

Conflicts are inevitable in human life politics essay



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Conflicts are inevitable in human life and existence and are a necessary part of life. Conflicts are necessary for change in human society since they help to build relationships in groups, establish a group's identity, build internal cohesion in groups and can lead to balance of power in society as well as create new rules and laws (Coser, 1956). However, when conflicts are violent, and depending on the nature and type of intervention schemes used, they remain unresolved and can become protracted disrupting policy-making and development since attention is diverted from issues that will otherwise improve the lives of people to the conflict.

Consequently, it is important to resolve violent conflicts to prevent these conflicts from diverting attention from issues of development. Historically, the first and second world wars resulted in massive destruction of property and human life and a decrease in levels of socio-economic development in poor nations (Blattman & Miguel, 2008). During the Second World War, for instance, about 60 million people died, a new wave of arms race arose and nations like Germany had many properties destroyed (Blattman & Miguel, 2008). Then came the Cold War with its manifestations of proxy and quasi conflicts in developing countries of Europe, Africa, Asia and America.

Violent conflicts poses serious threats to human security, peace, life, stability, social and economic activities; weakens institutions; breaks social cohesion; and causes humanitarian tragedies such as internal displacement, refugeeism and rape (Zezeza, 2008). Indeed, violent conflict is one main impediment to development because it can seriously hinder development efforts spilling over borders, reducing economic growth and prosperity (Ali, 2006). The examples of Haiti, Bosnia, Burundi, Sudan and Somalia are worth

noting as development in these states has been seriously curtailed because violent conflicts have endangered people's lives and continue to worsen the poverty situation in these countries. During the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the country lost 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as well as losses in other economic indicators (Oelbaum, 2007). In the West African sub-region, countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, La Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea have had violent conflicts with their devastating consequences on stability, political and social development of these states (Adetula, 2006). More than 250, 000 lives were lost in Liberia and millions worth of infrastructure destroyed (Adetula, 2006).

During violent conflicts, farmers cannot go to their farms to work for fear of losing their lives and farms are set ablaze leading to the destruction of farm produce. Traders and businessmen cannot engage in commercial activities leaving markets deserted. Properties of individuals and households are lost through arson and looting. Local revenue mobilizations are seriously curtailed due to the breakdown of commercial activities and security. Moreover, schools are closed down affecting the work of teachers and students since they cannot attend school which negatively affects academic performance. Businesses and most of the workforce also relocate to other places where there is peace (absence of violence). Consequently, many development efforts are negatively affected, because peace which is needed to ensure development is absent.

However, where peace prevails and there is no violent conflict, security is guaranteed and the environment becomes conducive for engaging in economic and agricultural activities and, peoples' livelihoods can be ensured

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(Francis, 2006). Many people can move about freely without restrictions since their security is guaranteed. Also, local investments and businesses are attracted to peaceful areas than places where there are violence and, generally, people are able to participate in the development process. Thus peace remains a pre-requisite for development since development can best be pursued in a violent free environment.

The end of the Cold War saw a spate of new and different conflicts in many parts of the world with specific causes with Africa getting her share of these conflicts. These were intra- state conflicts which included predominantly, ethnic conflicts between rival ethnic groups, conflicts over succession and power struggles within the state and conflicts over the control of state resources (Idowu, 2005). From 1946-2010, the world has had 243 conflicts, out of which 36 have been active since 2009 (Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), 2010). Most of these conflicts in several parts of Africa have often been driven by ethnic contest for power, land, resources and the struggle for identity and, in recent times, political infiltrations (Osaghae, 2005). These ethnic conflicts, such as the Sudanese, Burundian and Democratic Republic of Congo's conflicts, have created deep-seated hatred and destructions with their attendant manifestations of genocide, mistrust, inequality in the distribution of power and resources among ethnic groups in these states. Many of these intra-state conflicts became protracted and thus affected development with severe consequences not only for various nations but individuals and families.

Ghana has often been described at both local and international levels as an oasis of peace and stability in a continent besieged by conflicts. The peaceful

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organization of the 2008 general elections has made Ghana a beacon of hope for democracy, good governance, stability and peace in Africa. The American Fund for Peace in 2009 described Ghana as the most peaceful and stable country in Africa (Myjoyonline, July 15, 2009). Unlike her neighbours, Ghana remains relatively peaceful and has not experienced any violent conflict of a national scale.

However, Ghana's image as a beacon of peace in Africa is marred by some internecine ethnic, land and chieftaincy conflicts which sometimes result into violent ones with negative consequences for human lives and local level development (Gyimah, Kane & Oduro, 2009). Most conflicts in Ghana are localized inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic disputes that mainly result from disputes over chieftaincy, land, identity and resources and, in more recent years, political and economic connections (Kendie & Akudugu, 2010; Tsikata & Seini, 2004). Although some of these ethnic conflicts have always remained localized, they have often drawn national and international attention since their consequences have a toll on national resources and development (Agyeman, 2008). Resources such as financial allocations or revenue mobilizations which otherwise could be used for development are channeled into maintaining peace and security in these areas. Also, localized activities such as farming, industry, commerce, business investments and livelihoods are disrupted. The Konkomba and Nanumba/Dagomba conflict in 1994/95, for instance, resulted in the loss of 2000 lives and 18, 900 animals, over 500, 000 tubers of yam destroyed, 60, 000 acres of crops set on fire, 144 farming villages burnt, 78, 000 people displaced and millions of property belonging to the state and indigenes destroyed (Mahama, 2003).

It is worth noting that ethnic relations among many of the diverse ethnic groups in Ghana have remained cordial as compared to others in the continent such as Nigeria, Rwanda and La Cote d'Ivoire (Gyimah, Kane & Oduro, 2009). This is because ethnic relations among the ethnic groups in Ghana have not degenerated into conflict of a national scale as it is the case with Nigeria, Rwanda and Cote d'Ivoire. There have, however, been very devastating and protracted ethnic strifes among some ethnic groups in Ghana. Notable among these are the intra-ethnic conflicts among the Dagombas, the Ewes of Peki-Tsito and the inter-ethnic conflicts between the Kusasis and Mamprusis, Konkomba and Nanumba/Dagomba, Nkonya (Guan) and Alavanyo (Ewe) people, the Akropong-Akwapim and Abiriw people and Gonja and Nawuri people (Agyeman, 2008).

Many of these localized conflicts in Ghana have assumed a protracted nature with occasional flaring up of violence which has negative impact on local and general development in these areas (Akwetey, 1996). The Dagbon chieftaincy, Bunkpurugu-Yunyo, the Buipe chieftaincy and Akropong-Akwapem and Abiriw land conflicts are yet to be resolved, and occasional violence in these areas pose grave danger to localized development efforts and many poor and marginalized people become the principal victims of these violence. One such conflict also is the Bawku conflict.

The conflict is a deep-seated and longstanding ethno-political conflict between the Kusasis and Mamprusis in the Bawku Traditional Area of Ghana. The Bawku Traditional Area is one of the largest areas in the Upper East Region of Ghana located in the north-eastern part of the region and shares borders with Togo and Burkina Faso (GhanaDistricts. com, 2009, June 12).

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The economic base of the area is mainly agriculture, although trade and commerce are also conducted. Ethnically, the Bawku Traditional Area is occupied by Kusasis, Mamprusis, Busangas, Hausas, Mossis, Bimobas, Frafras and other minor groups with the Kusasis being the majority in terms of population (Bawku Municipal Assembly, 2006).

The Bawku conflict is identity-based, and revolves around the claim for traditional political power (chieftaincy) between the Kusasis and Mamprusis. The contest between the Kusasis and Mamprusis over the Bawku chieftaincy has its roots in colonial times. Since the 1930s, the conflict has taken different twists and has remained intense and unresolved, and therefore protracted. There appears to be apparent political interference in the conflict and this has intensified violence in Bawku, stalling development efforts in the area (Lund, 2003). The primary actors in the conflict – the Kusasis and Mamprusis – have taken entrenched positions making resolution efforts difficult and almost impossible.

Since the inception of the Bawku conflict, frantic efforts have been made at resolving it. The colonial government established the Opoku-Afari Committee in 1957 to help resolve the conflict when disputing claims for the chieftaincy started. The enactment of National Liberation Council (NLC) Decree 112 and Provisional National Defence Council Law (PNDCL) 75, which although were not directly intended for the Bawku conflict only, was also used in a bid to help end the conflict, but these have failed. Governments have also used mediation to help end the conflict. In 2008, the then President of Ghana, John A. Kufuor, invited both the Kusasis and Mamprusis to The Castle (seat of Ghana's Government) to broker peace between them but this failed. This

was followed by mediation by the National Peace Council (NPC), but the conflict still continued. In March 2009, following the outbreak of violence, Vice President John Mahama embarked on a mediation mission to help resolve the conflict between the two factions but the violence still continued. This was again followed by a visit by President John Atta Mills to Bolgatanga to help broker peace between the two groups but it also failed to bring the desired peace. All these mediation efforts have thus failed to end the conflict.

The two ethnic groups have also resorted to the law courts to back their claim for the Bawku skin. These include writ filed by the Mamprusis at the divisional court to reverse the Governor General's decision in 1957; the Kusasis' counter writ at the Appeal Court in 1958 to overturn the ruling by the divisional court; and again the Mamprusis court action for their claim to the Bawku skin in 2003. All these court actions have apparently failed to bring an end to the conflict. Governments have also instituted internal peace-keeping operations by deploying security personnel to the area and used the imposition of curfews to manage the conflict, but the conflict still rages on.

A number of CSOs /NGOs since 2001 have also made efforts at mediating to end the conflict through peace building processes and conflict resolution mechanisms. These efforts include the Bawku Peace Accord reached between the stakeholders in the conflict at the Damongo Peace Agreement, which was spearheaded by a consortium of NGOs mediating in the conflict, including 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 Bawku East Women's Development Association (BEWDA). The National Peace Council (NPC) has also mediated and drawn up a roadmap to peace but has not helped to end the conflict. In addition, an Inter-ethnic Peace Committee was formed in 2010 by both ethnic groups to help resolve the conflict (WANEP, 2010). The aforementioned efforts have all failed to bring the needed resolution of the conflict and peace to the Traditional Area.

The protracted nature of the conflict has implications for development in the area. Its continuation poses threats to commerce, agriculture, education, healthcare, security and general development of the traditional area. When peace and security in the area is guaranteed, sustained development is likely to be pursued.

Statement of the problem

Violent conflicts have very devastating consequences on local level development because they produce a cycle of violence and depending on the nature and type of intervention, can result in the protraction of conflicts. The continuous violence in Bawku as a result of the conflict has consequences on the development of the area, as well as the resources of the nation in general. The violence in the area is a bane to agriculture, commerce, human lives, property and infrastructure, and is exacerbating the poverty situation in the area (Daily Graphic, June 8, 2008). Reports of the conflict indicate that there is general insecurity and lawlessness in the area, and this results in the imposition of frequent curfews which curtail free movement of people and the brutalization of civilians during curfew hours (Amnesty International Ghana, 2008). Localized development efforts like <https://assignbuster.com/conflicts-are-inevitable-in-human-life-politics-essay/>

agriculture and commerce are curtailed. Besides, cross-border trading and other commercial activities in the Bawku area have also been affected.

The loss of lives in the area has become a daily routine as many lives are unaccounted for. There is also continuous destruction of property and infrastructure. In the wake of the violence in December 2007, 155 shops and many houses were burnt and several people displaced (Ghanaweb, January 7, 2008). The state continues to spend money and resources in deploying security personnel to the area to maintain peace. The conflict leads to proliferation of illegal arms which continue to be used in perpetuating violence. The overall impact of all these is deepening of the poverty situation in the area.

With the realization by government, CSOs/NGOs, some international organizations and even the indigenes of the area of the need for a final resolution of the conflict, many efforts have been made to resolve the conflict to bring sustainable peace to promote development in the area. However, efforts by government, NGOs and other stakeholders at finding a lasting solution to the conflict through committees of enquiry, mediation, inter-ethnic peace dialogues, peacekeeping operations, law and order and the use of the court system have not yielded the desired results at finding sustainable peace and a final resolution to the protracted conflict between the two ethnic groups.

Critical analyses of the protracted nature of the conflict bring into question what alternative resolution mechanisms can be used to resolve the conflict or complement both government and CSOs/NGOs efforts at finally resolving

the conflict to enhance peace and development in the area. Besides, the protracted nature of the conflict and frequent eruption of violence directly have a relationship with development and hence the need to analyze the ramifications of the conflict on socio-economic development of the Bawku Traditional Area. It is in the light of the above that this study seeks to research into how the conflict in the Bawku Traditional Area affects socio-economic development of the area.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study was to examine how the ethnic conflict in the Bawku Traditional Area affects socio-economic development in the area.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

Ascertain the effects of the Bawku ethnic conflict on agriculture in the area;

Examine the effects of the conflict on commercial activities in the area;

Examine the effects of the conflict on general security in the traditional area;

Ascertain the effects of the conflict on education and health care in the area;

Examine the prospects for peace in the area; and

Make recommendations for peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Research questions

The study employed the following research questions in investigating the problem:

What are the effects of the Bawku ethnic conflict on agriculture in the traditional area?

What are the effects of the conflict on commercial activities in the area?

How is the conflict in the Bawku Traditional area affecting security in the area?

What are the effects of the conflict on education and health care in the area?

What are the prospects for peace in the traditional area?

Relevance of the study

The frequent recurrence of the Bawku conflict remains a source of worry to many people, the inhabitants of Bawku, government and NGOs. Despite government efforts and a lot of efforts by NGOs that have been made to resolve the conflict, the erratic and frequent outbreak of the conflict between the two feuding ethnic groups seem to elude any workable solution for a final settlement and sustainable peace and this tends to be negatively affecting local level development. It is claimed that government has spent more than GH¢648 million on maintaining security in northern Ghana alone since 2002 (Kumateh, 2005 cited in Aganah, 2008).

It has been the desire and pursuit of government and NGOs to resolve the ethnic conflict in Bawku and other ethnic conflicts around the country to minimize their impact on development efforts. The attempts over the years at resolving the conflict have all failed to bring lasting peace to Bawku. This study will provide and add to empirical knowledge on the nexus between ethnic conflict and development, as well as empirical information on the

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effects of protracted conflicts on development. The results of this study will also provide pragmatic information to help resolve the Bawku conflict and other protracted ethnic conflicts around the country. It is equally hoped that the findings and recommendations of this study would be of interest to government, who is a major stakeholder in the conflict, NGOs and other interest groups involved in conflict and development.

All researches on the conflict are aimed at how to resolve the conflict. This study examines the effects of the conflict on development to inform all stakeholders on the deleterious ramifications of the conflict in the hope that the protagonists would see the need for peace.

Organization of the study

The study is organized into six chapters. Chapter One presents the introductory part of the whole study which includes the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, the research questions, the relevance of the study and how the study is organized. Chapter Two examines a review of relevant literature on the study. This covers relevant issues such as development, conflict, the impact of conflict on development and the relationship between conflict resolution and development. Theoretical bases and a conceptual framework of the study are also examined in this chapter.

Chapter Three examines the Bawku conflict into detail tracing its historical basis, dynamics, causes and current developments. Chapter Four deals with the methodology used in carrying out the study. It comprises a description of the study area, the study design, the population, the sample for the study,

the sampling techniques, the data collection techniques and the data analysis procedure. The presentation and analyses of the results are the focus of Chapter Five. Chapter Six finally presents summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature related to the subject matter of the study. These include the review of concepts as well as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study.

Development

The term development has been used and defined variously by different scholars at length. However, the term is generally about change and growth in human well-being at the individual, community, regional, national, or global circles. Historically, development used to be equated to economic growth and generally concerned with the ability of a country's economy to increase and sustain its Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in real items. In this way, development was measured in terms of real growth in per capita income (Schoeman, 1998).

Since the 1950s, the meaning of the term development has changed from merely looking at development as an increase in GNP or GDP. According to Stewart (2004), this is a very inadequate characterization and definition of the term 'development'. There is now a change towards alternative development strategies due to the inadequacy of the economic growth

paradigm (Kendie, 2002). Development generally is about improvement and qualitative change in the lives of individual people or an entire society.

Development, according to Todaro (1997, p. 9), is: “ a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of poverty”. This involves changes in human conditions which involve important facets such as economic well-being, security, reduction in inequality and poverty, the absence of violent conflict and its proper resolution and management.

Todaro & Smith (2009) observe that there are three important aspects of development:

Raising people’s level of living – their incomes and consumption levels of food, education, medical services etc.;

Creating conditions conducive for the growth of people’s self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions that promote human dignity and respect; and

Increasing people’s freedom by enlarging the range of their choice variables by increasing varieties of consumer goods and services.

Stewart (2004) equally conceptualized development simply as a progress in human well-being. This includes well-being in the general life of human beings including peoples’ health, education and security. The reference to security presupposes the absence of violent conflict and a proper resolution and management of these conflicts when they occur. Similarly, Ibeanu

(2006, p. 10) posits that development: “ is a process of improving the conditions in which human beings live”. Ibeanu (2006) believes that these conditions emanate from a complex interplay of both the natural environment and the social or inter-human environment. These include peace, justice and security which are important tenets of development. Amartya Sen (1999) also sees development simply as ‘ freedom.’ that is freedom in all forms – economic, social and political freedom. Sen believes that political freedom empowers individuals to build their capabilities for development.

One important tenet that can ensure development is human security – the ability of people to be safe. Violent conflict which constitutes an obstacle to security is a serious impediment to development, and development cannot be realized in an insecure and conflictual environment. The UNDP Human Development Report of 1994 notes that human security is an important part of development and development can only occur in a peaceful society (UNDP, 1994).

Human security

Security, according to Francis (2006, p. 22), is “ generally about the condition or feeling safe from harm or danger, the defence, protection and preservation of core values, and the absence of threats to acquire values.”

Security is about conditions that ensure human existence and survival.

Peace, development and justice, especially in Africa, are important conditions of security since the absence of these can create conditions for conflict and insecurity (Francis, 2006). The security of humans remains a very important part of their well-being and development. The term ‘ human

security' was first initiated in 1994 by the UNDP Human Development Report to focus security from the point of view of people, as opposed to that of the security of states (Jolly & Ray, 2006). Thus human security is 'people-centred security' or 'security with a human face', which places human beings-rather than states-as the focal point of security considerations (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), 2009). Since then, discussions on security have been focused on human security than states security.

In defining human security, the UNDP (1994, p. 3) states that: 'for too long, the concept of security has been shaped by the potential for conflict between states. For too long, security has been equated with threats to a country's borders. For too long, nations have sought arms to protect their security. For most people today, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Job security, health security, environmental security, security from crime, these are the emerging concerns of human security all over the world.'

The simplest definition of human security, according to Jolly & Ray (2006, p. 6), is "primarily an analytical tool that focuses on ensuring security for the individual, not the state." Tadjbakhsh (2005) also conceptualizes human security as 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want'. That is to be secure is to be free from both fear (of physical, sexual or psychological abuse, violence, persecution, or death) and from want (of gainful employment, food, and health).

The UN Commission on Human Security (CHS) (2003) gives a broader definition of human security as the protection of the “ vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment”.

According to the CHS, this means:

Protecting basic rights and freedoms;

Protecting people from severe and widespread threats and circumstance;

Motivating and empowering people to take their destiny into their own hands; and

Providing the necessary political, social, environmental, economic, military as well as cultural framework and systems within which people can live meaningful and dignified lives (CHS, 2003, p. 4).

Thus, the key premises of human security contained in the UNDP 1994 Report (1994) are: (i) its focus on freedom from fear and freedom from want, and (ii) its four emphasis on universality, interdependence, prevention, and people-centredness. The elements of human security include violent conflict; poverty; humanitarian crises; epidemic diseases; injustice; inequality; fear; and wants (Alkire, 2003).

Violent conflict remains one major threat to human security in that it threatens peoples' opportunities for their well-being including their freedom from fear and want, and limit their opportunities for development. Violent conflicts deny humans the security to engage in their commercial, agricultural and other activities. According to the CHS (2003), some strategies must be put in place to ensure the security of people in relation to

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violent conflict. These include protecting people caught up in violent conflict through incorporating in the agenda of international, regional and security organizations, designing a holistic approach to protect people caught up in violent conflict and curbing further violence; empowering people recovering from violent conflict through conflict resolution and prevention and building social protraction systems for the poor after conflict.

Conflict

Conflict is one of the most inevitable things in life and occurs at all levels of human society – at home, school, the family, society or at the work level. The term, however, has been defined and used differently. According to Lund (1997), conflict occurs when two or more parties pursue incompatible interests or goals through actions that the parties try to undo or damage each other. These parties could be individuals, groups or countries. The parties' interests can differ over access to resources, the control of political or traditional power, their identity and values or ideology (Maiese, 2003). The realization of these needs and interests by people can lead to conflict. When two groups or individuals such as ethnic groups pursue incompatible interests and needs which could either be political, economic, social or cultural, they can engage in conflict which can be violent.

In the opinion of Coser (1956, p. 121), “ conflict occurs when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals”. Coser seeks to argue that people in conflict are in competition or struggle over their identity, resources or power in which the conflicting parties attempt to undo one another. One thing that is worth

mentioning in Coser's definition is the fact that it identifies the causes of conflicts which include struggles over people's identity, power and resources. Conflict, therefore, is a struggle which is either positive or negative between two individuals or groups in pursuit of interests and goals on which they sharply disagree.

Ethnic conflicts

According to Richardson Jr. & Sen (1996), an ethnic conflict is a struggle between rival ethnic groups who seek to get control of political power to maintain it. This is usually done through ethnicity, which plays an important role in mobilizing, structuring and managing ethnic groups and institutions. This definition recognizes that political power is the rationale behind ethnic conflict. Indeed, many ethnic groups fight over the control of political power which can either be state or traditional power in order to gain control over political institutions within the state or traditional area. However, many proximate causes such as the struggle for resources could also account for ethnic conflicts. Political power cannot, therefore, be the only cause of ethnic conflicts.

According to Maiese (2003), ethnic conflicts are conflicts over people's identity that are internal among or between ethnic groups within a country who tend to compete for resources, power or claims over their status and not between states. To this end, Irobi (2005) and Agyeman (2008) maintain that ethnic conflicts which are conflicts over race, identity and language become complex, and this makes it very difficult to resolve them primarily due to ethnicity which defines the totality of an individual's existence including his hopes, fears and sense of future. Ethnic conflicts have induced over 70

percent of conflicts in the world [Center for Development and conflict Management (CIDCM), 2009]. Africa, Asia, America and Europe have all experienced varying degrees of ethnic conflicts with dire consequences. In Africa, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria and Ghana have experienced devastating ethnic conflicts. There are also longstanding ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka, Kosovo, Bosnia and former Yugoslavia.

Generally, ethnic conflicts result from