Civil Society Organisations in Conflict Prevention in Northern Ghana: Contributions and Challenges

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Abstract

For the past two decades, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have been recognized internationally as key actors in implementing conflict prevention activities. To that end, the international community has called for the full participation of CSOs in conflict prevention. This study examines the responses of CSOs to this clarion call with a focus on their contribution to conflict prevention and the challenges confronting them in the Northern Region of Ghana. The paper employed a purposive sampling technique in selecting thirty-nine (39) participants, while in-depth interviews were used to elicit responses from the respondents. The findings of the paper suggest that CSOs engaged in conflict prevention, concentrate their efforts on early warning and early response, public education and awareness creation and post conflict reconstruction among others. The findings reveal further that inadequate funding and human resources, security, weak coordination and networking, higher expectations from beneficiaries and sustainability are some of the challenges confronting CSOs working in conflict prevention. The paper concludes that while CSOs have a role to play in promoting sustainable peace, the ultimate task rests on the local people and state institutions.

Keywords: Civil Society, Civil Society Organisations, Conflict and Conflict prevention

Introduction

The past two decades of political instability, terrorism, political insurgencies, political uprisings and violent conflicts in the developing world, have witnessed the increasing need for the design and implementation of conflict prevention activities. This recognition has partly been attributed to the fact that such security challenges have brought huge costs to nations involved.

It is estimated that during violent conflicts, scarce resources meant for the socio-economic development of nations and communities are diverted into peacekeeping activities. The global economic impact of containing violence in the year 2012 was estimated by the Institute of Economics and Peace (2013) to be $9.46 trillion-representing 11 % of Gross World Product. The Institute states further that, should the world reduce this expenditure by 50 %, it would repay the debt of the developing world ($ 4.076 billion) provide enough money for the European Stability Mechanism ($ 900 billion) and fund the additional amount required to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

There is also the general consensus that conflict prevention will not only lead to the prevention of catastrophes, it may be easier to tackle conflict early before they become violent. Besides, there is also cost effectiveness of prevention when compared with the exorbitant bill for subsequent relief, protection and reconstruction if prevention fails. The fact that the world has become a global place and events occurring in a particular area have global consequences even makes this situation ever more real. This is supported by Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Mial (2007), who argue that the recognition of the international community in the importance of conflict prevention is partly a reaction to the events which took place in Rwanda, Former Yugoslavia and elsewhere, a realization that it may be easier to tackle conflicts early before they reach the point of armed conflict and mass violence and the ensuing global effects.

This recognition has been championed by the United Nations as outlined in the Agenda for Peace by then Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). In the same vein, the African Union in its Protocol relating to Peace and Security in Africa has identified conflict prevention as a critical strategy to promoting peace in Africa. In that regard, the African Union in 1993 established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Similarly, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 2008 adopted the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework as a key strategy for promoting peace and security within the West African Sub-region.

In all these strategies and related protocols, although the onus task is placed at the door steps of member states, other stakeholders such as Civil Society have been called upon to contribute to promoting conflict prevention in partnership with member states. ECOWAS in its conflict prevention framework has called on the civil society sector to play an increasingly critical role alongside Member States in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security (ECOWAS, 2008). Also the African Union in its Protocol establishing the Peace and Security and its associated Rules of Procedure envisage a greater role for African civil societies in the area of peace and security. Specifically, Article 20 of the Protocol states that civil society organisations interested in or involved in a conflict situation may be invited to participate in discussions relating to that conflict. According to the African Union (2008), the transformation of the OAU to the AU has involved a shift in

the continental body's peace and security agenda. A shift in focus from conflict management to conflict prevention presents new challenges which imply the involvement of more stakeholders such as CSOs in the actualization of this agenda. This is because of their proximity to the grassroots (from where they can provide firsthand information on conflict situations), and their expertise in conflict analysis. The National Architecture for Peace in Ghana has also recognized the important role of Civil Society Organisations in conflict prevention and in this regard has identified Civil Society Organisations as major stakeholders in the implementation of the National Architecture which is a blue print of Ghana and its stakeholders in the promotion of peace and conflict prevention. These provisions give the opportunity to a wide spectrum of non-state actors such as civil society organizations to effectively contribute to the prevention of violent conflicts.

Civil Societies have responded positively to these proposals and have initiated and implemented a number of conflict prevention activities especially at the community level. In Sudan, CSOs have spearheaded some of the most significant advances towards peace, particularly at the local level. In the Mano River Zone, CSOs have also played an important role in the formulation of the country's security sector reform policies, mediation, reconciliation and post conflict recovery. CSOs have also played more diffuse roles in peace education, curriculum development, early warning, promoting the involvement of women, promotion of democracy and governance, advocating against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and disarmament activities (AU, 2006). With the rise in CSOs work in conflict prevention apparently in response to the clarion call by the UN, AU and ECOWAS, an equal measure of research work has been done in the area of CSOs and conflict prevention. The challenge however is the narrow focus of the research; researches are focused on national conflicts, therefore ignoring the work of CSOs in community based conflicts. The objective of this study therefore is to identify and discuss the contributions of CSOs to conflict prevention, the challenges encountered and the opportunities for further engagement in conflict prevention activities in local communities of the Northern Region of Ghana.

Definition of terms
The Concepts Civil Society and Civil Society Organisations
The Civil Society Sector has been identified as playing varied roles in many sectors of nation building, as such its composition and nature varies. The concept Civil Society is fluid and very problematic to come out with a generic definition. There are many contested definitions, since individuals view the concept from different perspectives and also based on time and place. Within the Ghanaian political environment for instance, the evolution of the civil society sector can be understood from four distinctive strands, pre-colonial period, the colonial period, post-independence period and the fourth republican constitution era. These will however not be the focus for discussion in this paper.

From the larger historical perspective however, the concept of Civil Society was referred to as the state especially in the Sixteenth Century Political thought. In contemporary discussions, the concept is contrasted with the state. Hegel's nineteenth century notion of civil society included the market; whereas contemporary concept tends to regard civil society as nonprofit sector. Gramsci (as cited in Ulanga, 2008) regarded civil society as an arena where class hegemony forges consent, whereas much contemporary discussion treats civil society as a site of disruption and dissent. According to Sneyd (2012), civil society can be understood to be a political space where voluntary associations deliberately seek to shape the rules that govern aspects of social life. For Edwards (2005) an essential feature of the idea of civil society is collective action, which foregrounds "the collective, creative and values-driven core of the active citizen." The concept of civil society has been critiqued for limiting the diversity of actual civil society in particular places because of its origins in Western thought. However, Lewis (as cited in Edwards, 2005) argues that a more extensive understanding that embraces ideas about public space, citizenship rights, and organised resistance makes the concept applicable and useful in colonial and post-colonial contexts, such as parts of Africa.

For the purpose of this paper, in using the term "Civil Society", reference is being made to the definition offered by the World Bank which notes that *Civil society refers to the arena – distinct from the market and the state – in which citizens come together to pursue common interests through collective action, neither for profit nor for the exercise of political power. Thus, all organizations and associations that lie between the family and the state (except firms and political parties) are part of civil society. These include religious and professional organizations, labour unions, the not-for-profit media, grassroots organizations, and NGOs* (World Bank, 2003).

Conflict
There are many conceptual clarifications on conflict. For the purpose of this article however, the definition given by Mayers will be appropriate. Mayers (2000) defined conflict from three dimensions namely "conflict as perception", "conflict as feeling" and "conflict as action". As a set of perceptions, Mayers contends that conflict is a belief or understanding that one's own needs, interest, wants or values are incompatible with someone else's. Mayers further argues that as a "feeling", conflict involves an emotional reaction to a situation or interaction that

signals a disagreement of some kind. The emotion felt might be fear, sadness, bitterness, anger or hopelessness or some amalgam of these. If we experience these feelings in regard to another person or situation, we feel that we are in conflict and therefore we are. Concluding, Mayers stated that "conflict as action" consists of the actions that we take to express our feelings, articulate our perceptions and get our needs met in a way that has the potential for interfering with someone's ability to get his or her needs met. For the purpose of this paper, conflict will be defined *as the existence of incompatible goals or the means to achieving these goals between individuals or identifiable groups. This incompatibility arises within a defined relationship and therefore any attempt to establish peace must focus on transforming the existing relationship between the parties.*

Conflict Prevention
One major issue that has become dominant in the realm of peace and international security especially after the end of the cold war is conflict prevention. This preoccupation according to the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflicts (1997) is based on the fact that it is easier and less costly to stop a conflict at an early stage and that acting in a full blown conflict is the costliest and most dangerous way of intervening and also the one that offers the less possibility of success. Similar to the numerous arguments advanced in support of conflict prevention, many definitions have been given to the concept. Scholars have developed different ways of understanding the concept and have therefore approached it from different angles. This conceptual differences and confusion has created challenges in its operationalisation. As a result Lund (1996) argues that the definition of conflict prevention should be such a way that it can be distinguished from other similar concepts and can also be operationalised.

The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflicts (1997) observed that the aim of conflict prevention is to prevent the emergence of violent conflict, prevent on-going conflicts from spreading and prevent the reemergence of violence. Creative Associates International (1998) defines conflict prevention as actions, policies and procedures or institutions utilised in vulnerable places and times to keep states or groups from threatening or using armed force and related forms of coercion to settle disputes. Also, it refers to actions taken after a violent conflict to avoid recurrence (as cited in USAID, 2001).

One definition that has brought the concept of conflict prevention into the light of international realm is the definition given by Boutros Boutros- Ghali. Boutros-Ghali (1992) in the Agenda for Peace linked conflict prevention to preventive diplomacy. Boutros-Ghali defined preventive diplomacy as actions taken to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur. The basic underlying principle of conflict prevention is that conflicts are not bad as being perceived, but it is the application of violence as an option for resolving conflicts that has become a problem. Conflict prevention therefore seeks to address those factors that predispose conflict to violent conflict from three levels namely; deep (Structural) prevention, Light (operational) prevention and systemic prevention. These actions are not solely the responsibility of the state, but that non-state actors such as Civil Society Organizations have a role to play.

The Principle of subsidiarity, the theoretical underpinning of the study
This research which attempts to understand the contributions and challenges of CSOs to conflict prevention is grounded on the principle of subsidiarity. The principle as a political philosophy, calls for the devolution of functions from a higher authority to a lower structure for such functions to be carried out, if the lower structures have the capacity and ability.

The Principle of Subsidiarity according to Millon-Delso (as cited in Endo, 1994) cannot be dated exclusively from the Popes' encyclicals of the Catholic Church. The idea is rather a typically European or western thought, and can be traced back to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. However, it is worth noting that Johannes Althusius was the first proponent of the concept. Althusius developed the principle in connection with his theories of the secular federal state in the seventeenth century, and one can find subsequent echoes of it in the thought of political actors and theorists as varied as Montesquieu, Locke, Tocqueville, Lincoln, and Proudhon (Endo, 1994). Althusius in his book "systematic analysis of politics" in 1610 and in 1614 stated that "no man is sufficient that therefore man is unable to live comfortably, being isolated from society. Men need the assistance or aid of others, and thus establish, cultivate and conserve associations such as family, collegium (e.g. guild/corporation), city, province and the State. Seeking for "symbiotics" among these associations-that is the essential subjective matter of politics, Althusius picked up a biblical concept of "foedus" (the alliance or league that originally meant the bond between God and men), and secularised it to apply to associations in this world.

In the 19th century, social conscious catholic thinkers like W. von Kettler and L. Tapprelli began to acquire the notion of subsidiarity and later become the main forces in the subsidiarity discourse. Their interest in the concept was basically in response to the social problems caused by the industrial revolution. They called for the higher authority to assist the weakers in society as a way of solving these problems. It is nevertheless equally true that, it was the Catholic Church who established the notion of subsidiarity as an important 'principle' (Endo,

1994). Perhaps more importantly, the Church made deliberate efforts to systematise the principle of subsidiarity. In May 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued an encyclical "Rerum Novarum" to all the Bishops, in which he condemned the capitalistic exploitation of the poor, just as the socialists. In the encyclical, Leo emphasised the need for state intervention to protect workers by guaranteeing, a just wage and the freedom to organise for collective bargaining (Carozza, 2003). The encyclical argued that justifiable state intervention was limited in nature. Thus, Leo wrote, "Whenever the general interest or any particular class suffers, or is threatened with harm, which can in no other way be met or prevented, the public authority must step in to deal with it"; but the limits of that intervention "must be determined by the nature of the occasion which calls for the law's interference - the principle being that the law must not undertake more, nor proceed further, than is required for the remedy of the evil or the removal of the mischief. In short the ultimate aim of the encyclical was to justify and encourage the protection of workers from the effects of unrestrained capitalism (Carozza, 2003).

In 1931, when one of Leo's successors, Pius XI, wrote on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of Rerum Nova-rum (which Pius referred to as "the Magna Charta" of Christian social action"), the political circumstances of course were dramatically different, dominated more by the rising threat of totalitarianism than by the failure of the state to protect the constituent parts of society (Carozza, 2003). In his encyclical Quadragesimo Anno, Pius reformulated the Rerum Novarum principle of intervention-but-not-interference with a decidedly stronger emphasis on the limits of public authority. He also expressed the idea of subsidiarity both more amply and more precisely and thus provided the starting point for all subsequent uses and adaptations of the principle (Carozza, 2003). In the Pius encyclical, the principle of subsidiarity entails that; "a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good" (Moller, 2005).

This marked the birth of the principle of subsidiarity and it has been applied in the fields of international humanitarian law, Regional Integration and democratic practices. The European Union has adopted the concept as one of its central principles and has therefore enshrined the principle in its new constitution signed in June, 2004 (Moller, 2005). Within the ambit of international Peace and Security, the principle is also enshrined, thus defining certain roles for Regional and Sub-regional bodies, as well as Civil Society Organisations. In Chapter VIII (article 53) of the United Nations Charter, it is stipulated that the Security Council Shall where appropriate, utilise such regional arrangements as agencies for enforcement actions under its authority. Also in Chapter X (article 71) it is stipulated that, the Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organisations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organisations and, where appropriate, with national organisations after consultation with the Member of the United Nations concerned. In a similar vein, the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted the functions of the Principle of subsidiarity by calling for the participation of Civil Society Organisations in the promotion of political stability especially at the local level. Article 20 of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) protocol of the African Union requires the PSC to encourage civil society organisations 'to participate actively in the efforts aimed at promoting peace, security and stability in Africa' and allows the PSC to invite them to address it directly. The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework calls for the involvement of CSOs in areas of conflict prevention particularly in areas where state parties cannot reach.

Drawing from these, this article does not seek to debate the pros and cons of the adoption of the principle in matters of peace and security within sub-region. This article is inspired to understand the work of CSOs as critically considered as stakeholders in promoting peace and security within the functions of the principle of subsidiarity as well as the challenges encountered with reference to their role in conflict prevention within the context of the principle of subsidiarity.

Methodology
The study employed qualitative research strategies to understand the contributions of CSOs to conflict prevention in the Northern Region of Ghana. The study population comprised directors and programme Officers of CSOs in conflict prevention, as well as the beneficiaries of the programmes of CSOs. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 24 CSOs from 30 CSOs (Table 1) that are actively involved in conflict prevention activities and 15 beneficiaries. Data was gathered mainly from primary and secondary sources. In-depth interview was the main method for gathering primary data with the help of interview guides. Secondary data was gathered through desktop review of existing documents of organisations such as progress reports, annual reports, activity reports and monitoring and evaluation reports. The method for analysing the data was content and descriptive analysis. The mode of analytical presentation was thematic in nature. In this case relevant issues are schematically considered under selected themes and sub-themes designed to address the stated objectives of the paper. These themes and sub-themes are discussed and supported by verbatim narrations and statements.

Table 1: List of Organisations selected for the study

No.	Name of Organisation	Type of organization
1.	West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP-Ghana)	NGO-Local
2.	Centre for Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies	Research Institution/NGO
3.	Women in Peacebuilding (WIP)	CBO-Women's group
4.	Foundation for Security and Development in Africa	NGO
5.	ActionAid Ghana (AAG)	NGO
6.	SEND Ghana	NGO
7.	Northern Youth for Peace and Community Development	CBO-Youth Association
8.	World Vision International (WVI)	NGO
9.	DAWAH Academy	Faith Based Organisation(FBO)
10.	Sustainable Peace Initiative	NGO
11.	Business Development and Consultancy Services	CBO
12.	Rural Media Network	NGO
13.	Community Development and Youth Advisory Centre	CBO
14.	Centre for the Promotion of Youth Development and Empowerment	CBO-Youth Association
15.	Northern Regional Youth Development Association	CBO-Youth Association
16.	Action for Disability and Development	NGO-National
17.	Council of Churches	FBO
18.	IBIS Ghana	NGO-International
19.	Assemblies of God and Development Relief Services	FBO/NGO
20.	Amasachina Self-Help Association	CBO
21.	Tiyumba Development Association	CBO
22.	Diamond FM	Media
23.	Tumalana	CBO
24.	Catholic Relief Services	NGO-International

Source: Field work, February, 2011

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
Roles of CSOs in conflict prevention
Early warning and early response

The findings of the research indicated that early warning and early response is one of the activities of CSOs in conflict prevention. The CSOs undertake this activity through the collection and analysis of information on predetermined factors that are considered a threat to human security for the objective of anticipating the escalation of violent conflict, developing strategic responses to these threats, and the presentation of the information and options to actors for decision making and even sometimes intervene as peacebuilders. Ekiyor (2008) suggested that CSOs have played pivotal roles in the development of conflict early warning and response frameworks in most regional organisations and within states and are also involved in filtering, monitoring and analysing information at the community and national levels and this serves as the *sine quo non* of conflict prevention.

Nine (9) organisations (SEND Ghana, FOSDA, BADECC, AAG, DAWAH ACADEMY, WANEP-Ghana, CPYDE, CODYAC AND CECOTAPS) out of the 24 organisations in the sample were involved in early warning and early response activities. The organisations used community volunteers who were trained and situated in some selected communities known as hot spots to gather information on issues such as the migration of women and children, youth groupings, shop closure at unusual times, movement of arms to and from farms, organisation of secret meetings, boycotting of communal celebrations and the use of abusive language or statements during radio discussions. When these signs are picked up, the organisations analyse the information to determine whether such signs are recipe for conflict. If the signs are considered as security threats after the analysis, the organisations either intervene by promoting community dialogue, peace talks and mediation or report to the appropriate security agencies such as the police, Bureau of National Investigation (BNI) and the military for their action and response.

There were however differences in the structure of early warning and early response among the organisations. With the exception of WANEP-Ghana that had a well-defined structure (data analyst, computer and quarterly reporting or briefing of appropriate stakeholders) for carrying out early warning and early response activities, the other organisations did not. WANEP-Ghana in collaboration with its network members has established and launched an early warning and early response system in the Northern Region of Ghana under the Ghana Alert Project with the aim of detecting, preventing and controlling violent conflicts. The project is currently piloted in four communities (Tamale, Bimbilla, Yendi and Buipe) known as hotspots with a total of 75 community surveillance teams recruited, trained and situated in these communities to gather and present to the

Research on Humanities and Social Sciences
www.iiste.org
ISSN (Paper)2224-5766 ISSN (Online)2225-0484 (Online)
Vol.6, No.13, 2016
IISTE

data base analyst incident and situation reports on early warning signals.

The early response component of the Alert Project involves the use of quarterly interface meetings in the region where major stakeholders namely the Police, Bureau of National Investigations (BNI), Customs Excise and Preventive Services (CEPS), Ghana Armed Forces (GAF), Ghana Immigration Service (GIS), Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS), National Disaster Management Organization (NADMO), National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), Youth Groups, women groups, National Peace Council (NPC), religious leaders and chiefs meet to discuss the security threats identified and to design appropriate intervention mechanisms or strategies. WANEP-Ghana also holds regular meetings with the press to bring to their notice these threats so that the media could in turn help in influencing the government to act. The meeting with the press also enables WANEP-Ghana to sensitise the press on its role in addressing these threats. According to the Programme Officer of WANEP-Ghana: "*In Yendi violence was prevented through a meeting of chiefs that discussed and assured the youth who had threatened violent action to address their worry over indiscriminate land sale by chiefs in the area. Also, at Banvim-Dohini in the Tamale Metropolis, a death threat issued by a chieftaincy faction to a rival chief was resolved with the help of the Ghana Police Service in the Region. These among others were possible due to the identification of early signals which are a threat to security of these two communities*" (Friday, February 11, 2011 Unstructured Interviews).

Through early warning and early response initiatives by CSOs in the region, it is expected that they will contribute to preventing, mitigating and preparing for violent conflicts in the region. However this is only possible when other stakeholders are committed and responsive in time to the information they receive from the CSOs.

Research and documentation

Research, documentation and dissemination of information activities on peace and conflict were identified as one of the key conflict prevention activities carried out by CSOs. Out of the 24 CSOs, three organisations (Sustainable Peace Initiative, WANEP-Ghana and Centre for Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies) were involved in research, documentation and dissemination of peace information. According to Hiscock (2008), civil society organisations can perform an important role in conflict prevention by collecting all relevant information on a particular conflict or conflicts within a region and making it more accessible to other organisations, the general public and government officials. Through such kinds of research and information dissemination, Hiscock stated that it contributes to conflict prevention by making it easier for all relevant stakeholders to be informed about such conflicts. WANEP-Ghana annually conducts research in conflict areas and this data is published on the Ghana Peace Watch an annual publication on issues relating to peace and conflict.

In the year 2005, WANEP-Ghana conducted an impact assessment of peace building training of police officers and a final report has been published on the findings. Also, in 2009, data from fifteen pilot communities in the region were used in the publication of the Ghana Peace Watch. In addition, SPI has undertaken research and published these finding with the objective of contributing to sustainable peace in the region. SPI has established an electronic database of all conflicts in Northern Ghana, a comprehensive set of references on conflicts in Northern Ghana and has supported the publication of the history of violent conflicts in Northern Ghana. SPI has also published and distributed 1,500 copies of a seminal book documenting history of ethnographic conflicts in Northern Ghana. This publication has been distributed to all relevant stakeholders throughout the country. This has added significantly to available knowledge about these issues and the book has already become a reference document of note in the region.

CECOTAPS has also conducted a comprehensive research on the causes of the Bunkpurugu-Yunyo conflict, documented women's experiences in the conflict and the role women can play in conflict resolution, and has published and disseminated information on the conflict which can be used to raise awareness, facilitate mediation and dialogue and reduce the level of violence in the community. According to the Director of the Centre: "*CECOTAPS considers research, documentation, and dissemination of literature on peace and conflict in the region as powerful ingredients as it informs actions that can translate into benefits, as such CECOTAPS has made research, documentation, publication and dissemination an integral part of its conflict prevention efforts*" (Unstructured Interview conducted on Wednesday, Febraury 2, 2011 with Rev. Fr. Lazarus Anneyeh of CECOTAPS).

In addition FOSDA has established learning centres in the form of libraries, were books about peace and conflict are kept for people to read and learn about peace and the effects of conflicts in Africa and Northern Region in particular. Moreover based on the learning centres, a number of reading clubs on peace and conflict have been established in some senior high schools in the region. Through research, documentation, publication and dissemination of information, the CSOs aim to contribute to achieving peace in the Northern Region of Ghana. Research, documentation, publication and dissemination of information on peace form an essential component of any strategy for promoting sustainable peace. This is because the challenges for peace continuously change, the knowledge required, comprehension and response to the persistence of violent conflict

demand clear-sighted research. There are new trends of conflicts emerging and therefore require new response and as such peace research, documentation and dissemination of information will inform and guide this new response.

Post conflict reconstruction

The findings of the research have also established that post-conflict reconstruction is one of the functions carried out by CSOs in communities that are emerging from conflict. This is related to activities that are carried out in the immediate post-conflict phase to help communities come back to normal lives, and for institutions to function. Of the 24 organisations in the sample, three organisations (AGREDS, AAG and BADECC) were involved in post-conflict reconstruction or rehabilitation. This is in line with the observation of Ekiyor (2008), when conflict is over, CSOs are often active in ensuring peaceful transitions to democratically elected governments, socio-economic recovery involving poverty reduction strategies, youth employment and women micro-finance projects which are important to rebuilding economies decimated by conflict. However, while Ekiyor discusses post-conflict reconstruction function of CSOs at the national level, the findings of this research discusses post-conflict reconstruction at the community level.

Under its post-conflict reconstruction project, AGREDS focuses on restoring to victims of violent conflict their normal lives through agricultural and income generation actions. During the post-conflict phase of the 1994 ethnic conflicts that engulfed the Northern Region of Ghana, AGREDS initiated a yam seed and cattle restoration project to help restore the livelihoods and social systems of the people that were destroyed during the war, when victims lost their livestock and yam seeds. BADECC also undertakes post-conflict reconstruction activities so as to assist victims of violent conflicts. According to the Director of BADECC: "*We have provided seed credit to farmers in conflict areas to restart their farming activities; small ruminants distributed to women victims especially widows in collaboration with TUMA KAVI in three communities in the Demon area of the Saboba- Chereponi District with funding from the Canadian High Commission. We have also built a grain storage facility and a cash grant provided to women to support grain marketing in the Demon area of the Saboba-Chereponi District with support from IDEX and USA*" (Unstructured interviews conducted on Tuesday, February 8, 2011with Director of BADECC).

Under the human security programme, AAG has a post-conflict reconstruction and recovery project for conflict affected areas. This project covers a wide range of areas such as poverty reduction and employment creation, education, water and sanitation, health, agriculture among others. AAG has supported the rebuilding of schools in the Saboba-Chereponi District. This involved the cooperation of the Konkomba and Dagomba communities and children of both communities make use of the facilities. Amasachina is working with Dagomba and Konkomba communities on a joint project to build Nurses quarters at Kpatinga. This projected is supported by UNICEF and the District Assembly. Reconstruction is not only a key to preventing the recurrence of conflict, but is also a critical step towards long term development. Post-conflict reconstruction in addition provides sustainable livelihoods in conflict affected communities; ensuring that victims of violent conflicts regain their livelihoods which are necessary for preventing future conflicts. Also, it promotes reconciliation, forgiveness as well as restores and enhances relationships which are key ingredients to building sustainable peace in every community.

Peace education and awareness creation

The research findings showed that CSOs in the region undertake activities in the area of public education and awareness creation so as to bring to the attention of not only the general public on the effects of violent conflicts, but also the state on its constitutional mandate of providing a peaceful and conducive environment for the citizens of the region. All the CSOs surveyed undertook peace education and awareness creation activities. These activities target policy makers at the local and national levels, political parties, law enforcement officers, religious and traditional rulers, youth groups, women's groups and the society at large. The CSOs surveyed execute their public education and campaign activities through media campaigns; at various public events such as funerals, festivals and outdoorings, outreach activities, community durbars, peace matches, and public gatherings such as musical concerts. In addition to the negative consequences of violent conflicts, these efforts cover numerous related issues such as the dangers of illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the need for peace and harmony, peace agreements and peace accords, the need for using dialogue and non-violent approaches to resolving misunderstandings, reconciliation and consensus building. This confirms the findings of Konteh (2006), who states that CSOs like Oxfam (Great Britain), FOSDA, Campaign for Good Governance in Sierra Leone and CEDE in Liberia have been championing the campaign against the illicit trafficking and brokering in small arms and light weapons (SALW) in West Africa. This is also supported by Ekiyor (2008), who observed that CSOs work at the national levels to raise awareness of the dangers of arm production, and the ease with which arms can be smuggled across porous national borders. AAG in partnership with Diamond FM and Tumalana organised a forum on international peace day in 2007 for trouble making youth groups such as the

"Kandaha boys", the "Aluta boys", the "Azoka boys", and the youth of the two major political parties (NDC and NPP). During the forum the idea of the international peace day as well as peace messages were shared with the youth groups by prominent citizens of the region. In addition, FOSDA embarked on a project dubbed 'ride for peace' in the Yendi District by using bicycles. During the ride for peace, issues discussed included the consequences of conflicts, dangers of illicit proliferation of small arms and the need for peace and harmony.

Similarly, SEND Ghana also focused on awareness creation through the use of drama to deliver peace messages to the general public within the catchment area. To this end SEND Ghana has trained and established drama groups in five operational communities (Kete Krachi, Kpandai, Bimbilla, Chamba and Salaga) who are used by the Peace Animators to facilitate peace education and promote non-violent conflict resolution. *The original intension was to have a cross community mobile drama groups. However, due to the poor roads and a lack of a common language in which to communicate, it was decided in June 2002 soon after the first phase of the project was initiated, that instead community based drama groups should be trained within each ethnic group in order to overcome both of these problems".* (Wednesday, February 9, 2011 through unstructured interview with Programmes Officer for Salaga Development Area).

Through the Ghana Alert Project, WANEP-Ghana funded THUDEG to embark on a peace project which used children to educate communities about the need for peace in their communities. One of such peace education programmes was organised in the Central Gonja District. The choice of this district for the peace match was partly because of the rampant chieftaincy clashes which undermined development in the area. The children held placards, some of which read "politicians give us peace, but not war", "love peace for the sake of our future". With support from AAG and AGREDS, WANEP-Ghana produced, developed and aired two peace jingles on two radio stations. These messages in English and Dagbani are aired four times a day for a week. The messages appealed for peace, non-violence and reconciliation.

Peace education and awareness creation as a conflict prevention strategy aims to develop citizens who are sufficiently literate in non-violence and as such behave in a manner that can enhance positive peace. In short, Peace education and awareness creation promotes the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will allow people to develop the behavioral changes that can prevent the occurrence of conflict, resolve conflict peacefully or create the social conditions conducive to peace.

Challenges to conflict prevention
Sustainability

The inability to sustain project activities and gains was identified by majority of the respondents as one of the key challenges CSOs face in their efforts to promote conflict prevention in the region. The organisations attributed this to short term financing and the general lack of donor support and continued support. This confirms the view of Georg (2005), who suggested that most activities of CSOs are not sustainable due to short-term financing and continued donor support. Organisations such as SPI, CODYAC, DAWAH ACADEMY, Amasachina and AGREDS argued that most donor organisations have financed their conflict prevention activities once and have ceased to support such activities. Also, some donors do not have the interest in supporting conflict prevention activities in Ghana and have shifted their focus to countries that are in the transitional periods or experiencing violent conflicts within the sub-region with the view that Ghana is a peaceful country. This phenomenon according to the organisations is as a result of the continuous acclamation of Ghana as the beacon of democracy and oasis of peace in the West African Sub-region which is volatile and unstable.

In addition, organisations such as WANEP-Ghana, CECOTAPS, BADECC and CPYDE pointed out that they have on several occasions received financial support from donors to implement conflict prevention activities. However, such financial support is often in the short-term and sometimes just for a particular activity such as a training programme, a validation workshop or an educational programme. The organisations stated that this has made it difficult for them to continue most of the activities in the region, hence their inability to address the major issues of conflict and promote sustainable peace in the region.

According to the Director of CECOTAPS Rev. Fr. Lazarus Annyereh: "*The first and second phase of our project was supported by the Catholic Relief Services. This support however came to an end after the completion of phase one and two projects. We wish we could continue activities in the two phases as well as expand them, but this was not possible due to the truncation of funding by our donors CRS. As I talk to you, the third phase will be ending this year and we have fears about the continuation of our donors to continue with the phase four which is a continuation of the third phase*" (Wednesday, February 8, 2011 unstructured interviews).

Expectations from beneficiaries

Several organisations interviewed pointed out that, high expectations from beneficiaries constitute a major factor constraining the efforts of CSOs in conflict prevention the study shows. Most of the CSOs argue that conflict prevention activities undertaken by them are advocacy in nature and therefore physical results are not seen, but it is often geared towards behavioural changes within the individual and the society. Other CSOs are of the view

that in the area of conflict prevention results of activities are not instant but take a long term to make an impact. This according to the organizations is because these activities are process in nature and not events and therefore the outcome is not readily available to boast of absolute success. However the beneficiary communities are often looking forward to getting quick results as well as high benefits especially in the case of relief distribution. According to the Director of CODYAC: "*Conflict prevention is not part of the work you see tangible results coming out, so most of the beneficiaries do not understand when you continuously visit them and talk to them. They do not see the tangible results like houses being built, food being provided and many other things. So they think you are doing nothing*" (Thursday, February 10, 2014, unstructured interview as mode of enquiry).

While some view these issues as genuine concerns, others are of the view that the way some organisations present themselves to the people especially the well-resourced CSOs and the multilateral organisations create the room for beneficiaries to often have high expectations about the activities and results of the organisations. According to one respondent, Mrs. Abujaja Afaishat: "*Sometimes how some organisations present themselves to the beneficiaries is interesting. They go there with fashionable cars, hold all sorts of gadgets such as laptops as well as bottled water. So what do you expect the people to think and expect from organisations that call themselves NGOs? Definitely instant results and high benefits*" Tuesday, February 15, 2011 Unstructured interviews).

In addition to the advocacy nature of the activities of CSOs and the way CSOs present themselves, the issue of limited financial resources was mentioned as one of the reasons for the inability of most CSOs to meet the expectations of beneficiaries. In the words of the Director of CECOTAPS: "*In Yendi, the Peace Committee expects the Centre to sponsor all activities initiated by it which to the Centre should not be the case, because our responsibility is to support them. However, the Centre would have wished to do that, but because of the challenge of securing sustainable financial support the Centre is unable to*" (Wednesday, February 8, 2011 unstructured interviews).

Some organisations such as SEND Ghana, WANEP-Ghana, DAWAH Academy, CPYDE and FOSDA have also argued that such situations exist because of the perception of many communities and their leaders who see peace as needed to be brought from outside rather than generated from within and the limited view of their own power to influence and bring peace. As a result of the issues raised above, the organisations concluded that the various stakeholders have lost confidence in the work of the CSOs. In the words of the Director of DAWAH ACADEMY: "*As a result of the high expectations of beneficiaries from the organisations and our inability to meet their expectations has led some of them to say that CSOs are only talking and they are not seeing improvement in the situation. The beneficiaries often run out of patience and do not have the enthusiasm to participate in our conflict prevention activities which without their support and cooperation we cannot have successes*" (Tuesday, February 15, 2011 Unstructured interviews).

The study also indicated that as a result of the non-availability of immediate results of activities of CSOs in conflict prevention, donors are often biased against such interventions-because they do not bring tangible results and instead focus on promoting activities that bring physical results and changes in the communities or society. As observed by the Director of CPYDE Dr. Hussein Zakaria; "*Conflict prevention activities do not bring tangible results so most donors are reluctant to finance such kinds of proposals. Rather they prefer to finance those that have tangible results*" (Unstructured Interview conducted on Tuesday, February 8, 2011).

These findings are similar to the view of Georg (2005), who concluded that activities of conflict and peace are multi-level, multi-sector, multi-casual and multi-faceted phenomena and simple straight forward linkages and cause effect relationships cannot be observed. Moreover, most developments in this area are highly dynamic, if not sometimes erratic and have their ups and downs too. In any case they are hard to measure. This leads many observers to question the value of CSOs activities, even to the point whether they are successful at all.

Funding

Funding was consistently identified as one of the challenges confronting CSOs in their participation in conflict prevention, the study revealed. Since none of the organisations in the sample are financially self-sustainable, inadequate donor funding limits organisational effectiveness in carrying out their conflict prevention activities as well as possibility of organisational growth, introduction of new programmes and increase in the scope of operations. In the view of a staff of FOSDA: "*Limited funds constrain the organization's ability to cover many activities as well as replicate projects and programmes in some areas*" (Monday, February 14, 2011 Unstructured interviews).

Furthermore, some organisations noted that because of financial constraints they are unable to expand their programmes such as relief distribution and rehabilitation in their activities, reach a number of communities with their current activities. Some organisations also expressed a concern that even when organisations receive funding from donors, such support often comes as a onetime donation and not as sustained funding. The donor

funds are also tied up to specific activities and proposals that have been submitted and approved. Organisations such CECOTAPS, WANEP-Ghana and AAG indicated that they can only go out of the proposal after seeking permission which creates undue delays and therefore can affect the implementation of programmes.

This situation according to the organisations is as a result of the reluctance of donors to fund long-term priorities in conflict prevention and is also due to the unattractiveness of Ghana to donors in the area of conflict prevention, the CSOs revealed. According to the respondents this is as a result of the long held perception that Ghana is a beacon of democracy and oasis of peace in the West African Sub-region. This has created a situation where donors feel reluctant to sponsor and support conflict prevention activities in the country. Some donors are also not willing to finance activities of preventing the emergence of violent conflict, rather they are only interested in financing activities that are carried out in communities or countries that have experienced violent conflicts, prevent on-going conflicts from spreading and prevent the re-emergence of violent conflict.

In addition, with the exception of some organisations that have well established structures and are therefore attractive to donors for funding, others do not have the capacity to attract support from donors. Therefore most at times proposals submitted by such organisations are not considered by donors especially when the programmes are large ones. Forster and Mattner (2007) suggest that, CSOs often lack adequate financial resources to implement conflict prevention activities. The financial constraint according to them is often as a result of the source of funding for activities of CSOs. Forster and Mattner argue that funding for most CSOs is donor driven which most at times are inadequate, irregular inflow and the preference by donors to civil society activities on a project by project basis which affords CSOs the limited opportunity to develop long term conflict prevention activities. The issue of funding therefore impedes strategic planning, specialisation and sustained engagement with specific areas or communities and the well-established organisations such as AAG, World Vision, CRS, SEND Ghana, WANEP-Ghana, CECOTAPS, IBIS Ghana and AGREDS face similar problems.

Insecurity

Insecurity was also identified by respondents as one of the major challenges hampering the work of CSOs in peace and development in the region, the study revealed. The insecurity factors identified by the organisations include the periodic eruption of violence and the issuing of threats to staff of CSOs. Most organisations interviewed argued that the periodic eruption of violent conflicts in the region or communities impedes the development of CSOs and in most cases forces them to halt their efforts all together. Explaining further, the CSOs asserted that progress could be made in a particular conflict situation as well as a solid foundation being laid for a successful settlement of the dispute. However when violent clashes do emerge, the progress that has been made is halted and efforts have to be made to start the whole process taking into consideration the new issues, challenges and parties that have emerged culminating into the violent clashes. In some cases, when new violent clashes erupt the attention of CSOs are diverted towards only relief support for victims.

According to the Director of CECOTAPS: "*As a center, most of our interventions especially in the Bunkpurugu-Yunyo conflict are often halted when violent clashes erupt. When this happens we have to respond to the new emerging issues, identify and include new stakeholders as well as re-orient our programmes to respond to the new issues, stakeholders and the new challenges*". In addition to violent conflicts or violence consequences on planned activities and programmes of civil society organisations, several of the organisations in the sample note that at times arrangements could be made to undertake a particular conflict prevention activity such as a football gala, public education and public forum in a particular community. But due to the interruption of violent clashes or mounting of tension in the community, such activities are not undertaken based on the advice of the security agencies regarding the situation.

Another challenge associated with insecurity identified by the CSOs in the sample is, when parties to a conflict especially, those classified as hidden parties are benefiting directly from the conflict, they become uncomfortable with the efforts of the CSOs at resolving the conflict. When such situations exist the hidden parties look for opportunities either to eliminate or paint the efforts of the organisations as not being neutral or as favouring one party against the other party. One respondent during the interview had this to say: "*At a point my wife did not want me to go out in Tamale especially during the Dagbon Chieftaincy crises, because some Dagombas in Tamale see me as an Andani and others see me as an Abudu. When they see me attending to the needs of any of the sections of the conflict during the relief distribution, am considered either as an Andani or Abudu. When I visit the camp of the Andanis, am an Andani and an Abudu when I visit the camp of the Abudus*".

Again, some CSOs observed that when parties to a conflict take entrenched positions and are not willing to cooperate and dialogue, it creates a major challenge to the CSOs, especially when it involves chieftaincy. When parties assert themselves as chiefs in a dispute, it is often difficult to make an entry as peacemakers or peacebuilders. The question that usually arises according to most of the respondents is "*which royal gate should I visit first*?". Several organisations noted that when such situations exist it creates an environment of insecurity and fear within them which has the propensity of derailing the efforts of the staff and the organisations. According to one of the respondents who narrated an experience where the organisation had to

withdraw from initiating a peace process involving two factions in a chieftaincy conflict: "*In one of the communities in the region where two families are claiming ownership to a chieftaincy title we made a move to start a peacebuilding process in that community. We first visited one of the gates and as tradition demands we paid homage to the chief and made our intentions known. We then moved to the other family and did the same. In this whole process, the first family we visited where not happy and threatened not be part of the peace process and even issued death threats to the staff of the organisation including the volunteers within the community*".

Overall, the issue of insecurity impedes the activities of the organisations in the region, puts the lives of staff of CSOs and the volunteers at risk as well as that of the properties and projects of the organisations. This therefore implies that to prevent conflict and build peace, we must ensure that peace initiatives and activities are planned and implemented in a sustained and peaceful environment.

Conclusion

In this study, the work of CSOs in conflict prevention in the Northern Region of Ghana was discussed within the context of their roles and challenges. In their quest to contributing to conflict prevention, CSOs in the Region have carried early warning and early response activities to prepare, mitigate and prevent violent conflicts, research and documentation to generate information to guide and inform new strategies for peace building. Furthermore, CSOs have undertaken post conflict reconstruction to provide sustainable livelihoods in communities affected by violent conflicts, to promote positive relations among conflicting parties in the region as well build peace constituencies, and peace education and awareness creation to increase inter party tolerance, peaceful co-existence and interdependence. However, issues of sustainability, high expectation, networking, funding and insecurity have to some extent weakened the work of CSOs in conflict prevention thereby limiting their impact, coverage and growth. CSOs should not be seen as a substitute for conflict prevention, but rather playing a supportive role and that the central impetus for conflict prevention comes primarily from political actors and protagonists. Therefore, the attitude of government, local politicians and the protagonists to CSOs is also relevant.

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