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WEST AFRICA CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTE

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PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

RESOLVING COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN GHANA: THE ROLE OF NON-STATE ACTORS

Meeting Report

Alisa Hotel, Accra, Ghana

22 March 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CSO   Civil Society Organization

NGO   Non-governmental organization

OSIWA   Open Society Initiative for West Africa

SIPRI   Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

WACSI   West Africa Civil Society Institute

ABOUT IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATIONS

About WACSI

WACSI (West Africa Civil Society Institute) is a spin-off of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), a George Soros Foundation. WACSI is a civil society resource centre engaged in training, research, documentation, and policy dialogue for civil society organisations (CSOs) in West Africa. The Institute focuses on creating strategic opportunities for dialogue and strengthening the operational structures of CSOs. These activities provide a forum for exchanging ideas, sharing experiences and bridging differences between policy makers and CSOs. The institute has built a reputation for reducing the gap between policy makers and civil society.

www.wacsi.org

About SIPRI

SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. Established in 1966, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations which open a source of latest information and guidelines to policy makers, researchers, media and interested public. Since SIPRI was established on the basis of a decision by the Swedish Parliament, a substantial part of its funding comes in the form of an annual grant from the Swedish Government. The Institute also seeks financial support from other organizations in order to carry out its broad research program. Located in Stockholm, Sweden, SIPRI offers a unique platform for researchers from different countries to work in close cooperation. The Institute also hosts guest researchers and interns who work on issues related to the SIPRI research program.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ghana has been hailed as a model example of peaceful democratic governance in sub-Saharan Africa. The country has indeed successfully avoided major violent conflicts affecting its surrounding neighbours; however, various instances attest that the potential of *communal-level* conflict does exist. The most prevailing example of a violent conflict on Ghanaian soil materialises in the Dagbon chieftaincy crisis. The tension has been on-going since the murder of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II, the ruler of Ghana's Dagbon Kingdom, along with over 29 high profile individuals in March 2002. This murder escalated latent tensions between the Abudu and Andani royal families, whose historical struggle for power and royal supremacy has generated profound insecurity among civilians in the Northern region. No long-term solution has been discovered, despite the numerous efforts of successive governments to address the crisis.

In an attempt to brainstorm non-conventional and new, creative means of peaceful mitigation of communal conflicts, West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) in collaboration with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), conducted a study "Governance and Security in Ghana: The Dagbon Chieftaincy Crisis." The study aimed at unravelling the dynamics of the communal conflict in Dagbon, focusing on the sociocultural background and the hidden factors and stakeholders potentially fuelling the violence. Key findings and policy recommendations of the research report were presented in the meeting hosted by WACSI and SIPRI: *"Resolving Communal Conflicts in Ghana: The Role of Non-State Actors," held on the 22nd of March 2011 at Alisa Hotel, Accra, Ghana.* The meeting brought together academic, governmental and civil society actors who brainstormed the possibilities of mitigation including the need for government to engage civil society actors. One of the key outcomes of this meeting was to make clear suggestions on *how* to proceed towards a peaceful solution of the Dagbon crisis, and how enhancing civil participation may contribute to this aim.

The meeting generated a number of key recommendations for better conflict management and prevention strategy. These recommendations are aimed at both the government and civil society actors, who must work in co-operation. The Dagbon conflict highlights broader security problems in Ghana, that are often left unattended and poorly analysed: namely, the struggle existing between traditional forms of rule vis-à-vis the so called "modern" forms of governance and the seeming contradictory coexistence of the civil actor as a 'citizen' and a 'subject'.

Paradoxically, it seems that the democratic ideal of competitive political system has transcended to the level of chieftaincy; chiefs become politically aligned and claim for supreme position if "their" party holds state power, which was also the case of Dagbon. Communal conflicts are most often fundamentally embedded in this struggle, which must be recognised, addressed and dealt with both on the level of national governance and the civil society.

Although the meeting generally focused on the case of Dagbon, the recommendations can also be used as general guidelines to avoid and mitigate communal conflicts in the entire nation-state of Ghana.

The key recommendations that emerged from the meeting are outlined below.

Political/governmental actors

- Depoliticize the conflict. Since the two royal families in Dagbon, namely Abudu and Andani, have aligned with political parties, the actors within these parties have the responsibility of stripping their political and electoral interest off the conflict. However, depoliticizing does not mean retracting from the resolution process; on the contrary, the government and the parliament must play an active role and lead by example. They must call for peace, unity and mutual dialogue both in speech and action.

- De-marginalize Northern Ghana, encourage investors to develop the region and improve upon employment opportunities. One means could be introducing a tax rebate for private sector investments. This could serve as an incentive. In the long term, when people's basic needs are satisfied, the discourse of peace can more effectively be mainstreamed.

- Leave the punitive element solely to security agencies, such as the police and the judiciary. Train these agencies to respond promptly in even minor security threats and communicate these threats clearly to the government and the civil society.

- Refrain from treating the Dagbon conflict in isolation from other conflicts; recognize the influence of the instabilities in neighbouring countries that may fuel violence in Dagbon in the form of arms supply, for instance.

- Encourage the citizens of Dagbon to start a dialogue of peaceful transformation of the conflict, also beyond the Northern region. Use the media and other communication means to do so, create a public space for debate and discussion.

- Restructure the National Peace Council to make it an able overseer of communal-level conflicts. The council needs an effective management plan, and more resources and governmental support to become an effective actor in conflict mitigation and enable an effective management plan.

- Mainstream a more in-depth understanding of "culture" as an all-encompassing, dynamic feature of the citizens who the State attempts to govern. In many people's minds, a chief may be more respected than the president of the nation; therefore, the government must be aware of these so called "non-state" affiliations and their effect.

- Mainstream a more holistic understanding of "security" in national governance: the State cannot perceive itself as the sole provider of security for its citizens through legal means. Instead the state must acknowledge the role of non-state actors, and other stakeholders in providing security at the grass-roots level, analyse how they work, and create means of engagement.

- Pay close attention to latent conflicts embedded in chieftaincy, party politics, land disputes and other causes of instability in Southern Ghana as well; identify the tensions early and call for preventive measures before escalation. In order to do so, co-operate closely with civil society organizations in each region, harness their regional expertise and their immediate relation to the people in continuously monitoring developments.

- Start building national curricula of peace-education in schools and universities, which will restructure minds and instil the discourse of peace from early intellectual development.

Civil Society Organizations

- Establish a "think tank" consisting of varying civil society actors from CSOs, faith-based religious groups, traditional authorities, scholars, and the media that have their word to say on the conflict. This think tank will work in close co-operation with the National Peace Council, which has a co-ordinating mandate. This arrangement will bring the government and CSOs in closer co-operation in mitigating the Dagbon crisis, and in mitigating other potential communal conflicts as well.

- "Put your house in order" - in other words, CSOs must clarify their goals and aspirations, carry themselves professionally in order to create an appearance of credibility and accuracy. Especially in conflict mitigation processes, this discipline increases trust both between the diverse CSOs as well as between the government and civil society actors.

Joint Recommendations

- Work in close co-operation to design frameworks that may contribute to peaceful transformation of the Dagbon crisis.

- Initiate a clear, concrete peace plan for the people in Dagbon and people of Northern Ghana in general. This plan would promote tolerance, equality, justice and security for all, irrespective of ethnic group, religion and gender. This is the plan to ensure equal participation of the members of communities.

- Pay close attention to reducing the gap between the "formal" and the "informal" patterns of governance. These sectors holistically participate to providing security for citizens. One means of bringing these sectors closer happens through the right language: if the discourse of "human rights" and "citizenship rights" does not appeal to the different stakeholders within this context, the type of language that is more acceptable and understood should be used. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations must "know" the people they are working with and transform their communication accordingly.

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of civil society in proactive conflict management has been recognized by various scholars; however, its practical applications still lack trenchancy. In order to contribute to changing this, the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) in collaboration with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), co-hosted a meeting *"Resolving Communal Conflicts in Ghana: The Role of Non-State Actors."* The meeting explored the potential of non-governmental parties in mitigating communal level conflicts by taking the Dagbon chieftaincy crisis as the most pressing case example and an object of analysis. The meeting brought various stakeholders together to discuss and debate the prospects of state/civil society co-operation in establishing a more democratic, transparent and open national peace and security architecture in Ghana.

2. OPENING REMARKS: ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The Executive director of WACSI, Nana Asantewa Afadzinu opened the seminar by highlighting the existence of 15 current conflict flash points in the five regions of Ghana. She stressed the importance of civil society organizations in establishing an effective peace structure in Ghana and helping communities to discover their "own" conflict resolution mechanisms that would also acquire grass roots level legitimacy. Communities must be guaranteed an active role in conflict resolution with the help of civil society organizations and their professional expertise. This arrangement would guarantee an increased level of community participation. The positive effect of CSO participation had already attested in the case of Konkonba/Nanumba conflict in Northern Ghana. The inter-NGO consortium that was formed to facilitate a series of peace and reconciliation workshops among the warring factions greatly aided the government in mitigation. As the WACSI Executive Director implored, these positive examples should not be undermined, but recognized as "best practice" and worthy of emulation.

Nana Asantewa Afadzinu's statement was followed by that of Dr. Elisabeth Sköns, the Director of the Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme, SIPRI. Dr. Sköns remarked that most conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa are analyzed by foreign academic experts, who may turn a blind eye to "indigenous" concepts of peace and conflict. SIPRI decided to collaborate with WACSI in order to break this convention and come up with new, creative ideas and concrete suggestions for bringing lasting peace to some of these conflicts, particularly, communal conflicts. The two organizations initiated a thorough investigation on the Dagbon chieftaincy crisis and are now using the findings as a base to suggest better approaches for conflict resolution. It is also in the interest of both organizations that these suggestions are applied in a more general manner of resolving communal conflicts beyond Dagbon, even beyond the borders of Ghana to other conflict-prone areas in Africa.

The Deputy Minister of Interior, Honourable Kwabena Owusu Acheampong, acknowledged the role of CSOs in effective conflict mitigation. The Minister mentioned that there had been over 300 communal conflicts in Ghana, which were mainly inter-ethnic feuds between opposing coalitions in the Northern region mostly, and also in other parts of Ghana. The Minister hoped the meeting will provide effective strategies of resolving communal conflicts. The Minister proposed that one of the main aims of the meeting should be to reflect on how these strategies may be embedded in restructuring the National Peace Council; which a number of Ghanaian CSOs have been calling for. The Minister also endorsed the need for the State to work closely with civil society actors, whom he acknowledged had made effective contributions to conflict resolution in Ghana, and welcomed further collaboration.

3. CASE STUDY: THE DAGBON CHIEFTAINCY CRISIS

The first morning session presented the background and key findings of the research report initiated by WACSI and SIPRI: "Security and Governance in Ghana: The Dagbon Chieftaincy Crisis." After giving a brief introduction to the history and chronology of the conflict, the lead researcher Dr. Ken Ahorsu stated, that most governmental and non-government conflict mitigation efforts have yielded no positive results up to date. On the contrary, these efforts may have even contributed to fuelling violence. Dr. Ahorsu chronicled a number of mistakes that had been made in dealing with the escalation of Dagbon crisis, stating that after the murder of Ya Na, a number of initiatives that were undertaken to promote conciliation had proven largely ineffective, even though significant governmental resources had been used to establish and maintain them. Their inability to provide results, Dr. Ahorsu bemoaned, is therefore quite unfortunate.

These shortcomings highlight the current inefficiency of dealing with communal level conflicts in Ghana. The Dagbon crisis and its aftermath is an example of a conflict which has been influenced by political actors and successive governments. Political interests must be carefully interrogated in order to distance its effects on traditional institutions. Therefore, if the Dagbon crisis is used as a means to promote political interests, the conflict has the potential of re-escalating.

The lively debate that followed Dr. Ahorsu's presentation raised key questions, some touching on issues related to governmental interference in ethnic/communal disputes. A vexing question that participants grappled with was the following: in order to "depoliticize," should the government be completely disengaged from conflict resolution processes such as the one in Dagbon? The Ghanaian state has so been intrinsically involved in the Dagbon conflict through the party politics of successive governments, which poses a paradox of resolution: how can the state facilitate the process if it has historically been deeply embedded in the conflict itself? According to Dr. Ahorsu, no third world country can "afford" to leave the state out of the conflict resolution process.

Instead, the CSOs must find a common ground to demonstrate the right attitude of dealing with the government, which reciprocally must acknowledge the invaluable role of the civil society in finding a long-term solution to the conflict.

4. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF THE STATE AND CIVILIANS

After Dr. Ahorsu's presentation and the ensuing debate, the afternoon session concentrated on treating conflict management both theoretically and practically. Interestingly, as the first presenter, Prof. Isaac Olawale Albert emphasized, that "conflicts can't be resolved, they can only be managed." The purpose of the session was to deepen understanding of the various means of conflict management, and how these have been used in national governance, and in the specific case of the Ghanaian National Peace Council established in 2006.

Dr. Albert's theoretically oriented lecture addressed the different means of analysing a conflict and how to manage it at each stage. There are multiple ways of responding to a conflict situation, such as denial, strategic withdrawal, confrontation and joint problem-solving. However, these strategies lead towards different consequences, which are not necessarily favourable for both parties involved. Dr. Albert stated that the task of CSOs in conflict management is to achieve a "win-win"-situation through joint problem-solving with the State, for instance. Confrontation, he said, benefits no-one. The importance lies in careful analysis of each unique conflict and identifying the stakeholders involved, which results in a better informed and planned action plan.

The debate that followed raised an important distinction between the two schools of thought in conflict management, namely "adversarial" and "non-adversarial." Interestingly, it became apparent that "applying law" without the attempt of joint-problem solving is adversarial and may worsen the tensions. Therefore, the CSOs should always strive for either joint-problem solving or dialogue. The presentation made evident the multiplicity of highly advanced conflict theories that can also be used for predicting real-life situation.

After the theoretical insight, the remaining part of the session concentrated on concrete experiences of conflict management in Ghana. Mr. Opoku Mensah from the National Peace Council shared his experience of the challenges and difficulties that the Council has faced since its establishment in 2006. The institution still lacks legal status which hinders its work and efficiency on a wider scale. Initially, the objective of the council was to act as a governmental policy implementation agency of conflict resolution, while promoting indigenous perspectives and indeed, rendering conflict management process as "more Ghanaian." The council has been able to make some important concrete initiatives; however, the lack of resources has forced them to protract the establishment of regional peace councils in all the regions and district peace councils in all districts (the former is incomplete and the latter, non-existent), among other projects. The Council also requires legally binding mechanisms, which would highly improve its operational capacity.

The session ended with a presentation that revived the debate on chieftaincy, culture and governance. Mr. Aidan Naah Sabie analysed chieftaincy as a cultural institution that should develop its own mechanisms of resolving any conflict that relates to the institution itself. However, the legacy of colonial rule still looms large. Ghana, he said, has never properly redefined chieftaincy as a traditional institution of governance and the structures it needs to put in place. As Mr. Sabie indicated that this negligence has resulted in a situation where ethnicity and "ethnic belonging" may be manipulated and harnessed for political interests.

Indeed, the roots of conflicts are complex which calls for consolidating between various conflicting interests. As the moderator of the afternoon session, Prof. Kwame Ninsin concluded, that an important task for every party involved is to understand the "what" that people are fighting for. If the problem is citizenship instead of the more general term "communal membership," then the state must be accountable and take the responsibility. However, Prof. Ninsin said, the main task of every nation seeking to establish viable national peace architecture is education that starts from infancy: these holistic means are the ultimate gateway towards the ideal called "culture of peace."

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Successful management of the Dagbon crisis calls for innovative openings and perceptive co-operation between governmental and non-state actors. In this meeting report, non-state actors have been portrayed as integral participants to peace-making and resolution of communal conflicts. However, the potential suspicion between governmental and non-state actors does not help the cause. Quite rightfully, different parties have their interests, but when individual lives and the right to secure a living environment is at stake, these suspicions should be deflated. Professionalism and transparency is required from both CSOs and governmental actors in order to ensure effective co-operation. This is one of the key points of consensus at the meeting.

The key recommendations that emerged from the meeting are outlined below.

Political/governmental actors

- Depoliticize the conflict. Since the two royal families in Dagbon, namely Abudu and Andani, have aligned with political parties, the actors within these parties have the responsibility of stripping their political and electoral interest off the conflict. However, depoliticizing does not mean retracting from the resolution process; on the contrary, the government and the parliament must play an active role and lead by example. They must call for peace, unity and mutual dialogue both in speech and action.

- De-marginalize Northern Ghana, encourage investors to develop the region and improve upon employment opportunities. One means could be introducing a tax rebate for private sector investments. This could serve as an incentive. In the long term, when people's basic needs are satisfied, the discourse of peace can more effectively be mainstreamed.

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- Refrain from treating the Dagbon conflict in isolation from other conflicts; recognize the influence of the instabilities in neighbouring countries that may fuel violence in Dagbon in the form of arms supply, for instance.

- Encourage the citizens of Dagbon to start a dialogue of peaceful transformation of the conflict, also beyond the Northern region. Use the media and other communication means to do so, create a public space for debate and discussion.

- Restructure the National Peace Council to make it an able overseer of communal-level conflicts. The council needs an effective management plan, more resources and governmental support to become an effective actor in conflict mitigation and enable an effective management plan.

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APPENDIX 1: MEETING AGENDA

Venue: Alisa Hotel, Accra, Ghana
Date: 22 March, 2011
Keynote Speaker: The Honourable Kwabena Owusu Acheampong, Deputy Minister of Interior, Republic of Ghana

OPENING CEREMONY
9:00–10:00   **Chairperson:** *Nana Asantewa Afadzinu, Executive Director, WACSI*

                     Welcome Remarks
                     Nana Asantewa Afadzinu, Executive Director, WACSI
                     Dr Elisabeth Sköns, Director of the Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme, SIPRI

                     Keynote Address
- *The Honourable Kwabena Owusu Acheampong, Deputy Minister of Interior, Republic of Ghana*

10:00-10:30   **Tea Break**

MORNING SESSION: Facilitator:*Shaibu Abubakar, Board Chair WANEP-Ghana*

10:30–11:30   **Key Findings and Policy Recommendations: "Governance and Security in Ghana: The Dagbon Chieftaincy Crisis"**

- *Dr. Ken Ahorsu, Research Fellow and Lecturer in Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies, Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy (LECIAD), University of Ghana, Legon*

11:30–12:30   **Discussion**

12:30– 1:30   **Lunch break**

AFTERNOON SESSION: RESOLVING AND MANAGING COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

1:30:200   **Communal Conflicts Resolution Mechanisms**
- *Prof. Isaac Olawale Albert, Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

2:00–2:15	**Ghana's National Architecture for Peace**
	▪ *Mr. P.K. Opoku-Mensah, Executive Secretary, National Peace Council*

2:15–2:30	**Governance and Communal Conflicts in Ghana**
	▪ *Mr. Aidan Naah Sabie, Ibis West Africa Programme Director for the West African Human rights and Democratisation Programme*

2:30-3:00	**Reflections on Presentations and Discussions**
	▪ *Prof. Kwame Ninsin, Scholar-in-Residence, Institute for Democratic Governance, Ghana*

3:00–3:15	**Closing Remarks**
	▪ *Nana Asantewa Afadzinu, Executive Director, WACSI*

3:15	**Refreshments**