

An Analysis of Conflicts in Ghana: The Case of Dagbon Chieftaincy

by

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the dynamics of Dagbon chieftaincy conflict in northern Ghana and to examine how Rwandan's *Gacaca* conflict resolution strategy could serve as a reference point for sustainable peace in Dagbon. Respondents and key informants including chiefs, police officers, teachers, District Assembly members and students served as the primary source of data for the study, and also, journals, articles, books, news files, internet publications, radio and newspaper reports served as secondary sources of data. Thus, the paper reveal that lack of justice, political interference, mistrust and the relegation of traditional conflict resolution methods are reasons why Dagbon conflict is protracted. Hence, it is recommended that for sustainable peace to be seen in Dagbon, traditional authority can learn from Rwandan's traditional *Gacaca* conflict resolution system.

Keywords: Dagbon, chieftaincy conflict, Abudu, Andani, northern Ghana

Introduction

Chieftaincy institution is founded on the principle of tradition; chieftaincy without reference to tradition seems an unimaginable concept (Nyaaba, 2009). Africans have great respect for the chieftaincy institution not because of its primordial features, but because of its contribution to community development. Chiefs before the advent of colonialism performed several functions towards not only sustainable community development, but also for security, law making, military, judicial, economic and social welfare functions. Chiefs were subservient in mobilising local people for community action. According to Odotei and Awedoba (2006), the chieftaincy institution in Africa is generally acknowledged as a pre-colonial institution of governance with judicial, legislative and executive powers. Odotei and Awedoba (2006) also reiterate that chiefs were instrumental in military, economic and religious matters in their areas of jurisdiction.

In Ghana, the chieftaincy institution has historical significance, and it also has a legal recognition, making it a formidable foundation. For example, the 1992 constitution of Ghana acknowledges the chieftaincy institution and defines who a chief is in Article 277; “chief means a person, who, hailing from the appropriate family and lineage, who has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or installed as a chief or queen mother in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage” (Republic of Ghana Constitution, 1992). In a similar vein, the new Chieftaincy Act, 2008 (Act 759) has outlined procedures and guidelines for kingmakers on the installation, enskinment, destoolment and deskinment of chiefs. Chiefs are important actors and in the forefront of local development initiatives; some have created educational scholarship schemes; some have used their personal resources to build health centres, schools, provide water supply systems for their communities. Chiefs, just like government officials, have thus become “development agents”, (Awedoba, 2006). Also, chiefs played an important role in the struggle against colonial rule (Prah & Yeboah, 2011). Chiefs have served as traditional conflict resolution experts as well as change agents and leaders of development in their communities, and it is against these and other reasons why in Ghana, the chieftaincy institution has shown so much resilience that long after de-colonisation, it exists as a viable parallel mode of modern governance. However, despite its significance, experiences, recent studies have characterised the chieftaincy institution in Ghana as a potential source of conflict and instability.

Some scholars including Ahiave (2013) argue that the chieftaincy institution in Ghana has been bedevilled with numerous conflicts; hampering progress and for that reason, the institution is of no relevance in contemporary local government. The institution has become a causative agent for several communal conflicts, particularly those related to succession to traditional political office. Examples of such conflicts in Ghana include the: Sucusuku chieftaincy conflict, Sekondi chieftaincy conflict, Dagbon chieftaincy conflict, Cape Coast chieftaincy conflict, Bawku chieftaincy conflict, Ga Mantse succession dispute and the Anlo chieftaincy conflict (Prah & Yeboah, 2011; Kendie & Tuffour, 2014). These among other reasons are why many leaders tried to ban the chieftaincy institution. For example, Ghana’s first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah saw the chieftaincy institution as impediments to modernisation and nation building and tried to curtail the role of chiefs in local government and national politics (Kyed and Buur, 2005). And whereas some of these conflicts have been successfully resolved, the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict still remains protracted. However, it could have been resolved if the Dagbon had applied local methods of conflict resolution. Hence, the best way to resolve the conflict is for the government to use Dagbon traditional methods of conflict resolution to tackle the dispute, this according to Tolon Naa, Major (Rtd.) Sulemana Abubakari (Conteh, 2015).

In the first section of the paper, I have examined the history, causes and manifestations of Dagbon chieftaincy conflict. In the second section, I canvassed the effects of the conflict on development and analysed (in the third section); previous approaches to conflict management and peacebuilding in Dagbon. The fourth section probed why Dagbon chieftaincy conflict still remains protracted. Thus, I propose in the final section that the Rwanda local *Gacaca* conflict resolution method is a strategy the Dagbon can learn from in order to revive their local conflict resolution methods to ensure sustainable peace.

Research Methods and Approach

Data for this paper was collected in 2013 as part of a study into conflicts in Ghana, specifically, in the northern part where the Dagbon are located. A comprehensive multi-layered method of qualitative and quantitative sources of data collection was adopted in collecting and analysing data. Hence, I observed events and conducted interviews with respondents and key informants including chiefs, students, District Assembly members and teachers in Savelugu, Yendi¹ and Tamale². Secondary data including journals, articles, books, internet publications, newspapers, newsletters, news files, radio reports and reviewed thesis were also analysed for this paper. And furthermore, the key step to conflict resolution is to understand the intractability nature and spatio-temporal dynamics of the conflict phenomenon. Hence, this is why research for this paper was carried out; to analyse the protracted nature of Dagbon chieftaincy conflict and then propose a suitable strategy that can help ensure sustainable peace.

Dagbon Chieftaincy Conflict

As customs and traditions of the Dagbon people evolved, it became the practice that any son of a former Ya Na³ who occupied any of the royal gates of Mion, Savulugu and Karaga,⁴ be it an Abudu or Andani⁵ was qualified to be considered a Ya Na in a rotating manner (Brukum, 2004). However, the regent of Karaga gate cannot migrate to Yendi to become a Ya Na, King of Dagbon. The reason is that, Yakubu, the grandfather of Abudus and Andanis gave birth to three sons; Abudulai (Abudu), Andani and Mahami. Abudulai and Andani managed to become the Ya Na of Dagbon in Yendi. But Mahami could not make it to Yendi before dying; therefore, his children could not become a Ya Na over Dagbon since their father Mahami did not make it to the ultimate throne in Yendi as Na Ya. Nevertheless, Mahami's descendants can end and serve as a regent of Karaga because; the successor of Mahami was able to migrate from where his father ended at Kore to Karaga (Aikins, 2012). This custom existed until 1954 when Abudus tried to import a strange practice of Primogeniture; right of inheritance belonging exclusively to the eldest son into the Ya Na throne. This according to Aikins (2012) is purported to be the main source or cause of Dagbon chieftaincy conflict.

Significantly, manifestation of the conflict was seen in 1954 when Ya Na Abudulai III succeeded his father (Na Mahama Bla III). After fifteen years, Ya Na Abudulai III died and an attempt by some elders succeeded in imposing Mahamadu Abudulai IV, a regent from the Abudu gate as successor to his late father. Because of that, there were complaints that pro-Abudu strategy was adopted to protect the interest of the Abudulai family and ultimately eliminate the Andani family from the contest of the throne (Sibidow, 1970). Meanwhile, the Mion Lana Andani, a regent of Mion was the right person to succeed the late Ya Na Abudulai III as custom demands (Aikins, 2012). Later, impartial king makers from Dagbon Traditional Council had Mahamadu Abudulai IV from the Abudu gate deskinned⁶ based on recommendations of the Ollenu Committee in 1974 after sufficient evidence had been adduced and found that he was illegally enskinned (Mahama and Osman, 2005) to allow the Mion Lana Andani from the Andani gate to be installed as the Ya Na.

“Indeed, if the regent, Mahamadu Abudulai had been installed, this would have been the third time since 1948 that the Abudu gate would have occupied the throne to the exclusion of the Andani gate” (Aikins, 2012: 21). The deskinning⁷ of Mahamadu Abudulai IV is also one of the major sources of the conflict because, “You do not destool a Ya Na” in Dagbon (Tsikata and Seini, 2004: 33). According to Ahorsu & Gebe (2011), the Andani family called for the deskinning of Mahamadu Abudulai IV for not being properly enskinned according to Dagbon customs and traditions.

However, Mahamadu Abudulai IV and his Abudu allies did not recognise the Mion Lana Andani when he was enskinned as the Ya Na Yakubu Andani II (Tonah, 2012). After about three decades, the deskinned Mahamadu Abudulai IV died and there was the need to bury him. The Abudus wanted to perform the funeral rites of the late Mahamadu Abudulai IV just as any other legitimate Ya Na and also bury him in the Gbewaa palace. Meanwhile, to benefit from such customary burial, one must have been a legitimate Ya Na who had passed on. The Andanis prevented the Abudus from performing late Mahamadu Abudulai IV funeral rites in the Gbewaa palace because he was not a legitimate King before passing on. This brought a severe clash between the two gates and it took the intervention of the Regional Security Council, District Security Council; police, military National Peace Council and some Civil Society Organisations to ensure relative peace in the area (Aikins, 2012).

Nevertheless, the main issue that led to the death of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II actually began during the preceding Eid-ul-Adha and Bugum/fire festival when the regent of late Mahamadu Abdulai IV (the deskinned) tried to perform certain rituals reserved only for the legitimate Ya Na. The legitimate Ya Na, Yakubu Andani II was not happy about this as he perceived it as an affront to his authority as overlord of the Dagbon (Tonah, 2012). It is alleged that both gates paraded some weapons and decided that the Bugum/fire festival would determine who really controlled Yendi.

In March 2002, there were reports in the Ghanaian media that the two factions, the Abudu and the Andani gates were preparing for war (Tonah, 2012). On 23rd March, the government, acting upon the recommendations of the Northern Regional Security Council, imposed a curfew on Yendi and cancelled the celebration of the Bugum/fire festival. The curfew was lifted by the then Regional Minister after consultation with the Ya Na for the celebration of the festival (Yakubu, 2005). Ya Na Yakubu Andani II also assured the then Regional Minister that there would be no disturbances during the celebration of the festival (Tonah, 2012). The Abudus on the other hand were embittered by the decision to lift the curfew and claimed that if they could not celebrate the Bugum/fire festival, nobody else should.

Citing a police source the report indicated that as the time approached for the celebration of the Bugum/fire festival at Yendi, Ya Na and his elders received threats from unidentified groups of people to the effect that they (the unidentifiable group) were planning to disrupt the festival scheduled for Monday night. As a result of this, tension started mounting in the Yendi Township thereby, prompting the Yendi District Security Council to hold an emergency meeting to decide to re-impose a curfew to avert any unrest (Ahiave, 2013).

None of the sides was able to celebrate the festival which intensified their anger. On March 25th 2002 an attack on an emissary of the Ya Na by a group of Abudu youth and the destruction of his bicycle ignited violent conflict between the two sides (Tonah, 2012). This led to hostilities which continued for three days and eventually resulted in the murder of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II and forty (40) others including his elders on 27th of March, 2002 (Tsikata & Seini, 2004; Macgaffey, 2006; Wuaku-Commission Report, 2002). The news of Ya-Na's assassination was widely reported in the Ghanaian media. Reporting under the caption 'YA-NA KILLED', both *The Daily Graphic* and *The Ghanaian Times* reported on Thursday 28 March 2002 that Ya-Na Yakubu Andani II, King of Dagbon, had been reportedly killed in renewed clashes between the factions in the Dagbon chieftaincy dispute on Tuesday night. Whereas *The Daily Graphic* reported that twenty-four (24) others were killed with him, *The Ghanaian Times* on the other hand put the figure at twenty-five (25) (Daily Graphic, 2002; Ghanaian Times, 2002).

Effects of the Dagbon Chieftaincy Conflict

In 2002 alone, several people were murdered in the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict including the Na Ya as well as the destruction of 36 houses (Tonah, 2012). The atrocity generated a series of conflicts all over the region including Tamale, Yendi and Bimbila. Properties valued at billions of Ghanaian cedis were destroyed. Hence, the government of Ghana had by the end of October spent more than six billion cedis on the Dagbon crisis which erupted in March 2002 and spent about 6.5 million cedis on the Dagbon crisis when Ya Na Yakubu Andani II was murdered (Brukum, 2007). The cost is just the tip of the iceberg, because there are many other expenses which cannot be quantified. In 1994, the government claimed to have spent six billion cedis (C 6,000,000,000) in maintaining peace in northern Ghana alone (Brukum, 2006).

According to Dr. Addo Kuffour, former minister for Defence, the government of Ghana spent over seven billion cedis (US \$9 million) in 2002 to maintain the fragile peace in Dagbon (IRIN, 2013). The money was used to feed security forces deployed in the area as well as for the provision of logistics and equipment to the security troops to help maintain peace in the area (IRIN, 2013). If it were not for the conflict, these monies could have been used for humanitarian and progressive services in the provision of social development like building of schools, clinics, markets centre, libraries, job creation etc., and not for the constant peacekeeping efforts in the area.

More so, the Dagbon chieftaincy violence adversely affected production, marketing and investment in agriculture, most dominant economic activity in the Tamale metropolis. During the outbreak of the violence, farmers engaged in the cultivation of perishable foodstuffs such as watermelons, tomato, pepper, onions etc. suffered heavy losses. Farmers abandoned their crops because they feared being attacked on their farms. Also, transportation networks were disrupted during the violent clashes as farmers were unable to transport their foodstuffs to the market centres. This resulted in the foodstuffs rotting on the farms, leading to a shortage of agricultural products.

Furthermore, the severe violence and insecurity in the metropolis resulted in most financial institutions being unwilling to grant loans to farmers to invest in agricultural production. One of the interviewees said, “the violence and insecurity increased the risk of been denied access to loans” (Respondent, 2013). Another interviewee, a livestock farmer dealing in cattle, sheep, goat and guinea fowl also said, “I made losses while most of my colleague’s livestock were looted by some conflict entrepreneurs” (Respondent, 2013). According to Mr Theophilus Ibrahima Dokurugu, a Board Member of the West Africa Network for Peace Building argue that the Dagbon conflict has now become a business to certain people in both the Abudu and Andani royal gates rather than a chieftaincy problem and many of them will not be able to feed themselves and their families when the two feuding families finally decide to reconcile (Ziem, 2012).

It is also acknowledged that basic human rights were abused during times of violent conflicts which the Dagbon crisis is no exception (Ahorsu & Gebe, 2011). For instance, some of the soldiers who were called upon to restore calm and peace during the 2002 Dagbon chieftaincy conflict allegedly ended up abusing young girls and brutalising people unlawfully. The police at some point in time refused to protect citizens. The police surprisingly turned away several fugitives seeking refuge at the police station during the conflict (Wuako Commission, 2002). And the extent of the conflict was also revealed during an interview when a university student said, “I had returned from campus because of malaria attack, yet, a military officer punched me in the face for suspecting I was one of the youths causing mayhem in the area” (Respondent, 2013). This depicts how human rights were violated during periods of the violent conflicts.

Another effect of the Dagbon conflict is that it forced many youth, vulnerable women and children to migrate and settle in the cities of Accra and Kumasi. Their presence in the cities added up to the already existing social and environmental challenges in the areas. Between the periods of 2002 and 2003, the number of head porters popularly known as ‘Kayaye’⁸ increased when the conflict was at its peak and curfews were been placed on the Dagbon. And according to Ahorsu & Gebe (2011), the conflict caused a relentless internal migration to the peri-urban periphery of southern Ghana including Accra.

Additionally, the conflict affected social cohesion and community mobilisation. The two gates remain suspicious and do not trust each other and do not attend each other’s social functions. The violence in Dagbon has also affected health care delivery and education adversely, the health cost of the violent clashes included deaths, injuries, ill health and psychological disorders among the residents. The situation placed a lot of stress on the limited health infrastructure and personnel in the area. The frequent curfews imposed also affected academic standards because students could not go out to access the libraries; teachers who held evening classes for students were also affected since their movement was restricted. Above all, a cursory look at facilities such as roads, clinics and schools in the metropolis as part of the observation technique applied in this study showed that most of these facilities though are already in bad shape, the conflict pave way for their total destruction.

The destruction of infrastructure like schools, water and health facilities during the violent conflict also negatively affected social development in Dagbon (Canterbury and Kendie, 2010). This is why according to Ghana Statistical Service (2000), the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict witnessed the greatest amounts of violence in Ghana leading to the death of hundreds of people, causing destruction to livelihood and distortion to social services. In a similar vein, Ahorsu & Gebe (2011) argued that the Dagbon conflict have been characterised by the wanton destruction of life and property, development reversals, serious abuse of human rights, and suffering, especially among the vulnerable.

Previous Approaches to Conflict Management and Peacebuilding

Military and Police Intervention

The National, Regional and District Security Councils, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defence through the police and the military have been useful in conflict management and peacebuilding in Dagbon over the years. Military and police were deployed to protect lives and properties in Dagbon. Following the exchange of gunfire in Yendi that lasted for three days (25th to 27th March 2002) leading to the death of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II, a military and police contingent were deployed to re-enforce the existing detachment.

Their duty as usual was to protect lives and properties as well as to monitor and enforce the state of emergency that was imposed on Yendi, Tamale and other catchment areas. In spite of these efforts by the military and police, there is still no sustainable peace in Dagbon.

Commission of Inquiry

After the events of 25th to 27th March 2002 both the Abudus and Andanis as well as other individuals, institutions and groups, including opposition political parties, called on the government to institute an impartial and independent commission to investigate the conflict. Hence, the Wuaku Commission of Inquiry was set up by Constitutional Instrument, 2002 (C.I.36), and thus, the then President, John Agyekum Kufuor, on 25th April, 2002, appointed a three member commission of inquiry, chaired by Justice I.N.K. Wuaku, to investigate the Yendi disturbances (Wuaku-Commission Report, 2002). Among the findings of the commission include “The late Ya Na and all those killed within the Palace and its environs were killed by Abudu fighters.....” (Wuaku-Commission Report, 2002). The Commission also recommended the arrest and prosecution of several individuals for their alleged involvement in offences such as conspiracy to murder, attempted murder, causing unlawful damage, assault, illegal possession of weapons, and unlawful military training. However, there has not been a complete peace in the face of this Commission.

The Role of Civil Society Organisations

Civil Society Organisations including Faith-Based Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations and specialised United Nations agencies on their own initiatives and in collaboration with the state have played diverse and important roles in mitigating against the adverse effects of the Dagbon conflict (Ahorsu & Gebe, 2011). Apart from the provision of relief services to the displaced during the crisis, they helped organise sensitisation programmes aimed at educating people on the need for peaceful co-existence in Dagbon (Ahiave, 2013). And although their roles have been significant, there is still no sustainable peace in Dagbon.

Committee of Eminent Chiefs

In 2003, the then president of Ghana; John Agyekum Kufour constituted a Committee of four Eminent Chiefs led by Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Ashanti King. Their responsibility was to find a durable solution to the chieftaincy dispute in Dagbon. After a long period of deliberations and a series of negotiations, representatives of the two feuding gates in Dagbon signed a “Roadmap to Peace” on 30 March in 2006.

The “Roadmap to Peace” enumerated five major benchmarks in the peacebuilding process to include the burial of the late Ya Na Yakubu Andani II; the installation of the regent of the late king; the performance of the funeral of the deposed Mahamadu Abdulai IV; the performance of the funeral of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II; and finally, the selection and enskinment of a new Ya Na for Dagbon. Eight years after the signing of the roadmap only the first two proposals have been implemented with the remaining being shelved due to continuing disagreement between the two factions (Tonah, 2012).

The Committee’s effort has not been totally successful because it is only the local people that can solve the conflict using their own indigenous conflict resolution methods and not for a third party mediators. This is why Emmanuel Bombande, former head of the West Africa Network for Peace Building has stated that, Otumfuo’s Committee will only serve as a mediator and platform for peace and not offer a solution to the dispute (Conteh, 2015). And moreover, according to the respondents, lack of justice, political interference, mistrust and largely, the relegation of traditional conflict resolution mechanism are the key reasons why sustainable peace is absent in Dagbon in spite of the numerous efforts carried out.

Why Dagbon Conflict Remains Protracted

Lack of Justice

A senior police officer said, “The main issue in the perspectives of the two gates is justice seeking” (Respondent, 2013). Both the Abudu and the Andani gates feel justice has not been served over ascension to the throne. The Abudus are of the view that, they have been denied justice to perform the funeral rites of the late Mahamadu Abudulai IV and also their position is that since the late Ya Na Yakubu Andani II from the Andani gate was dead, it was their turn to hold the throne. The position of the Andani party is for them to maintain the throne because; the late Ya Na Yakubu Andani II did not die a natural death, and they feel that justice is denied them since a decade later, the government has not located the killers.

Political Interference

Political manoeuvring and implicit actions by influential individuals linked to the two gates and supported by ruling political elites who have held sensitive positions in the immediate past might have also contributed to the death of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II (Ahorsu & Gebe, 2011). During a one on one interview with a teacher in Tamale, he said that, “Manipulations of historical memories to evoke emotions such as fear, resentment and hatred by some politicians and conflict entrepreneurs into the minds of the younger generation have contributed to the intractable nature of the chieftaincy conflict in Dagbon” (Respondent, 2013).

Some politicians and conflict entrepreneurs from the two leading political parties in Ghana; the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress have aligned themselves to the Abudu and Andani gates respectively for political gains which in turn prolong the conflict. Thus, the murder of the late Ya Na Yakubu Andani II on March 27, 2002, took place during a time when the New Patriotic Party government was in power for the first time (Tsikata and Seini, 2004). Hence, the Andani royal family and their sympathisers believe that they had a hand in the death of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II (Ahiave, 2013; Yakubu, 2005). It is also captured in the Wuako Commission's report that, "Deeply intertwined with the local (Abudu–Andani) rivalry was the intrusion of national politics into chieftaincy matters in Dagbon. The Abudu royal gate, believed to be historically sympathetic to the Busia-Danquah political tradition from which the reigning (New Patriotic Party) emerged, considered the their victory in the 2000 elections as an opportunity to boost political stature at the local front and re-launched grievance previously held in abeyance. This is why the Abudus had high expectations from the New Patriotic Party victory (Ahorsu and Gebe 2011). Thus, they started contesting the Ya Na's monopolistic control over certain events and ceremonies including the traditional Bugum/fire and Eid-ul-Adha festivals, although, the Ya Na's sole control over these festivals had never been called to question" (Wuaku-Commission Report, 2002: 65). And thus, the National Democratic Congress used the death of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II as a key campaign message in the 2004 and 2008 general elections. Indeed, the party promised in its 2008 election manifesto to set up a new and truly non-partisan and independent presidential commission to look critically into the murder of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II and his elders in March 2002 and bring culprits into justice (Tonah, 2012).

Mistrust

In his study, Ahiave (2013) found that the Abudus had refused to approach the Kuga-Na⁹ to admit their guilt and apologise through him to the Andani gate in the form of peace making. One District Assembly respondent said, "Abudus have refused to approach the Kuga-Na because they (Abudus) are suspected to be embittered by the then Kuga-Na's refusal to allow them to bury Mahamadu Abudulai IV in the Gbewaa palace". Another respondent argued that, "Abudus have also accused the Kuga-Na of wanting to ignore and obliterate the legacy and memory of Mahamadu Abudulai IV by endorsing the decision of the Andani gate to install the regent of Naa Yakubu Andani II". The two clans remain suspicious of each other and do not attend each other's social functions. There have also been allegations that both have been arming themselves for a possible showdown (IRIN, 2013). Also, as part of the observation techniques employed in this study, it was revealed that the two gates do not trust each other as evident in a number of social gatherings I observed. During an interview with students at the University of Cape Coast who are also natives of Dagbon, an Abudu student said, "I feel insecure as an Abudu in the company of Andanis" (Respondent, 2013), and an Andani student said. "I do not attend Abudu gathering although we are all natives of Dagbon, because I cannot trust them" (Respondent, 2013). This is a clear manifestation of how mistrust has been transferred from parents to their children, making the conflict more protracted.

Relegation of Dagbon Traditional Conflict Resolution

In the case of disputes arising from chieftaincy, especially over the Ya Na's throne, Kuga-Na mediates between the two gates, the decision or plea to the Ya Na or his regent cannot be ignored (Tonah, 2012). And in extreme cases, the issue was referred to Nayiri¹⁰ who mediate and resolve the disputes, although candidates for the Ya Na throne were selected by the traditional selection committee through soothsaying and divination (Yakubu, 2005). This practice helped to avoid disputes which might lead to violent conflict and bloodshed (Ahiave, 2013). Yet, these potential traditional conflict resolution systems used in Dagbon in the past with the involvement of the Kuga-Na to maintain peace has been relegated to the background and a main reason why the Dagbon conflict has remained protracted, and thus, for sustainable peace to be seen in Dagbon, traditional approaches to conflict management and peacebuilding must be applied.

Proposed Conflict Resolution Mechanism for Peacebuilding in Dagbon

A few African nations have applied local conflict resolution mechanisms in managing and resolving ethnic, religious, chieftaincy and resource based conflicts. These traditional conflict resolution strategies for peacebuilding used include mediation, reconciliation, negotiation, conciliation, avoidance, accommodation and truth saying. The local techniques used also encouraged a win-win approach or non-zero sum game approach and created harmony through active participation in the process by all parties wherein the disputants unlike the Western approach, which promotes litigation and zero-sum game; and the winner takes all (Brock-Utne, 2001).

War victimised countries including Rwanda, Mozambique and South Africa have used local conflict resolution methods of *Gacaca*, *Amnesia*, and *Ubuntu* respectively to ensure sustainable peace in the aftermath of wars. Hence, African traditional conflict resolution methods are feasible, less expensive, promote local participation, serves as a source of wound healing and creates the basis for re-establishing social solidarity (Zartman, 2000). For example, the case of Rwandan's local *Gacaca* conflict resolution system is why there can be sustainable peace in Dagbon if the relegated Dagbon traditional conflict resolution techniques used in the past are once again revived and applied in the chieftaincy conflict between the Abudu and the Andani gates.

Lessons from Rwandan's Traditional *Gacaca* Conflict Resolution Method

As part of international community's effort in peacebuilding in Rwanda, an international court of Arusha was set up in Tanzania by the United Nations to try the perpetrators of the genocide. Although the court of Arusha played a significant role, it became obvious that the processes was slow, time consuming and cumbersome. In the light of this, Rwandans locally initiated mass trials using their own indigenous traditional court called *Gacaca*. The *Gacaca* traditional resolution method was used to ensure the peaceful atmosphere currently enjoyed in Rwanda. '*Gacaca*' is a Kiyarwanda concept, a traditional village based courts where village elders and their community members gather for problem solving, conflict resolution and peace-making mostly under trees or sitting on grass. As part of the *Gacaca* process, the genocide suspects are taken to the villages where they allegedly committed their crimes and confronted directly by their accusers. The trials are not overseen by legally qualified judges but elderly people respected for their integrity, impartiality and sense of humour in the community (Q & A: Rwanda's long search for justice, 2004).

Mostly, perpetrators are brought in the courts to tell their story and victims are also given the chance to share their story while all the community members including the local judges sit to listen. In addition to listening to the perpetrators confess their crimes before the genocide survivors, the court also listened to survivors express their trauma and suffering before the perpetrators (Koko, 2014). Koko (2014) reiterates that in doing so, the survivors gave the perpetrators the opportunity to measure the destructive impact of their crimes on innocent people. The *Gacaca* courts provided the survivors an opportunity to know their killers and to express their suffering before the perpetrators, expecting them to apologise. The practice is also seen as healing of wounds and psychological trauma for both parties. It gave the perpetrator the unique opportunity not only to measure the impacts of his or her crimes, but also to apologise before the victims and their relatives. Perpetrators explicitly expressed their apology and showed genuine remorse using phrases such as, "I am sorry, please forgive me", showing their self-reproach and their willingness for repentance (Koko, 2014). The *Gacaca* approach based on Rwanda's reconciliation strategy is a best practice for conflict resolution (Clemons and McBeth, 2001).

Why Dagbon Leaders Must Learn from the *Gacaca* Conflict Resolution Strategy

The government of Ghana's effort through the National, Regional and District Security Councils and the formal Courts systems have demonstrated higher commitments in resolving the Dagbon conflict. However, the conflict stands unresolved, and even protracted. The reason is that, the traditional methods of resolving conflict by the local people have not been given the needed attention.

The best way to ensure sustainable peace in Dagbon is for them to apply their own local conflict resolution techniques where soothsayers and the Kuga-Na as well as the Nayiri could play a key role in the chieftaincy succession processes. Thus, the government of Ghana must resort to local methods of dealing with the conflict like the Rwandans did, and not through formal court systems or in the establishment of committees and commissions, because they have not ensured sustainable peace in Dagbon.

Importantly, just as in the local *Gacaca* system where the perpetrators voluntarily asked for forgiveness from their victims through the local judges as part of the peace-making process, leaders of the Abudu gate may also apologise to the Andani gate through the Kuga-Na who in this context may serve as a local judge since it has been established that, “The late Ya Na and all those killed within the Palace and its environs were killed by Abudu fighters.....” (Wuaku-Commission Report, 2002). Afterwards, soothsayers must be allowed to perform rituals in the new Ya Na installation process. And in re-echoing the words of Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, traditional rulers and the Dagbon people themselves are the best people to resolve the matter (GhanaWeb, 2015).

The main lesson learned from Rwandan’s local *Gacaca* court system is that it was free from external influence and political interference; it was non-partial and restorative in nature. It was also administered by local judges in local courts. The Nayiri of Mampurugu as well as the Kuga-Na who according to Dagbon tradition are the right persons to mediate and also advise the conflicting parties must be allowed to perform their customary role without fear or favour. Since their decision or plea cannot be ignored, I strongly believe that their involvement can help ensure sustainable peace in Dagbon. For example, in the 17th century, following the death of Naa Gungobli, the Nayiri mediated a succession dispute among nine contestants for the skins of Yani which helped to avoid dispute which could have resulted in violent conflict and bloodshed such as the 2002 Dagbon crisis leading to Ya Na’s death (Ahiave 2013).

Conclusion

Chieftaincy succession conflict is a major problem to national development in Ghana. There are many issues of chieftaincy dispute in almost all regions; however, Ghana’s northern region via Dagon chieftaincy comes with a high severity for all. The conflict is quite unique in that it has characteristic and stand-alone aspects from other chieftaincy related conflicts, and thus, no other chieftaincy conflict has so passionately divided the political elite in Ghana as the Dagbon conflict has. The key issue is again that the Andani gate want to get those who killed the Ya Na punished and still have someone from the Andani gate as the overlord of the traditional area because the late Ya Na did not die a natural death as the Abudu gate want to gain access to the throne by performing late Mahamadu Abdulai IV funeral rites in the Gbewaa palace.

In this conflict, modern approaches to peacebuilding including police and military intervention, and commission of inquiry has contributed to resolving the conflict. However, for sustainable peace to be enjoyed in Dagbon, traditional conflict resolution techniques from within the local people with the involvement of Kuga-Na, Nayiri and soothsayers should be applied as the best source for sustainable peace in the region.

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Footnotes

¹ The official location where the Ya Na's Gbewaa palace is located.

² The administrative capital of the northern region of Ghana.

³ The customary title name for the King of Dagbon.

⁴ Mion, Savulugu and Karaga; are the three key gates from which a person is drawn from to serve as a Ya Na. Without serving as a regent in any of these three gates, one can't assume the Ya Na-ship title even if one is a royal.

⁵ The two main gates with both legal and customary mandates to assume the Ya Na throne.

⁶ Deskinment as used in the northern part of Ghana means, the removal of a chief from office. It also means destoolment as used in the southern part of Ghana.

⁷ The only way to do that was to kill him, in spite of his deskinment, his people (gate) may recognise him as the King though unacceptable.

⁸ Unskilled labourers, mostly women aged from 10 to 65 years who carry luggage for menial monies. They are also homeless and sleep in front of people's shops. They are exposed to rape and malaria, especially, those with babies. It is surprising to see government agents collecting levy from them in spite of their predicament.

⁹ The supreme father of both the Abudu and Andani gates, possessed with great wisdom and respected by all. It is also believed that he is always right and his decisions are respected by all in Dagbon. His roles include, settling dispute using traditional methods.

¹⁰ The King of Mampurugu is also blessed with divine wisdom and respected by all. He is consulted in extreme cases where the Kuga-Na needs assistance in conflict resolution.