REPORT ON THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON CONFLICT, SECURITY AND STABILITY IN NORTHERN GHANA

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The STAR Ghana Foundation belongs to the people of Ghana. We create platforms for ordinary people, particularly the most marginalised in society, to become active citizens who demand positive change in their lives and communities.

Our vision is to see a well-informed and active Ghanaian citizenry able to contribute to transformational change that advances democracy, accountability and social inclusion.

We want to increase the effectiveness of citizens and civil society to achieve an equitable, inclusive society by convening inclusive dialogue and collaboration; catalysing active citizenship and collective action; coordinating and supporting strategic partnerships, and facilitating continuous learning to fuel wider scale change.

Our ultimate goal is to ensure all citizens, regardless of gender, disability, age or location, are empowered to participate in decisions and raise concerns. We will continue to support a vibrant civil society to engage constructively with the government and drive forward a transformative development agenda that will leave nobody behind.

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INTRODUCTION

The National Dialogue on Conflicts, Security and Stability was organized in partnership with National Peace Council, Northern Development Authority and Northern Development Forum with funding from Foreign Commonwealth Development Office. The dialogue brought together state and non-state actors, civil society organizations, traditional authorities, security agencies and the media to discuss the underlying causes of conflict in Northern Ghana and develop a roadmap to promote inclusive development, peace, and stability in Northern Ghana.
Dr. Alhassan Anamzoya expressed an appreciation for the dialogue because it offers a platform to discuss how to achieve development of the Northern Sector. He commended government, national youth organizations, CSOs, religious leaders and development partners for the resolution of the chieftaincy conflict in Dagbon. According to him, “conflict is a major threat to peace and security in any community and there is a need to appreciate the value of peace and security in the modernization of any country.”

He noted that such an opportunity to diagnose factors of conflict and insecurity and explore strategies to resolve them could not have come at a better time.

He called upon the government and development partners to aid tackle the issue of unemployment in the North particularly amongst the uneducated and unskilled as “in idle hands lie weapons of violent conflicts”.

He pledged continuous support from the NDA to promoting peace and hoped that the dialogue will contribute to generating practical solutions to addressing the issues of conflict and instability in Northern Ghana.
Philip Smith expressed thanks to STAR Ghana and partners for the event and highlighted that the role of CSOs was needed now more than ever and the UK was committed to supporting CSOs in engaging government on issues of security and development. He noted that “Northern Ghana has historically struggled with conflict and security making it vulnerable to regional security threats and violence.” Increasing violent conflict and extremist groups from the Sahel are gaining momentum on the African continent and threatening a spill over in safe havens such as Ghana.

He mentioned that the threat of violence is further exacerbated by factors such as proximity to border communities, religious affinities, lack of formal jobs, inequalities, and existing historical disputes. “Heightened threats of terrorism in bordering countries calls for an urgent need to build Ghana’s capacity to prevent, preempt, protect, and respond to any such attacks.”

The development of Northern Ghana matters to Ghana and the UK. High level inequalities create a vicious cycle of high population growth, poor education and lacks development progress. Accelerated development of northern Ghana can be achieved when CSOs exert pressure on government to deliver its manifesto commitment and bridge the inequality gaps between the North and the South of the country.

Despite the pandemic, development partners are still committed to supporting government to ensure the gap between the north and south does not widen. “UK remains committed to support Ghana to maintain the image as a beacon of stability and prosperity on the African continent.”

He was hopeful that the conversation will build strong evidence of potentials drivers and vulnerabilities and make recommendations for prevention and response mechanisms to maintain Ghana’s resilience against extremism and organized crime – the final roadmap for peace and security will act as a blueprint for promoting security in Northern Ghana.
Two years ago, Regional Ministers in Northern Ghana with support from the STAR-Ghana Foundation, and funding from the FCDO organized the first Northern Development Summit which was implemented by Regional Coordinating Councils. “One key recommendation of the summit was to address the systemic and root causes of instability and underdevelopment of Northern Ghana. It was noted that without sustainable peace in northern Ghana, development will not be possible.”

The Conflict, Security Stability Project in Northern Ghana is a 2 months project funded by FCDO with the objective of developing a framework for peace, security, and development in Northern Ghana. For peace to contribute to development, it must be sustainable, and to be sustainable, it must be owned by all, inclusive of all voices and process of developing a framework is as important as its output.

Key strategy has been to consult a wide group of stakeholders - regional convenings were held in Bolgatanga, Wa and Tamale to solicit opinions and recommendations from a cross-section of citizens in Northern Ghana. Several radio discussions were held to broaden the scope of consultations.

A technical support group made of experts in gender, peace, inclusive development was set up to provide technical support and factor past lessons and experiences into the development of the roadmap. The purpose of the national level dialogue was to present the key findings and recommendations for input by stakeholders present and he expressed the expectation that the roadmap will be owned by all, inclusive of everyone views and suggestions with citizens ready to progress with the roadmap.
Dr. Adu-Gyamfi mentioned that the National Peace council was pleased to participate in such an important process which sought to consolidate the peace and stability of the country.

He highlighted that since 1992 till date, 8 elections have been held in Ghana and although not perfect, the nation has been touted as a stable democracy and a beacon of stability in Africa.

Research indicates that the current threat to peace and stability in Ghana includes armed robbery, tribal and chieftaincy conflicts, terrorism, vigilantism, and electoral violence. The nature of recent crimes requires a well-equipped security service with the capacity to act faster than perpetrators.

In Northern Ghana, most issues that have resulted in violence, disruptions and instability are centered around chieftaincy and land issues such as the Bawku, Yendi, Bimbilla and Chereponi land issues. “The narrative is changing however- there has been relative peace and stability in the Bawku, Bimbilla area and there is need to identify some best practices and build on the gains to sustain the peace.” The Peace Council made 3 suggestions to the forum:

First, Address the perennial issues of caretaker chiefs overstaying in office to assume position of a legitimate chief. He called for support for current efforts of the Dagbon chiefs and indigens to revise their traditional constitutions to resolve the durations of chiefs in office.

Secondly, National House of Chiefs to complete the process of codifying of traditional areas to bring clarity and certainty on occupation of vacant seats particularly in the North- he called on government, development partners and CSOs to lend support to these efforts.

Third, Address issues of ownership of title lands and farmlands and give it a legal backing. He hoped that the forum provides a platform to dialogue on the way forward to build stronger resilience against the existing and potential threats in the five Northern regions and in doing so, endeavor to bring all on board, move together regardless of differences and focus on the bigger picture of sustainable peace and development in the Northern region. He said the National Peace Council will continue to be a partner to contribute to peace and stability in Ghana.
Session 3: Analysis of drivers of Conflict: Perspectives of Traditional Authority

His Royal Highness
Ambassador Yakubu Abdullahi
Sagnarigu Chief

His Royal Highness Ambassador Yakubu Abdullahi highlighted chieftaincy disputes, land ownership issues, traditional governance of multi-ethnic kingdoms, religious disputes, illiteracy, political vigilantism, and challenges to the rule of law as the main drivers of conflict in northern Ghana. With challenges to the rule of law, he mentioned how security forces were not up to task and had inadequate logistics, how influential groups seem to be immune to the law such that they perpetrate violence without fear of repercussion, the high cost of litigations and the long delays in legal cases.

“Consequences of such conflicts have effects on the social, economic and political atmosphere in the country and sees state resources for development and running public institutions being diverted into conflict management, perpetuating poverty and underdevelopment.”

The way forward in managing conflicts was for state intelligence and security agencies to be accountable to become more accountable in their operations and response to peace and stability. “There is a need to adequately resource the intelligence and security forces to function without political interference or pressure.” On how many conflicts are recurrent despite efforts to solve them, “he noted that the management of conflict hardly pay attention to the root or remote causes of conflicts. He urged government, CSOs and NGOs to research into the remote causes of the perennial conflicts and identify sustainable solutions.”
He stressed on measures to promote peace. First, government must strengthen the National and Regional Peace councils by providing them with funding and logistics. Peace Councils in the various regions have traditional leaders, clergy and other recognized groups which are non-partisan to enable them deal with conflicts.

There is an urgent need for the codification of succession line- this is important because succession is one of the contributing factors of conflicts. Land disputes are also a prevalent cause of conflicts in the North. Legalities must be applied to lands to avoid conflicts.

“To achieve peace, stability in Northern Ghana, there was a need to be honest and accountable to each other.”
Session 4: Presentation on drivers of conflict and security in Northern Ghana

"A peaceful Northern Ghana will contribute immensely to the peace and security of Ghana and that is why this dialogue has been called. It goes beyond hailing from the Northern part of Ghana because without peace in the North, the touting of the nation as a peace haven is incomplete."

It is essential that in tackling the root cause of conflict, periodic conflict analysis to deepen understanding of the nature of conflicts as stakeholders is important.

The poverty rate in Northern Ghana is 3-times higher than the national average; and it is important to consider poverty as one of the underlying causes of conflict and how such development challenges are being managed.

Drivers of conflicts in Northern Ghana include: land governance and its tenure system and chieftaincy succession; youth unemployment and the limited space in accessing decent work and employment. Beyond creating projects, analyzing how these projects are managed to be inclusive to address the growing unemployment in Northern Ghana.

Weak state institutions- poor institutional performance within the local governance system in Northern Ghana has created an environment for corruption. Local governance system often addresses conflicts rather than responding to the development needs of the region.

Low confidence in the security and justice system.
Political party violence and the winner takes all system; deepened development inequalities by unfair distributions of development polices and not targeting the actual needs of the people in the region.

Border security challenges: the porous nature of the borders create an avenue for racism and extremism to enter the country. There was a need to have a prepared and prevention culture.

Masculinities, youth, and violence sees youth being militarized by families and security agencies, violent extremism and terrorism.

Natural disasters and climate- perennial floods from the Bagre Dam and the droughts creates food insecurity.

Farmer herdes clashes and growing fulaniphobia: there are a lot of emerging farming conflicts over issues such as grazing land and water resources for cattle. Growing stigma against the Fulani community results in their lynching or murder for alleged crimes.

Negative imaginaries of the Northern region and being a northerner: negative stereotype of northerners as being violent and defensive people and are only good for menial jobs.
Session 5: Causes and drivers of conflict in Northern Ghana

Nana Prugu mentioned the centrality of the youth in conflicts and issues of vigilantism as due to their socialization and their mobilization. He highlighted that these youth were often misinformed, misused and abused further making them vulnerable to recruits for violence activities. There was also the issue of lack of information of how to properly manage and sustain their resources.

National Youth Authority rep cited traditional structures as a challenge which could be overcome by capacity building for traditional chiefs in leadership. Elsie Tackie-Mensah from KAIPTC shared that because conflicts and vigilantism were human rights violations, they had to be dealt with from a human rights approach. She noted that research needed to be conducted on the contemporary way that radicalization and poaching of the youth is being done.
Paul Osei-Kuffour (online participant) bemoaned how urbanization affects farmlands, and how lands are being purchased recently with no compensation for indigens which is a rising cause of conflicts.

Underestimation of what the youth face and their exclusion in decision making makes them prone to unprofitable and violent behaviors.
Session 6: Presentation of strategies to addressing the drivers of conflict and insecurity in Northern Ghana

- Facilitate the creation of a northern Ghana Peace Institute; well established, independent, and well-funded.
- Invest in creating decent jobs, making existing initiatives such as youth employment program and nation builders corps sustainable.
- Support nonviolent communications for social change – communications across mass and social media must be non-violent and promote social change. Social media spaces should be detoxified to ensure peace.
- Promote local economic development- interventions to empower MMDAs with local development agendas, adopt local initiatives to develop areas to ensure economic empowerment of the youth. Seasonal festival of arts and culture must be functional and Institutionalized.
- Support non-partisan Northern Ghana thinktank who will develop localized strategies on deliberating issues that affect the Northern Belt.
• Create inclusive spaces of dialogue looking at mitigating violence and radicalization and such spaces must be intentional to engage with youth identify groups.

• Create a voice for women in peace initiatives- strengthen existing structures such as Queen mothers association.

• Working with traditional authority: voice and authority to lead at the fore front of these issues.

• Promote positive imaging of Northern Ghana.
Session 7: Open Forum Strategies for combating conflict and insecurity

Reinforce public awareness and sensitizations on peace and complement with sanctions for perpetrators of conflicts and violence to restrain the urges of the youth. NPC shared a highlight from a boot camp organized in election prone constituencies was that although strategies were put in place to reduce violence, there was an urgent need to leverage on such gains to sustain the platform beyond elections.

The Representation from the National Youth Authority noted two existing structures that could be leveraged to reduce the high incidences of vigilantism amongst the youth. The first was the Youth Parliament which is an advocacy platform for young people to engage on issues and suggest alternative ways of addressing them. The second was the umbrella Youth groups which is the mouthpiece of all registered youth groups in Ghana. The platform provides an opportunity for all interest groups to engage on issues and develop solutions. He noted that “when young people are included in conversations from the start, they are always involved, and try to contribute and also listen to the authorities which can be helpful to reduce vigilantism.”

Traditional rulers can transform ‘young warrior groups’ in areas such as Dagbon to be more proactive and construct role by mentoring them in the local governance system.
To tackle the high rate of unemployment, it was also suggested that the youth was trained with adequate required skills and that there was a need to discuss a reform of the educational system from the current academic focus to a more practical focus.

Regional Ministers and MMDAs must have capacity building sessions to enhance their capacity in intervention skills considering the huge role they play in ensuring that peace of their respective regions and constituencies. There was a suggestion to have an allocation in the budgets to support Peace Initiatives as a way of combating violence.

Instituting an award system for journalists who often project the North in a positive light or throwing out challenges to encourage a more positive imaging of Northern Ghana.

Non formal education should be encouraged to improve literacy and numeracy skills of the youth, to increase their access to decent jobs.

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