

Why the Resolution of the Nandom Imamship Conflict Has Not Been Successful

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Abstract

In our earlier work (2022), we analyzed the dynamics of the Nandom Imamship conflict in the Upper West Region of Ghana. This current paper discusses the threats to the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict. The study that informed this paper was undertaken to understand the Nandom Imamship conflict using a qualitative approach and a case study design. The purpose was to explore the factors that have been stalling the resolution of the conflict since its eruption to enable conflict resolution and peacebuilding practitioners or institutions to devise appropriate mechanisms towards resolving the conflict. The findings show that the threats to the resolution of the conflict exist at system, actor, and community levels. The local dynamics of the conflict and the conflict environment were not well understood by intervening parties. As such, we argue that conflict analysis should be prime to conflict resolution. The paper observed that trust and confidence building are critical issues in conflict resolution. The paper concludes by arguing that consciousness and understanding of conflict resolution threats is significant to approaching conflicts and constructing effective conflict resolution processes.

Key words: Conflict Resolution, Threats, Nandom, Zongo, Imamship

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INTRODUCTION

In our earlier work (Kuupiel & Nangwele, 2022) we analyzed the dynamics of the Nandom Imamship conflict. We traced the cause of the Nandom Imamship conflict to the illness of both the Chief Imam and his vice. We discovered that both Imams later died and this created a vacancy of the Imam Position, and subsequent disagreement among Orthodox Muslim community over people to occupy the vacant positions (Kuupiel & Nangwele, 2022). The conflict later transformed into a struggle between two ethnic/tribal factions over the Imamship of Nandom – the Moshi on one hand and the Wangara, Dagomba, Zabarma, Sisaala, Waala and Fulani on the other (Kuupiel & Nangwele, 2022). The conflict has strained social and trade relations between the two factions involved in the conflict. Yet, we discovered in our previous work that it has ignored all resolution efforts since its eruption. Various intervening parties including the Peace Council of Ghana, the Nandom Paramount Chief and traditional leaders, and other individuals have attempted to resolve the Nandom Imamship conflict but their efforts have been abortive. It is unclear what is making the resolution efforts of the various stakeholders in the Nandom and in conflict resolution and peacebuilding circles to be abortive. Then violence ensued among the Orthodox Muslim community again in August 2018 (Yeboah, 2018). It was alleged that some people sustained cutlass injuries, properties were destroyed, panic and fear and uncertainty and tensions were brewing. This generated concerns and attention within and outside Nandom.

At some points, the government had to close down the mosque. Condemnation and expression of grievance came from some Muslim Missions. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in 2018 issued a press statement on the violence in the Nandom Zongo over what they described as the “Appointment of Imam” (Yeboah, 2018). The general secretary of the Mission, Alhaj Abbass Wilson, in the press statement described the violence as ghastly albeit that is not the first time of such occurrence in Nandom (Yeboah, 2018). He again grieved that: the violence sends worrying signals about Islam; peace, love and compassion could be compromised; and the Mission could be at a greater loss when such considerations as ethnic, heredity, or political are placed over the Islamic requirements for Imamship (Yeboah, 2018).

The potential threat of the conflict to the peace, security, lives, property, business and the general development of Nandom is a concern and source of worry to many Nandome (natives of Nandom) within and

outside the municipality. Studies have acknowledged that although the consequences of conflict are not easily predictable (Ibrahim, Adjei & Boateng, 2019), in most cases they have been strong (Sulemana, 2009; Tsikata & Seini, 2004; Adzahlie-Mensah, 2007; Mensah, 2013; Bukari, 2013; Adzahlie-Mensah & Benson, 2018; Lund, 2003; Duah, 2014). For instance, growth and development could be retarded, livelihoods implicated (Bowd & Chikwanha, 2010; Hegre et al., 2017; Collier et al., 2003; Collier, 2004; Brück, Justino, & Martin-Shields, 2017; Ray & Esteban, 2017) and quality of governance eroded (Hegre & Nygård, 2012).

The problem that needs redress is the unclarity of the threats to the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict. There is lack of data to help conflict resolution practitioners to understand why the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict has not been successful. This begs the question: what are the threats to the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict? Therefore, this current paper explored the threats to the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict. The aim was to understand the various factors that contributed to stalling the resolution of the conflict in order that, conscious of them, conflict resolution and peacebuilding practitioners or institutions can devise appropriate mechanisms towards resolving the conflict. The paper argues that trust and confidence building are essential in conflict resolution. The paper also argues that political interference and activities of spoilers in conflict situations prolong resolution efforts. The paper concludes by recommending the need for intervening bodies to build the capacities of community peace-setters to lead the resolution process. The paper provides significant insights to stimulate reflection on the processes and practice of conflict resolution and management. An understanding of conflict resolution threats is significant in constructing effective conflict resolution and peace processes.

Research Question

The following question guided the conduct of this study:

1. What are the threats to the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict?

LITERATURE

Conflict Resolution Threats

There are numerous unresolved conflicts in Ghana, of which some are longstanding and with consequences going beyond the conflict environment. Even conflicts that are perceived to be resolved in Ghana seem to be either reoccurring or producing conditions that are making the sustenance of peace difficult. Conflict resolution is thus not an easy process. Conflict resolution is “complex and multidimensional” (Adzahlie-Mensah & Benson, 2018, p. 9). However, how conflicts are handled once they occur is very crucial in peace processes (Bowd & Chikwanha, 2010; Tchombe, 2006; Mahama & Longi, 2013; Bukari, 2013). As such, it is important to understand the critical elements of conflict resolution. Adzahlie-Mensah and Benson (2018) indicate that trust and confidence building, resources, patience and understanding of local issues are critical elements of conflict resolution. They observed that overlooking such issues could make resolution of a conflict difficult. Thus, El-Bushra (2017) argued that “conflict and peace [should be thought of] as complex, iterative, many-layered, and dynamic processes” if interventions are to yield productive outcomes (p. 2). A conflict resolution process that is not participatory or does not include everyone as well as fail to recognize the role of context, could find it difficult to result maximum outcomes (Kuupiel, 2020).

In Africa, we are faced with a difficulty in ‘diagnosing and designing solutions’ to conflicts (Aall, 2015). Africa is not only replete with numerous conflicts, but also, many of the conflicts are appearing difficult to resolve. Kutesa (2009) observed that the threats to resolution of conflicts in Africa are many. Finance has been identified as a major threat to peace efforts in Africa (Kutesa, 2009; Oguonu & Ezeibe, 2014). Ahiave (2013) indicated lack of justice, mistrust among conflict parties, lack of confidence in the peace process and the activities of ‘spoilers’ as factors that stalled the resolution of the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict. Gati (2008) realized that the conflict between the Adaklu and Anyigbe people escalated because of the “failure” of state and traditional institutions to address the grievances of the parties. Conflicts breed mistrust between or among conflicting parties (Adzahlie-Mensah, 2007) and this tends to affect resolution processes. Sometimes refusal to follow “laid-down succession plan” and the interference of politics in conflict are factors that could make it difficult for a resolution of conflict and lasting peace to be secured (Kanda, 2019). When the complexities involved in conflict are not well analyzed and understood (Körppen & Ropers, 2011) resolution could also be difficult.

Interference of politics in conflict situations could prolong resolution. For instance, there is consensus that political interference made the resolution of the Dagbon chieftaincy crisis very difficult (Ahiave, 2013;

WASCI & SIPRI, 2011; Tonah, 2012; Kanda, 2019; UNDP, 2012). Jackson and Morelli (2009) argued that “first strike advantage” is a major threat to peace. Jackson and Morelli insist that “the offensive advantage of war makes wars inevitable” and securing lasting peace daunting. Although Ibrahim et al. (2019) stated that conflict outcomes are not easily ‘predetermined’, Jackson and Morelli (2009) are of the view that largely, “war outcomes depend on the one who initiates the war” (p. 16). Also, it is argued that resolution of conflict could be challenging when parties feel that a stoppage of the fight will make them to lose their position or be marginalized (Gates et al., 2016) or when there is diaspora involvement in the conflict (Collier & Hoeffler, 2000). The link between the size of diaspora and influence on homeland conflict has been established (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Collier & Hoeffler, 2002). There are debates about the contribution or impact of international involvement in conflict resolution. For Rogier (2004), conflicts become more difficult to resolve than anticipated when there is no ‘international involvement’. As such, Johnson (2016) attributed Africa’s successes in management and resolution of conflicts to international involvement. However, Aall (2015, p. 1) thinks “outside help has not been reliable.”

The ‘overestimation’ of conflicts ‘over peace efforts’ by the media (Grasa & Mateos, 2010) is also worrying and could make achievement of resolution to take long. When there is “state failure, apparent resistance to peace efforts and proliferation of warring parties” (Rogier, 2004, p. 5), conflict resolution could be challenging. Ducasse-Rogier (2004, p. 9) explained that “State failure create political and security vacuum, increase in warring parties jeopardize mediation efforts, and belligerents’ interest in the continuation of the conflict and badly intentioned neighbours” pose threats to resolution of conflicts. Hence, although conflict management is a contemporary ‘necessity’ (PIN Points, 2002), Madalina (2016) puts that managing conflicts is now the new challenge in every organization. Therefore, “one important concern of today is the difficulty dealing with intrastate conflicts that may affect international peace and order” (Gody, 2012, p. iii).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dynamic System Theory (DST)

The Dynamic System Theory (DST) was drawn upon in this paper to understand why the resolution of Imamship conflict in Nandom Zongo has not been successful. DST is linked to Ludwig von Bertalanffy *general systems theory* (Schwaninger, 2005). DST holds that a system (conflict) is made up of many elements (behaviours, emotions, feelings, actions, etc.) that interact and change over time leading to the creation of a pattern of behavior (van Geert, 2011; Lunkenheimer, 2018; Thelen & Smith, 2005). As the Imamship conflict in Nandom changes over time, the pattern of behaviour of the conflict parties also changed, thereby affecting the resolution of the conflict. The application of the theory is that the ways the various parties and actors in the Imamship conflict in Nandom interact affect the resolution of the conflict.

As shown in the findings, the interaction of the conflict parties and resolution practitioners or mediators made the conflict parties to lose confidence and trust in intervening bodies, and this made them to appear uninterested in participating in resolution efforts. The theory also indicates that, as conflict develops and changes, those changes should be treated as “potentially informative data” (Lunkenheimer, 2018, p. 3) to the resolution process. As such, failure to treat changes in interactions and behaviours in conflict as an ‘informative data’ to resolution process could make resolution of the conflict difficult. As shown in the findings, intervening bodies in the Imamship conflict in Nandom failed to treat changes in the dynamics of the conflict as a potential informative data to their resolution efforts, and this made it difficult for them to secure a resolution. Hence, the changes in the Imamship conflict and the interaction of the actors in the conflict contributed to the difficulty in resolving the conflict.

Adversary Enemy Images

The adversary enemy images theory (Mitchell, 1981) was also drawn upon to explain why the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict has been difficult. The adversary images theory is underpinned by two major types of enemy images – the black-top images and the unified enemy image (Mitchell, 1981). The theory of adversary enemy images was used by C. R. Mitchell in 1981 in his book, *The Structure of International Conflict*. Adversary images theory is concerned with “one party or group’s perception and evaluation of a rival and the rival’s characteristics, motives and behaviour” (Mitchell, 1981, p. 104). The theory indicates that when parties in a conflict hold adversarial enemy images about each other, it tends to make the resolution of the conflict difficult. In the context of this study, the conflict parties’ perception and evaluation of each other as enemies contributed to the difficulty in resolving the Nandom Imamship conflict.

Specifically, the study used the black-top images to explain why resolving the Imamship conflict has not been successful. The belief of the black-top image is that the enemy can be categorized into two. The first category is that there is “[t]he evil leadership, who hate and fear ‘our own’ group and who are responsible for deluding their followers about ‘us’ and our aims and ambitions – as well as our basic goodwill towards their group or nation” (Mitchell, 1981, p. 105). The second category of black-top images is that there is the belief that “[t]he mass of the followers are basically good, and only become hostile towards us because of the activities of their leaders” (Mitchell, 1981, p. 105).

The application of the black-top images in the Nandom Imamship conflict is that the two factions – the Moshi faction and the Wangara, Dagomba, Waala, Sisaala, Fulani, Zabarma faction (Kuupiel & Nangwele, 2022) seem to perceive each other as having evil leadership who hate and fear their group and who are responsible for misleading or deceiving their followers about them and their aims and ambitions as well as their goodwill towards their group. Also, both factions in the Imamship conflict perceive the mass followers of the rival faction as basically good and only become hostile towards them because of the activities of their leaders.

Thus, the findings showed that although attempts are sometimes made by the youth of both factions to build peace and unity among themselves through such activities as football, they tend to be stopped by their elders or leaders. In our earlier work (Kuupiel & Nangwele, 2022), we observed that some of the people in Nandom Zongo Muslim community find it difficult to attend the funeral, wedding (Amariya) and naming ceremonies of their friends from the rival faction due to the conflict. Hence, although some of the followers of the two factions in the Imamship conflict may appear basically good, they tend to hold enemy images about their rival faction because of the activities of their leaders. These enemy images formed by the two factions in the conflict against each other contributed to making it difficult for them to cooperate and compromise in the resolution of the conflict.

METHODOLOGY

The research that informed this paper was approached qualitatively using a case study design. Ten (10) purposively selected actors in the Nandom Imamship conflict participated in the study. The study was interested in the multiple meanings that the participants ascribe to (Creswell, 2014) the difficulty in resolving the Nandom Imamship conflict. As a qualitative case study, it was interested in the in-depth perspectives of the actors in the Nandom Imamship conflict on why the conflict has been difficult to resolve. Thus, the study was informed by what the actors themselves think are the threats to the resolution of the conflict. This afforded the study the opportunity to understand the threats to the resolution of the conflict from within (Cohen et al., 2007; Cohen et al., 2018). Using a case study enabled a “detailed description and understanding” (Ary et al., 2010) of the threats to the resolution of the conflict. Data was collected through interviews. Participants were asked open-ended questions. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interviews lasted between fifteen (15) and fifty (50) minutes. The data collection lasted for a period of two weeks. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The coding regime was informed by thematic coding. Participants’ confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and informed consent were observed. As such, pseudonyms were used to present the findings. Trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through thick description.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Threats to the Resolution of the Nandom Imamship Conflict

The data reveal that the threats to the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict are multiple and exist at different levels. However, although Kutesa (2009) and Oguonu and Ezeibe’s (2014) studies identified finance as a major threat to peace efforts in Africa, this study realized that there were no threats posed by financial resources to the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict.

Poor interaction between state and traditional intervening systems and the conflict parties

The study found that the conflict parties were not happy with the way state institutions and traditional institutions handled the conflict. Participants from the two factions (the Moshi faction, and the Wangara, Dagomba, Waala, Sisaala, Fulani and Zabarma faction) involved in the conflict (Kuupiel & Nangwele, 2022) indicated that the way in which the conflict was handled by the traditional authorities in Nandom and Peace Council further caused tension and at some times, confrontations. An elder shared:

So they brought peace council, and peace council tried for long but it did not work. Many people tried to intervene but any day that they will be bringing someone to come and intervene in the matter and resolve it, you always see that tension begins to rise again. (Field Interview with an Elder, 2020)

The response suggests that resolution attempts rather tend to cause more tension than reduce it. Some of the participants claimed that some intervening bodies were using power rather than mediation in handling the matter, and that made the resolution of the conflict unsuccessful. They indicated that some intervening bodies were forcing solutions on them, and that made them not to listen to or heed their advice. A Chief from one of the conflict factions stated how some intervening authorities confessed not to have handled the resolution of the conflict well:

...the paramount chief knows; he said he used chieftaincy power but that the issue is not solved and in fact the issue is not solved. (Field Interview with a Chief, 2020)

A narration was given that someone who was brought from the regional capital (WA) to be leading prayers was not shown to the entire Zongo community but only to one of the factions in the conflict. A participant indicated that when they heard that the 'neutral' person who was brought from Wa was presented to the other faction (their opponent), that they also decided not to do whatever the Nandom Traditional Authority says. A Chief from the faction of the six tribes recounted:

When they brought the Waal-Bie [person from Wa], instead of you to call all the Zonguole [people of Zongo], you are having the misunderstanding so we are bringing this person to give you to lead you to be praying so that when you resolve the issue he will go. But you took the same thing to Kotoko. Kotoko and Hearts cannot live together. So when they brought him they went and presented him to him [the Moshi candidate for the Imamship]. We also kept quiet. We said that you can force a cow to the river but the water, it will not drink. (Field Interview with a Chief, 2020)

According to some of the participants, at a point during the mediation process, while the Nandom Traditional Authority will be saying one thing, Peace Council will also be telling them another thing. They stated that Peace Council will come and talk to them and go back and the traditional authority will also summon them to talk to them and at the end, what they will be told will be different from what they were told by the Peace Council. Thus, two institutions were talking to and seem to be telling the conflict parties different things at the same time.

According to participants, that made it difficult for them to accept whatever they say. Parties in the conflict were thus unhappy with the way the conflict was handled by intervening institutions and have decided not to heed their recommendations. The DST explains that such pattern of behavior is created as elements such as emotions, actions, and feelings interact and change over time (van Geert, 2011; Lunkenheimer, 2018). The data reveal that some traditional authorities seem unaware that at the time they were intervening in the conflict, a state institution (Peace Council) was also engaging the conflict parties. The data also show that intervening bodies at a point left the conflict parties to their fate when the conflict parties warned them not to intervene again. This made the conflict parties to continue to engage in the conflict. A traditional leader stated that:

They warned us to tell Peace Council not to come to them again. ...we got to a point and said ok if it is like that we will also remove our hands and leave their matter to them. (Field Interview a Traditional Leader, 2020)

Intervening parties withdrew from making efforts to resolve the conflict when the conflict parties warned them not to come again. Hence, intervening bodies failed to be "tough, patient and resilient", as well as "pragmatic and confident" (Adzahlie-Mensah & Benson, 2018, p. 11) in approaching the issues and leaders of the two factions in the Nandom Imamship conflict. One of the elders stated that the conflict would not have gotten to its current state if traditional authorities and elders had addressed the issue properly when it first began. A traditional leader confirmed this assertion when he indicated that:

But the time that we were entering into the matter it was even late... (Field Interview with a Traditional Leader, 2020)

Also, some of the participants accused intervening bodies and a committee that intervened and inquired into the conflict of not giving them feedback after they told them their stories. The data reveal that a committee chaired by Justice Sidney Braimah which was set up in 2018 by the Upper West Regional Minister to investigate the conflict and make recommendations for resolution of the conflict has not given the conflict parties feedback as to what their recommendations are. Such situations breed suspicion and could make people uncooperative towards subsequent efforts at resolving the conflict.

The data reveal that there are perceptions of interference in the work of the committee. Thus, it can be argued that intervening parties' interaction with conflict parties was not forthcoming. State and traditional institutions that were intervening in the conflict seemed more interested in securing a resolution than addressing the underlying grievances of the conflict parties. When such things happen, it makes it difficult for the conflict parties to accept recommendations. The finding thus corroborates Gati's (2008) study which observed that the conflict between the Adaklu and Anyigbe people escalated because of state and traditional institutions' "failure" to address the grievances of the two communities. The data show that the parties involved in the Nandom Imamship conflict did not own the resolution process that was procured. When conflict parties feel that they do not own the resolution of their conflict, securing lasting solutions tends to be difficult (Adzahlie-Mensah & Benson, 2018). Therefore, the crucial issue about conflicts is in how they are handled or approached once they occur (Bowd & Chikwanha, 2010; Tchombe, 2006; Mahama & Longi, 2013; Bukari, 2013).

Lack of trust and confidence in intervening bodies

From the data, it also became apparent that the conflict parties no longer have confidence and trust in intervening bodies in bringing resolution to the conflict. The conflict parties accused intervening bodies of being biased and supporting their opponents. One participant indicated the following:

Let's say me and you have an issue and someone called us to resolve the issue and the person I have the issue with came and called you the person who called us to resolve the issue and you people entered into a room for about fifteen minutes and then came out and said that you go, when I am ready I will call you. How will you think? You went to the Judge and they came and called the Judge and said that Judge let's go into the room and talk and you sat waiting for the Judge and he came out fifteen minutes later and said that you should go home that he will find a day and call you again. How will you think? Even if they go in and didn't do anything but what will you think? (Field Interview with a Cleric, 2020)

The response suggests that intervening bodies' conduct created trust issues between them and the conflict parties. The data suggests that the neutrality of intervening bodies was questionable and this made the conflict parties to lose confidence and trust in them. The adversarial enemy images theory indicates that when a conflict party perceives an intervening body of supporting their adversary, they may reject recommendations that come from such body. The study realized that both factions warned Peace Council not to come to them again, claiming of wanting to ensure peace. Rogier (2004, p. 5) argued that "resistance to peace efforts" makes resolution of conflict difficult. It was discovered that the two factions in the conflict threatened to burn the vehicles of Peace Council should they see them again. This claim is illustrated in the following response:

Even when the Peace Council people came, they told we the chiefs to tell them that if the peace council people come again that they will burn their vehicles. So that means they meant the fight. (Field Interview with a Traditional Leader, 2020)

The response suggests that both factions in the conflict were not happy with the manner the resolution of the conflict was being handled. They think that intervening parties rather worsened the conflict situation among them. Thus, not only were the two factions in the conflict not talking to each other. They were no longer willing to talk to intervening bodies. The conflict parties appear to be resistant to intervention efforts. Rogier (2004, p. 5) indicated that "resistance to peace efforts" makes conflict resolution challenging. The seemingly commitment of the conflict parties to the conflict, as Ducasse-Rogier (2004) stated, was a threat to the resolution of the conflict. A participant indicated the following:

...people who even entered into the issue rather spoiled the whole thing. (Field Interview with a Chief, 2020)

Also, the data reveal that the two factions tend to want to fight again whenever intervention efforts were being procured. A participant stated the following:

Many people tried to intervene but any day that they will be bringing someone to come and intervene in the matter and resolve it you always see that tension begin to rise again. (Field Interview with Opinion Leader, 2020)

The study observed that the reason why the conflict parties no longer tolerate anybody or mediators 'who claim to be conflict resolution experts' is that, anytime such people attempt a resolution, the conflict normally occurs again. The lack of confidence and trust in third-party interveners has been one of the strong threats to the resolution of the Imamship conflict in Nandom. The finding thus supports those of Ahiave's

(2013) study which indicated that lack of confidence of conflict parties in intervening bodies tends to impact negatively on the resolution of the conflict. Trust and confidence building is essential in conflict resolution. This is because mistrust and suspicion are exemplified in conflicts (Adzahlie-Mensah, 2007). Also, Adzahlie-Mensah and Benson (2018) explained that when the confidence and trust of conflict parties are not built in the resolution process, it tends to create a situation where; the resolution process is not legitimated, and parties may not value the conversation as well as feel uncomfortable to express their views.

Perceived political interference

The study discovered that the conflict parties' perception of interference of political figures and politics in the conflict decided on the resolution of the conflict. The data reveal that their refusal to accept some recommendations during the conflict resolution process was because they think that some political figures are supporting one of the factions. The data show that the faction of the six tribes (Wangara, Dagomba, Zabarma, Waala, Sisaala, and Fulani) (Kuupiel & Nangwele, 2022) accuse the MP of Nandom of supporting the Moshi tribe for the Imamship. One of the chiefs stated the following:

The paramount chief supported them...Ambrose Dery [the MP] supported them. We said, me in particular said chief have you seen, if NDC people are fighting over chairmanship and you ask NPP to come and resolve the case will they be able to resolve it? How can they resolve it? They can't resolve it. That means he doesn't want it to be addressed. (Field Interview with a Chief, 2020)

The response suggests that the conflict remains unresolved because it is interfered with by politics and politicians. The implication is that a conflict party who believes that an intervening party is supporting their adversary may not accept any recommendation that will come from such intervening parties. It was realized that some of the conflict parties resisted intervention efforts because they believed such efforts were supporting the faction they regard as their enemy and whose leadership hates them. The adversarial enemy images that the conflict parties hold towards each other worsened with perceived interference of politics and political elements in the Imamship conflict. An elder from the Moshi faction indicated the following:

Yes, politics is a threat. You see the time that Ambrose [the MP] said they shouldn't pronounce him, if they had pronounced, people would have died. If they had pronounced Alhaji Ibrahim as the deputy Imam, the Moshis too will not accept him to lead us to pray. When we were not even fighting but if that had happened we would have even killed each other. Because of that he [the MP] prevented it and because of that they are fighting Ambrose [the MP] up till date. (Field Interview with an Elder, 2020)

His response suggests that the MP was accused by the faction of the six tribes of supporting the Moshi because he stopped a meeting that was meant to pronounce one person as the Imam for peace and security reasons. Thus, it has been noted that the MP of Nandom does not have power over who becomes the Imam of Nandom (Quaye, 2017). One of the key actors in the conflict indicated how he was asked by the Traditional Authority of Nandom in the mediation process about him belonging to a particular political party in the following response:

I was there and one day he called me again, that was the third time, and he told me that he heard that I am an NPP [New Patriotic Party] member. That day I was angry and I told the chief that is it a crime for me to be an NPP? So I told him that people are in NPP and they crossed carpet to NDC [National Democratic Congress] and he told me that he is part. Then I said chief what brings NPP and NDC issue in our path of worship. What even brings the issue to the chief's palace? It is about worship. I am a Ghanaian, I have the right to choose the party I want but what brings party issues into our worship and he said that I should take it easy, and that I should go and that he has heard. (Field Interview with a Key Actor, 2020)

The response reveals that the actor was unhappy when the traditional authority, who was intervening in the conflict, asked him of the political party he belongs to. The data suggest that the actor became convinced by the question from the traditional authority that there are political lenses in the conflict. When people perceive that political lenses are being drawn into the conflict, they may not accept anything that comes from the resolution efforts. The study also reveals that the 'refusal' to publish or implement the finished report of Justice Sidney Braimah's Committee on the conflict made some of the conflict parties to be convinced that there is political interference. Some of the participants claimed that such persons are afraid that if the report is implemented, they may lose the electoral votes of the faction that will be disadvantaged. Three participants indicated the following:

Since the issue came and we got to know those whose hands are in the issue, they are refusing the issue to be resolved because they see that if they resolve the issue they will lose their votes. If they see to it that the issue is resolved, and it goes one way, they will lose the other side's votes. (Field Interview with a Chief, 2020)

Peace Council came after that lady. One Rev. Father from Kaleo we call him Alhaji, he is in Wa, all of them came here. And they told us that we should leave the issue, that the issue is not here. I grew up and met my father so when he said that I understand. (Field Interview with an Elder, 2020)

There was a day that they said they were coming to finalize everything but they were stopped. They didn't come again, so why? Okay fine peace council has been stopped, even members of the community who tried, the natives of Nandom who tried to resolve the issue were also stopped. (Field Interview with an Opinion Leader, 2020)

Research has observed the interference of politics in conflicts in Ghana (WASCI & SIPRI, 2011; UNDP, 2012; Tonah, 2012). However, other participants were of a contrary view that politicians were rather responsible for the reduction of the conflict:

I can say it is the politicians who are even making the thing to be reducing because they always want to say it is the MP that is responsible but the MP said since he is the interior minister he can't be the interior minister and be addressing issues in the country while there is conflict or fight in his house. So before they will hear that fighting will occur he always let the police to come and keep guard at the place so that fighting will not ensue. The interior minister is keeping guard so that fighting will not erupt, if not destruction will come. (Field Interview with a Traditional Leader, 2020)

The response suggests that political leaders are rather interested in ensuring peace and calm in Nandom, but not in determining who the Imam of Nandom should be. Yet, some of the conflict parties still believe that political hands are in the conflict thereby making resolution of the conflict difficult.

Perceived gains (economic, recognition and prestige) from the conflict

The conflict has led to a situation where both sides now conduct their activities separately (Kuupiel & Nangwele, 2022). Each side now recognize and treat their candidates for the Imam of Nandom as their Imams, who perform their occasions including naming ceremony, funerals, marriage ceremonies and every other occasion within the Islamic tradition (Kuupiel & Nangwele, 2022). As such, some of the participants indicated that the prestige and recognition that comes with one being regarded as an Imam are being enjoyed by both contenders for the Imamship, and this has made them to continue to act in ways that will not ensure a resolution to the conflict. The data reveals that the contenders for the Imamship position are reaping benefits and would not want the conflict to end. One participant stated the following:

...the two Imams we are talking about do not have a specific job they do apart from talking about Islam. So at the end of the day they are fighting simply because when you become the imam you get salary, you get allowances and what have you. So all of them are looking at the benefits they are going to get from. And you know the two major political parties, the president of the republic and the Flag bearer of the major opposition, all of them come and they come to meet them. So look at the prestige and all that. And so all of them have two-two wives with children and they need them to attend better schools, so they are looking into that how much I can benefit and take care of my family. (Field Interview with an Informant, 2020)

The response suggests that people's personal interests and their quest to fulfill them is making the resolution of the conflict daunting. The data reveals that the contenders perhaps feel that if the conflict is resolved and they happen not to be the Imam they may lose all the benefits they are currently enjoying. Again, the data suggests that the economic benefits (salaries and allowances) and the respect that comes with being the Imam appear to be motivating the individuals who have been contesting the Imamship position over the years to be uncompromising. This affirms the finding of Gates et al.'s (2016) study, which indicated that when parties in a conflict feel that stoppage of the fight will make them to lose their position or be marginalized, they may continue to fight or resume the fight so that they could maintain supremacy. Some of the participants claimed that both contenders of the Imamship position are being sponsored by their diaspora tribesmen. As such, they do not want the conflict to end in order to continue to reap those benefits from their diaspora members. Collier and Hoeffler (2000) argued that when there is diaspora involvement in the homeland conflict, especially financial support, it tends to make conflict more likely and the resolution difficult. Given the established link between the size of diaspora and influence on homeland conflict (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Collier & Hoeffler, 2002), a larger Nandom Zongo diaspora could make resolution of the Imamship conflict more daunting and this may lead to intractability of the conflict.

Failure of intervening bodies to analyze the dynamics of the conflict before attempting resolution

The data reveal that the dynamics of the conflict (Kuupiel & Nangwele, 2022) were not analyzed and understood by intervening bodies before proceeding to make efforts to ensure resolution of the conflict. As a result, some of the participants expressed concerns that some intervening bodies lack understanding of the conflict and how things are done within the Islamic religion thereby making it difficult for them to resolve the conflict. The data reveals that some of the intervening parties had little knowledge of the Nandom Imamship conflict. Two participants stated the following:

...Then the chief said if that is the case that he will go to Wa and bring someone to come and lead prayers in the mosque. Then I told them again it will not happen that way, leave our religion matters to us, you don't know the paths in our religion. What you can do for us as a chief you can. Ghana here everywhere you have the power you can roam and ask them to look for an Islamic scholar, someone who understands the Quran to come and sit with us and teach us the way. ...we will follow what he says. But you who do not know the Quran what will you do? (Field Interview with an Elder, 2020)

Peace council came and entered into the issue. One lady...her name is Rosaline Baatuolkuu, she entered into the issue and realized that the issue is more than she thought and said this your issue, that there is something. (Field Interview with a Chief, 2020)

The response suggests that instead of intervening bodies and individuals understanding the conflict and the issues surrounding it first before attempting a resolution, they appeared to have rather rushed into addressing it and this made the resolution of the conflict difficult. Intervening parties or mediators that do not understand the Nandom Imamship conflict may find it difficult to resolve it. Thus, other participants stressed that understanding of the conflict is key to resolving it:

...the people that are there and can address the issue when they know the issue well they can resolve it. (Field Interview with a Chief, 2020)

...not everybody can just come and resolve it. (Field Interview with Opinion Leader, 2020)

One reason why understanding the dynamics of the conflict is important is that intervening parties that have little knowledge and understanding of the Nandom Imamship conflict may end up making recommendations based on incomplete stories and that may not address the issue of concern to the conflict parties. Studies have indicated that an understanding of the dynamics of a conflict is significant for the resolution of the conflict (Mahama & Longi, 2013; Penu & Osei-Kufuor, 2016). Intervention efforts did not properly understand the issues better before procuring a resolution. The DST explains that conflict is a dynamic process; they change as the conflict develops (van Geert, 2011; Lunkenheimer, 2018; Thelen & Smith, 2005) and those changes should be treated as 'informative data' (Lunkenheimer, 2018) in the resolution process.

Yet, intervention efforts in the conflict appeared to have failed to treat changes in the conflict as "potentially informative data" (Lunkenheimer, 2018, p. 3), thereby making the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict difficult. The argument is that failure to understand the dynamics of a conflict would constraint resolution efforts. Körppen (2006) argued that conflict analysis is the primary activity to do when attempting to intervene in a conflict. The resolution of conflict is rooted in the analysis of the conflict. Thus, Kuupiel (2020) indicated that a conflict would be well resolved when it is well analyzed. Many of the efforts that have been taken to resolve the Imamship conflict in Nandom failed to understand the local or contextual issues characterizing the conflict. As such, resolution efforts were rather hasty to solving the conflict rather than understanding the underlying issues in the conflict. Conflict may persist unless the "underlying conflict factors [are] satisfactorily addressed" (El-Bushra, 2017, p. 4). Interveners did not take time to analyze and understand the complex interaction of the issues in the conflict and how those issues interdepend (Körppen & Ropers, 2011).

Communal Friday prayers in the Mosque

The study realized that communal Friday prayer in the central Mosque became a threat to resolving the conflict. The data reveal that the central Mosque was the avenue where most of the fights and confrontations occurred between the factions in the conflict. Each faction perceived the leadership of their opponents as evil or hating their group and who are misleading their followers to be hostile towards them. Both factions have accused the leaders of their opponents of misleading and making their followers to believe that they are supposed to produce the Imam of Nandom. Thus, since the two sides are contesting over who should be the

Imam and lead them to pray on every Friday, some of the participants indicated that people tend to prepare for fight whenever they were going to the Mosque for Friday prayers. Two participants stated the following:

The Mosque is where the fight even occurs. Oh yes, it was a threat. They were threatening one another there. When they are having their prayer occasions that is when the fight normally emerges. Even there was a time we heard that they went to mosque with pepper spray, cutlasses and others. I think that was the period that it was proper that the mosque be locked. They were threatening each other. (Field Interview with a Traditional Leader, 2020)

Mostly it happens too on Fridays but now it hasn't happen again. From 2013 to 2018 August, there was a time that they have to close down the mosque. (Field Interview with an Opinion Leader, 2020)

The responses suggest that violence and confrontation were mostly staged in the Mosque during Friday prayers. The data suggest that different acts of violence were being carried out in the mosque during Friday prayers. The study discovered that the police tend to lock up the Mosque anytime there is an eruption of fight or confrontation between the two factions. The two factions were finding it difficult to worship together without fighting or the eruption of heated quarrel. Thus, a holy place was turned into a confrontation or violence theatre. This could perhaps, explain why at the time of the data collection for this study, it was discovered that the two factions were praying separately on Fridays since the last opening of the Mosque for Islamic activities. It was observed that while one group prayed in the central Mosque, the other used a Mosque at the Nandom Senior High School for their Friday prayers. The findings support those of Penu and Osei-Kufuor (2016) and Penu's (2016) studies which indicate that intermittent violence and/or attacks in a conflict situation tends to mar peace processes and makes it difficult for intervention efforts to yield productive outcomes.

Poor perception of conflict and peace by some intervening parties

The data reveal that intervening bodies' perception of conflict could have had deciding effect on the difficulty in resolving the conflict. During the interaction with some elders of the Nandom Traditional Area, it was observed that their perception of conflict or peace may have influenced the way they handled the conflict between the two Muslim factions in the Zongo community. When they were first approached during the data collection process, they were hesitant in responding to the research, indicating that as far as they are concerned that there is peace in Nandom Zongo and that nobody is currently fighting. One of the elders indicated the following:

... As far as we are concerned there is peace in the Zongo. Are you seeing people fighting when you pass through town? (Field Interview with Elders, 2020)

The response suggests that some intervening parties had narrow understanding of peace because they view peace as when people are not actively fighting or when there are no physical confrontations. This perception of the conflict might have influenced the way they handled it. The finding thus affirms Morake et al.'s (2011) study whose findings indicate that people's perception of conflict tends to affect their management or how they deal with the conflict. The argument is that how a conflict is perceived could determine how the conflict is approached and handled. It is therefore important that intervening efforts reflect on their own perception of the conflict they are approaching and allow their reflection process to interact with what the local people constitute as part of the conflict.

Perceived presence of spoilers

The data reveal that there could be spoilers or conflict profiteers in the Nandom Imamship conflict. Some of the participants think there are people who are profiting from the conflict and are doing things that will make the conflict to continue in order that they can continue to profit from it. Two participants stated the following:

Of course, yes! People are there who don't want the issue to be resolved...they see that if the issue is resolved they will lose. (Field Interview with a Chief, 2020)

There is something or somebody somewhere who doesn't want lasting peace in Nandom. That is it, so they want it to continue so that they will continue to benefit. (Field Interview with an Opinion Leader, 2020)

The finding is that there are profiteers in the Nandom Imamship conflict who appear to be acting to stall or 'spoil' the resolution of the conflict. The finding speaks to those of Ahiave's (2013) study which discovered that the activities of spoilers contributed to the difficulty in resolving the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict.

Rumours

The study found that rumours also contributed to stalling the resolution of the conflict. The data reveal that rumours about planned attacks or attempts to pronounce one candidate or the other as the Imam by the factions in the conflict tend to increase tensions in the Nandom Zongo Muslim community. One of the participants indicated how they prepared and waited for the other faction when they heard that people from the other faction were coming to attack him. Another participant indicated that anytime they are told that their opponent is planning to stage an attack in the Mosque that they also prepare for fight when going to the Mosque to pray. As such, confrontations that would not have occurred tend to ensue. The study discovered that rumours tend to cause tensions to rise in the Nandom Zongo Muslim community, especially, when such rumours lead to heavy security presence. Two participants stated the following:

...some of the conflict does not even reach a particular stage but they will tell lies that they fought, shot guns and things. So when it happens like that...they will bring police and soldiers but when they come they will say what they heard about the conflict when they come, it is not always like. (Field Interview with an Opinion Leader, 2020)

...some of them you will hear and realize that it is a rumour. (Field Interview with an Elder, 2020)

Sometimes when tribe members (especially young men) of the factions in the conflict in other towns hear rumours that their opponent is planning to attack their people back home, they tend to travel home to help. Although such rumours often turn out to be untrue, they tend to create and increase tensions. An opinion leader indicated the following:

Yeah, for example, some of our brothers that are in different towns and what have you, sometimes they will hear this before you realize they are calling and everything. Some will even say we have to enter car and go home, that we have heard that these people are planning to do this so we have to enter car and go home. Sometimes they will pick a car and rush home before they realize things are not that way and they will come back. [So] yeah, [rumour is] a serious threat. (Field Interview with an Opinion Leader, 2020)

Yes rumour is a threat to the resolution of the conflict at the beginning. The time that it used to happen like that we used to hear that they said they will do this. That these people said they will do this but we realized later that it was all lies. But it was happening like that. (Field Interview with an Elder, 2020)

The data reveal that tensions tend to grow and confrontations which would not have occurred tend to occur, thereby making it difficult for resolution of the conflict. Due to the threat rumour posed to the resolution of the conflict, it was discovered that whenever there are rumoured planned attacks, people tend to inform the security.

Overall, the findings of the study explain Aall's (2015) argument that it is daunting to 'diagnose and design' solutions for conflicts in Africa. Sensitivity to local issues is crucial in conflict resolution process (Adzahlie-Mensah & Benson, 2018). The failure of third-party interveners to understand that context is a powerful element in conflict resolution (Kuupiel, 2019) contributed to the difficulty in resolving the Nandom Imamship conflict. Parties that were intervening in the conflict also appeared to have failed, as Körppen (2006) indicated, "to identify relevant persons and groups within the conflict [community] and support them with a range of capacity-building measures" (p. 6) to lead the resolution of the conflict. The resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict has thus been very challenging. Hence, though the management or resolution of conflicts is a contemporary necessity (PIN Points, 2002), it has come to be a new challenge that society has to deal with (Madalina, 2016).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The threats to the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict exist at system, actor and community levels. The conflict parties' lack of confidence and trust in third-party interveners and the perceived political interference decided strongly on the resolution of the conflict. The dynamics of the conflict and the conflict environment have not been properly understood by intervening parties. When conflict resolution practitioners or mediators understand these threats to the resolution of the conflict it will enable them to develop appropriate approach to deal with it. Also, the neutrality of intervening parties and the confidence and trust of the conflict parties in them is necessary if any resolution of the conflict is to be attained. Inclusiveness and participation of all the conflict parties in the resolution promotes community ownership of and commitment

to the process. Intervening parties that would adopt mechanisms and approach the conflict parties in a manner that is pleasing to both factions (served the common good) will engender participation in the resolution. Feedback is essential in conflict resolution process. Feedback is a significant tool that can help build the cooperation of the conflict parties and develop their value in the resolution process. Refusal to provide feedback to the conflict parties may make parties uncooperative or not value the resolution process or demonstrate less or no interest in future resolution efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the findings:

- i. It is also recommended that intervening parties seeking to resolve the Nandom Imamship conflict should build the confidence and trust of conflict parties in them and the resolution process. This will engender conflict parties' willingness to participate in the resolution process.
- ii. Intervening parties should identify and build the capacities of community peace-setters to lead the resolution of the conflict. The Nandom Zongo people should own the resolution process.

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