the conflict could easily spread to other parts of the region especially to the regional capital-Bolgatanga, where many people from Bawku had resettled." The NGOs were also concerned that in the absence of any sustained peace, there could be no meaningful development in the area (Bombande, 2007). The recurring violent

outbreaks destroyed much of the development interventions introduced by these actors and made new development work difficult.

The BIEPC was made up of 23 members from the various ethnic groups in the Bawku traditional area, including Kusasis, Mamprusis, Bissas, Moshies, Hausas, and Dagombas. The committee was facilitated by a representative from the NGO consortium and co-chaired by two prominent elders from the Kusasi and Mumprusi ethnic groups. The BIEPC worked closely with chiefs, elders, opinion leaders and members of the various local communities to address some of the most contentious issues at the roots of the conflict, including disputes over land and the celebrations of traditional festivals. The BIEPC, in partnerships with the UNDP and the National Peace Council, organized capacity building workshops for members of the committee and other local leaders on conflict mediation and peacebuilding. These training workshops were designed to lay the foundation in developing a common language around mediation tools, and to identify opportunities for dialogue at the community level. A member of the BIEPC pointed out that:

> When the idea of local peace committee was brought up. It received wide support from all sides because deep down we all accept that the only way Bawku can achieve peace is for the various local communities to come together and work to resolve our differences. All the interventions that have been implemented over the years have achieve little results because nobody can come from Accra to resolve this conflict for us.

The BIEPC served as a platform for promoting intercultural dialogue and reconciliation. The Committee provided a platform for the various ethnic groups to openly and respectfully exchange their respective views on the conflict to foster a deeper understanding of the other's perception of the conflict. The Committee also facilitated cross-communal visits and interactions, including joint street processions as trust and confidence building measures. The Executive Secretary of the Regional Peace Council observed that:

> The BIEPC process demonstrated to the various ethnic groups that inter-ethnic cooperation, dialogue and reconciliation was only possible but eminently desirable. When the youth of the different communities saw their leaders putting aside their differences and working together for reconciliation and peace, it sent a strong message to them that there was life beyond the conflict.

A local opinion leader asserted that:

The BIEPC gave our local communities the opportunity to share their respective grievances and to understand the conflict and its effects from the perspective of the other side. This experience was novel because for the first time people could view the conflict from a wider perspective and appreciate the genuine desire for peace from all sides.

The BIEPC employed indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms to find a sustainable solution to the recurring conflict. The main traditional mechanisms adopted by the Committee included blood cleansing rites and the burial of objects. These rituals are performed by an earth priest, or *tendaana*. Blood cleansing involves sacrificing a goat and a rooster to pacify the land in places where human blood was shed during the conflict and prepare a communal meal to signify reconciliation between the feuding factions. A member of the BIEPC observed that:

During our deliberations we decided from an early stage to perform some traditional rituals as part of the conflict resolution process. Although some Mamprusis did not initially support this idea because [of] their religious beliefs [Islam], it was eventually agreed that the non-Muslim members of the Committee could facilitate the performance of these rituals if they could contribute to peace in the area.

As observed by Boege (2006), traditional conflict management generally follows a line of restorative justice instead of punitive justice because the aim is to guarantee cooperation between conflict parties in the future, rather than punish perpetrators for past deeds. Reconciliation is necessary for the restoration of social harmony of the community in general and of social relationships between conflict parties in particular. A Kusasi elder explained that:

The sacrificed animals are roasted and shared as a communal meal to show the resolve of the people in conflict to work together for a peaceful resolution of their differences. The communal meal is also meant to demonstrate to the entire community, especially the youth, that it is time to put the past behind us and work together to forge a new future where all tribes—Mamprusis, Kusasis, Bissas, Moshies—can live together in peace and unity.

The blood cleansing was performed in 23 communities affected by the violence and loss of human life. The elder added that:

This ritual is very important because it is the first step to seeking forgiveness from the spirit of the earth god for desecrating the land. Without forgiveness from the gods, any attempt to find peace is bound to fail and our people would experience untold suffering as punishment for disrespecting of the land.

Another respondent confirmed that:

> The sharing of the communal meal played a big role in easing tensions in the communities because it demonstrated the frustration of all groups with the destructions and the upheaval to everyday life caused by the conflict. The sharing of the meal between adversaries also demonstrated our common resolve to put our differences aside and work together to return Bawku to her former glory days.

The second traditional ritual performed as part of the conflict resolution process involved the burial of objects to signify the end of hostilities between the warring factions. This ritual involves the burial of a sacred okro stalk to signify an agreement between the factions and the earth god that no more blood would be shed. A Kusasi elder claimed that:

> Our people do not take this ritual lightly because it is an agreement with our ancestors and a promise with the earth itself not to desecrate it anymore. we all understand that the ancestors and the gods would severely punish anyone who breaks this promise.

In January 2022, the BIEPC peace process suffered a major setback when violence broke out between the rival ethnic groups leading to the loss of several lives and destruction of properties. In April, at a two-day review meeting in Bolgatanga, members of the BIEPC outlined some of the challenges that have undermined efforts of the Committee to build sustainable peace in Bawku (Upper East Regional Peace Council, 2022).

Members of the Committee observed that the emergence of hardliners on both sides, critical of the BIEPC, has been a major challenge to the peace process. A section of the Kusasi Youth Association (KYA) has maintained that the chieftaincy conflict is settled and, therefore, there is no need to continue to engage with the Mamprusis on accepting the court verdict. This group insists that any attempt by any individual or group to circumvent the authority of the Bawku Naba must be treated as an act of criminality and be dealt with by the full rigors of the law. Mamprusi hardliners, on the other hand argue that the BIEPC peace process is simply a waste of time because the BIEPC has failed to produce any meaningful results for Mamprusis in Bawku. The Executive Secretary of the Regional Peace Council maintained that resistance from these headliners is a major obstacle to the progress of the dialogue and peacebuilding efforts of the BIEPC. Respondents to follow-up interviews also pointed to the emergence of spoilers on the BIEPC. These spoilers have little interest in the peaceful resolution of the conflict because of the belief that any emerging peace threatens their interests and power. A youth leader claimed that:

The presence of certain individuals on the Inter-Ethnic Committee has cast doubts in the minds of many people on the motives of the Committee. For example, a person who is in line to contest for the Bawku Naba on the Mamprusi side is a member of the Committee. How can we expect this person to be neutral in any discussion for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The BIEPC adopted a dual strategy of socialization and coercion to remedy the spoiler problem. The committee established a set of norms for acceptable behavior by the various parties on the committee. These norms then became the basis for judging the legitimacy of demands by the parties and the behaviors of the parties. The strategy of coercion relied on the use and threat of punishment to deter or alter unacceptable behavior. The committee collaborated with the security services on the prevention of violence and enforcement of peace in the area. The Bawku peace process demonstrates the role of local agency in local peacebuilding.

The Role of Local Agency in the Peacebuilding Process

The BIEPC peace process is a bottom-up approach with grassroot and mid-level actors playing key roles in the peace process. The participation of these actors gives the process legitimacy at the community level. Grassroots leaders represent the various ethnic groups, and witness at first hand their day-to-day struggle for safety and survival. These leaders are also directly privy to the deep-rooted divisions, hatred and animosity associated with the conflict. These leaders are therefore better placed to appreciate the local culture and deep-rooted issues that drive divisions between members of the different ethnic groups (Lederach, 1997; Clark, 2011).

On their part, mid-level actors, including NGOs, have strong social capital at the community level. The social capital enjoyed by the NGOs derives from their long presence in the region, where they have been engaged in development work and advocacy in areas such as human rights, women's rights, land rights, and the right to education (Aganah, 2022). Focus group discussants confirmed that:

The NGOs played an important role in convincing all ethnic groups to participate in the BIEPC process because these NGOs have long demonstrated their commitment to the development of all communities irrespective of ethic, political or religious affiliation. The NGOs have been working with and helping every group, whether Kusasi, Mamprusi or any other group to cope with the destruction caused by the conflict. So, when they invited us

to join the inter-ethnic committee, we had no doubt of their genuine concern for the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The BIEPC was, therefore, able to rely on its strong social and moral ties to manage recurring violence at the community level and to initiate a dialogue process between the various ethnic groups aimed at addressing the underlying causes of the chieftaincy conflict. As observed by Mateos and Solà-Martín (2022), local ownership is a critical aspect to ensure the sustainability and legitimacy of peacebuilding reforms. The mobilization of local agency and capacities is necessary for effective and sustainable interventions which better correspond to local needs and the changing local context (High Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, 2015).

The adoption of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms played a significant role in the management of the chieftaincy conflict and recurring violence. Local and indigenous conflict management strategies are more accessible to local communities because of their low cost; more flexible procedures; and respect for local values and customs (Akudugu & Mahama, 2011). These indigenous mechanisms proved more effective in empowering local communities in managing their disputes and working together to find a sustained solution to the underlying causes of the chieftaincy conflict. The performance of the traditional rituals reflects what Boege (2006) conceptualized as the psycho-social and spiritual dimension of violent conflicts and their transformation. This psycho-social and spiritual dimension served as the basis for the restoration of communal harmony and relationship among the warring ethnic groups, and a means of providing mental healing to people traumatized by the experiences of the recurring violence. The rituals also ensured that the peace process moved beyond formal negotiations to provide inclusion and participation of; the wider community, including not just the living, but also the ancestors and the gods. A member of the Municipal Assembly explained that:

The decision to perform our traditional rituals are particularly laudable because our elders, *tendaanas* and ancestors all became involved in the efforts to settle of the conflict. In our culture, conflicts do not only lead to the loss of lives and unnecessary destruction of properties. We also break various taboos by offending our ancestors and our gods whenever we fight. It is, therefore, important that when we want to resolve conflict, our *tendaanas* make sacrifices to beg our ancestors and gods for forgiveness.

The performance of these traditional rituals paved the way for the BIEPC to address some of the underlying causes of the conflict. The committee facilitated the celebrations of traditional

and religious festivals and initiated discussion on the return of confiscated farmlands. Following the performance of the traditional rituals, the committee shuttled between the leadership of Kusasis and Mamprusis to arrange for the resumption of annual celebrations of the Samanpiid and the Damba festivals (Azanduna, 2017). The successful celebration of the Samapiid by the Kusasis in December 2016, and Damba by the Mamprusis in January 2017, marked a key milestone in the peace process (Ghana News Agency, 2017). The success of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in Bawku demonstrates Lederach's (1997) assertion that when space is given for communities to elicit their own conflict transformation models, they can bring cultural wisdom to the mediation table in a way that contextualizes both conflict and the potential means of resolution.

Despite the challenges faced by the BIEPC peace process and the recent setback, it has been shown to offer the most promising route to sustainable peace in Bawku. The BIEPC contributed to increased inter-ethnic dialogue and collaboration, and eventually to the lifting of more than three years of curfew in the area. Until the recent violent outbreaks, the BIEPC peace process had coincided with the longest period of peace in the Bawku traditional area since independence from colonial rule. However, as demonstrated by the successful resolution of the 1991-92 conflict in the Northern Region, traditional and participatory peacebuilding processes usually need time and space because they include multiple activities at multiple levels of community which help to establish, reestablish, and strengthen relationships across the whole community (Aganah, 2022; Boege, 2006).

Conclusion

This article reveals the limitations of top-down interventions in the management of local conflicts and the role local participation in local peacebuilding. The use of top-down interventions failed to resolve the Bawku chieftaincy conflict because they lack grassroot participation and ownership. Top-down interventions, including curfews and other security measures, fail to achieve legitimacy and sustainability at the community level. These interventions are introduced to tackle the manifestation of the conflict, without addressing its structural causes. In contrast, the BIEPC led peace process has been more successful in managing conflict because it is a bottom-up approach with representatives of local communities playing an active role in the process. The BIEPC relied on its strong social and moral ties to initiate a dialogue process between the various ethnic groups aimed at addressing the underlying causes of the chieftaincy conflict and to manage recurring violence at the community level. The adoption of indigenous conflict resolution

mechanisms provided inclusion and participation for the wider community, and also served to restore communal harmony and relationship among the living, ancestors, and the gods of the community. Despite recent setbacks in the peace process, the BIEPC offers the most promising route to the resolution of the structural causes of the Bawku chieftaincy conflict.

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