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### Editorial

4

### Articles

Eugenia Amporfufu: The Gap Between the Health Status of Rural and Urban. Women in Ghana: A Case Study of Patients at a Mission Hospital in the Ashanti Region 6

Vijay Bhasin: Determinants of Technical Efficiency of Women Entrepreneurs in the Food Processing Enterprises in Cape Coast 24

Godwin Kofi Vondolia: Do Ghanaian Farmers have Preferences for the National Biodiversity Strategy?: A Case Study of Farmers Living Around the Kakum National Park in the Central Region 48

Kwabena A. Anaman and Charity Osei-Amponsah: Determinants of the Output of the Manufacturing Industry in Ghana from 1974 to 2006 69

Ernest K. Awanta: Students' Views of Mathematics : A Survey of Some Ghanaian Schools 90

Mohammed Sulemana: Understanding the Causes and Impacts of Conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana 110

Notes to Contributors 140

# UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES AND IMPACTS OF CONFLICTS IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF GHANA\*

by  
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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the causes and impacts of conflicts in Northern Region with particular reference to the Konkomba inter-ethnic conflicts. It situates the question of conflict within the context of the Northern Region of Ghana and defines conflict as a situation in which people, groups or individuals are involved in a serious disagreement or argument which degenerates into violence. Conflict can also be seen as antagonism between individuals or groups in society. An analysis of inter-ethnic conflicts in Northern Region reveals a pattern of struggle for paramountcy and autonomy. One of the main causes of conflict between Konkomba and other ethnic groups such as the Dagomba, Nanumba and Gonja is the struggle for paramountcy and autonomy. Land ownership and control of land are another major source of ethnic conflicts in Northern Region. Land has remained a thorny social, economic and political issue which has generated a lot of ethnic conflicts between Konkombas and Bimobas, Konkombas and Dagombas, Konkombas and Nanumbas, Konkombas and Gonjas, Gonjas and Nawuris and recently Konkombas and Nawuris.

The study relies on a survey of 600 people in different parts of the Northern Region to ascertain the perceptions of people about conflicts in the region. The analysis suggests that almost all the respondents are of the view that an impending major conflict is likely to occur in the Northern Region. There is enough evidence to suggest that all the ethnic groups that were involved in the major conflict in 1994 are stock piling arms to be used in the event of another ethnic war. This observation calls for an urgent examination of potential dangers of another inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflict. The early warning signs detected from this study are unambiguous. Therefore adequate measures must be adopted by the Government of Ghana to forestall a major conflict in the Northern Region in the near future.

**Key words:** conflict, resolution, ethnicity, ethnic conflicts, impacts of conflicts, wars

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Nothing raises so much fear and apprehension in the Northern Region of Ghana as the speculation of fresh ethnic conflicts, similar to those that rocked the Region in 1994. The wave of inter-ethnic conflicts and intra-ethnic conflicts in recent times went down in Ghana's history as the worst since political independence in 1957. The notion that violence may arise again has made the issue of ethnic conflicts a sensitive, yet important subject for discussion, aimed at formulating policy options for conflict management. Indeed, whenever the issue is raised, there have often been misconceptions, panic, confusion and skepticism, within the government, opposition, civil society organisations as well as within public circles and among conflicting parties.

It is a historical fact and current reality that most districts in Northern Region are haunted by actual or potential ethnic conflicts. This is partly because of the fact that different communities continue to consciously or unconsciously rely on ethnicity to perpetuate their dominance and hegemony in an atmosphere characterised by fear, suspicion and prejudice. The proliferation of ethnic conflicts in this region is so widespread that there is hardly any district where the problem has not reared its ugly head. West Gonja District, Nanumba South District, Nanumba North District, Gusheigu-Karaga District, Yendi District, East Gonja District, Bole District, Tamale Metropolitan Assembly, Saboba-Chereponi and Zabzugu-Tatale are all examples of areas where some conflicts have occurred. The necessity for a new paradigm in approaching the issue of ethnic conflicts and their management cannot therefore be overemphasised in this context. From the recent experience as well as studies carried out on ethnic conflicts in Northern Region, there is increasing evidence to suggest that even where a conflict has been brought under control, psychological trauma (i.e. fear and suspicion) left behind are seldom healed. In this context, we view ethnic conflicts as the anti-thesis of peace, stability and sustainable development and hence the need for inquiry into the causes and management of conflicts using non-violent means.

The main objectives of this study are to provide a brief outline of the causes and impacts of ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana with particular reference

to the Konkomba inter-ethnic conflicts and to discuss the way forward in terms of conflict management and conflict prevention. The rest of this paper is organised as follows: the next section (Section 2) provides some working definitions of ethnic conflicts and a set of propositions capturing the essence of our understanding of ethnic conflicts and the management of these conflicts. This is followed by a description of the methodology used for this study in Section 3. An overview of some ethnic wars in the Northern Region is provided in Section 4. Section 5 is devoted to the causes of ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region. The next section (Section 6) deals with the impacts of the ethnic conflicts in Northern Region with particular reference to the Guinea Fowl War. The seventh section evaluates the conflict resolution efforts after the major 1994 ethnic conflict. The eighth section deals with policy implications of the study. The ninth and final section concludes the paper.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND DEFINITIONS

### 2.1. Introduction

Ethnic groups are groups of people who see themselves or are seen by others as sharing a distinctive and enduring collective identity and traits based on certain features (Achebe, 1975). These features include belief in a common origin, a common ancestral heritage, a common history, a common lineage, a common kinship, a common destiny and culturally-specific practices and beliefs, common/shared interest/aspirations, social cohesion, physical appearance, language, a shared geographical territory. Common religious beliefs and practices may further contribute in varying degrees to ethnic identity. An ethnic conflict refers to a situation where people mobilise to fight other people on the basis of ethnic identity. An ethnic conflict could be inter-tribal or intra-tribal. The term **identity conflict** is increasingly used as an alternative to ethnic conflict (Amutabi, 1995). The former expression defines conflict in terms of one of its dominant drivers (the need for identity). However, since the focus of this paper is on ethnic conflict as the dominant line of tension in Northern Region, the term ethnic conflict is preferred and is therefore used in this paper.



## 2.2. Propositions of Ethnic Conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana

We outline with further explanation five main propositions concerning ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana. These are as follows:

1. Ethnic conflict in the Northern Region may not cease either on the ground or in people's minds for a long time; unless contending parties and groups resolutely embark on a conscious effort to manage conflicts as well as to build a civil society that is relatively free from intolerance, discrimination, violence and bloodshed.
2. Ethnic conflict is a major and primary source of violence and instability in Northern Region. The causes of conflicts in Northern Region are obviously complex and varied. Ethnicity is a major cause of conflict in the Northern Region. Conflicts increasingly present themselves as ethnic conflicts with ethnic identity serving as the rallying point or the mobilisation agent for the manifestation of the conflicts. The management of ethnicity and its related issues should therefore be a central part of processes to resolve these conflicts.
3. Ethnicity is a natural social phenomenon. There have been several theoretical debates on the nature of ethnicity. However, ethnicity is formed and shaped by deep historical, cultural, social, psychological and biological realities. Ethnicity is largely seen as a social construct. Ethnicity is a dynamic process, which is subject to change, assimilation and manipulation (Bienien, 1974).
4. Past and present inter and intra-ethnic conflict and conflict management strategies in Northern Region have tended to concentrate on symptoms of the effects and not the root causes of the conflicts. Although numerous resolutions or management strategies have been attempted in the past and present, none of them seem sustainable in creating an atmosphere for lasting peace, security and inter-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic co-existence in Northern Region. Although, much has been said about ethnic conflicts in Northern Region, yet very little has been done to bring about lasting peace in

the Region. Again, very little research has been carried out to ascertain the root causes of ethnic conflicts in Northern Region.

5. The final proposition is that ethnic conflicts in Northern Region cannot be resolved militarily.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This study adopts the survey method to collect data from 600 people in selected areas of the Northern Region. A qualitative approach is used for the analysis of these data to understand the perceptions and causes of ethnic conflicts in the Region. The Northern Region is the largest politically administrative region of the Republic of Ghana. The vegetation of the region is largely guinea savannah. The region is characterised by a mono modal rainfall pattern with a prolonged period of dry season. The Northern Region is situated north of the Black Volta River and the Volta Lake. There are about 20 ethnic groups in the region. Each ethnic group has its own distinctive culture. There are five major tribes of special interest in this study. These are the Gonja, Dagomba, Nanumba, Konkomba and Nawuris.

The Northern Region is sparsely populated with a population less than a fifth of the country. Although sparsely populated, the mean household size is higher than the national average. Over 70% of the region's population is rural, engaged in subsistence agriculture. Income levels and consumption expenditure are below national averages. The region has poor infrastructure. The level of education of the population is low. Poor health and sanitary conditions and inadequate social amenities are characteristic of the Region. There is considerable poverty with the majority of the population of the Region living below the national poverty line.

### **3.2. Sampling Procedures and Data Collection Techniques used for the Study**

Adults from all the major traditional authorities constituted the population for the study. The East Gonja District, Nanumba North and South Districts, Gushiegu-Karaga District, Zabzugu-Tatale District, Saboba-Chereponi District and Yendi District were

purposively selected for the study. This is because these districts were involved in the 1994 major ethnic conflict. In each district, cluster sampling was used to select suburbs while simple random sampling technique was used to select areas for the study. Systematic sampling technique was then used to select houses. In each house only one household member was interviewed. A total of 600 questionnaires were administered at the household level. Purposive sampling was also applied in selecting some institutions, civil society organisations. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) connected with conflict management, resolution and peace initiatives were also interviewed. Some of the NGOs interviewed are the Northern Network for Development, Amasachina, and the Northern Network for Peace Building. Personal or face-to-face interviewing was employed as the major technique for data collection. This technique offered the respondents the opportunity to express themselves freely as much as possible and allowed the questions to be explained clearly to them.

#### **4. OVERVIEW OF SOME ETHNIC WARS IN NORTHERN REGION**

Many ethnic wars have been fought in Northern Region, especially between Abudus and Andanis, (Dagbon intra-ethnic conflict), the Konkomba and Nanumba, the Konkomba and the Gonja, the Konkomba and the Dagomba, the Konkomba and the Bimoba, Gonja and Nawuris and recently between the Konkomba on one hand and the Nanumba, the Gonja and Dagomba on the other hand. It should be noted that the immediate cause of these wars could be related to a particular resource such as fish, cow, mango, guinea fowl and others. However there are always remote causes. The following sections provide a brief description of some of the major conflicts in the Northern Region based on historical assessment.

##### **4.1. The Konkomba–Dagomba War of 5th of September 1940 (The Cow War).**

The immediate cause of this war was given as the Konkomba people claiming that the Chief of Zegbeli (a Dagomba) had secretly conspired with a British Veterinary Officer to kill their cows by administering a dose of rinderpest vaccine. Since it was the Dagomba Chief who led the veterinary officer to their kraal, he was to be held responsible for the death of their cattle. The Konkomba therefore declared war against the Dagombas. The Chief of Zegbeli was assassinated before the police arrived to restore order (Ake, 1995).

#### **4.2. Konkomba – Dagomba War at Sambuli from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> May 1946 (The Fish War).**

This war took place on the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> May 1946. (DC Reference No. 285/3/1937 of 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1946)<sup>1</sup>. This was another war that was fought between Konkomba and Dagomba over fishing in a pond. The immediate cause of the war was that a Dagomba man was found fishing in a pond that Konkomba claimed belonged to them.

#### **4.3. The Pito War of April 1981**

In April 1981, there was a short but devastating armed conflict between the Nanumba and Konkomba in the Nanumba District. Many people were killed during the conflict. In addition, many villages were burnt down and properties were either looted or destroyed. The civilian government appointed a commission of enquiry to investigate the causes of this war and to recommend remedial measures to prevent another war from occurring. The commission of enquiry was still sitting when the government was overthrown in a military coup on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1981. The work of the commission was abruptly brought to an end after the coup. The root causes of the conflict were never ascertained and no remedial and preventive measures were put into place.

#### **4.4. The Nawuri and Gonja War of 1989**

In 1989, an ethnic conflict erupted between the Gonja and the Nawuri in Kpandia over ownership of land in the Kpandai area. Several lives were lost and property destroyed.

#### **4.5. The Gonja and Nawuri/Konkomba War of 1991.**

In 1991, the Nawuris assisted by the Konkomba attacked the Gonjas in Kpandai area and took over control of the land and kingship in Kpandai which had always been in the hands of the Gonjas. Many Gonjas were permanently displaced from Kpandai and its immediate environs.

## 4.6. The Guinea Fowl War of 1994

The Guinea Fowl War was the biggest ethnic war in the history of Ghana. The Guinea Fowl War engulfed seven administrative districts; Nanumba District, Yendi District, Zabzugu-Tatale District, Saboba-Chereponi District, East Gonja District, Guishiegu-Karaga District and Tamale Metropolitan Area. This war was triggered by a fight between a Konkomba man and a Nanumba man at Nakpayilli market in the Bimbilla District over the purchase of a guinea fowl. This was the immediate cause of the war, hence the name “Guinea Fowl” War. The triggering incident occurred on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1993. The resulting conflict was a major ethnic war which engulfed the Nanumba, Dagomba, Gonja on one hand and the Konkomba on the other hand.

While the apparent immediate cause of the Guinea Fowl War was a disagreement over the purchase of a guinea fowl at Nakpayilli market on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1993, the actual war started in earnest on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1994 at Nakpayilli where the argument over the purchase of the guinea fowl had begun. At the end of the day, over 200 people were reported killed at Nakpayilli. After the burning down of Nakpayilli, the war moved to the surrounding Nanumba villages. By the afternoon of 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1994, Bimbilla, the traditional seat of Nanumba, and also the district capital had received a large influx of refugees from Nakpayilli and its immediate environs. The Bimbilla Na, the Chief of Bimbilla, caused war drums to be sounded and war was formally declared between the Konkomba and Nanumba. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1994, news reached Salaga, the capital town of East Gonja, that war had broken out between Konkomba and Nanumba and pandemonium broke out in Salaga. Schools were immediately closed down and government workers vacated their offices. As a result of the confusion, fear and anxiety created by the Nanumba-Konkomba ethnic war, the Kpembe-wura, the divisional overlord of the area, caused a local announcement to be made to the effect that the conflict in Bimbilla had nothing to do with Gonja and Konkomba. People were advised to go about their normal work peacefully.<sup>2</sup> However on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 1994 Konkombas were at war with Dagombas. The war was launched from the direction of Bimbilla. Nakpachie was attacked on the morning of 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1994. The Ya Na, the King of the Dagombas, declared war between the Dagbon Kingdom and the Konkombas.

How did the 1994 ethnic war start in Gonja land? It is not within the scope of this paper to go into the genesis of how the war started in East Gonja. However, it is important to emphasise that, despite the assurances of the Kpembe-wura, and the

District Chief Executive given to the people in East Gonja that, the war was between the Nanumba and Konkomba and had nothing to do with Gonja; war did break out between the Konkombas and Gonjas. Barely two days had elapsed after the assurances from the Kpembe-wura to the people of East Gonja that the war broke out between the Gonjas and Konkombas. It was alleged by the Gonjas that, on Friday, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1994, one Salifu Adamu and his son were on their way to the farm when they were attacked by some Konkombas. Adamu was shot dead and his body incinerated, while his son who suffered cutlass wounds, ran to Kpembe to report the case to the Kpembe-wura. Two other men, Salifu Issifu and Malam Sanda T.T., were on their way to Salaga to say their Friday Muslim prayers when they were also shot dead. According to the Konkomba version, a Konkomba man from Bunjai (a village near Salaga) went to Salaga to conduct business but never returned.

The Konkombas further alleged that; on the same day; two Konkomba settlements near Salaga were burnt down by the Gonjas. The Gonjas however claimed that these villages were attacked after Konkombas had started the war on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1994. On 6<sup>th</sup> February 1994, the Yagbon-wura, the Overlord of the Gonja Traditional Area, formally declared war between the Gonjas and the Konkombas. He therefore deplored some warriors from West Gonja to East Gonja. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1994, the war between Gonja and Konkomba started in earnest at Bunjai between the Gonja warriors transferred from West Gonja to East Gonja and Konkombas at Bunjai.

## **5. CAUSES OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN THE NORTHERN REGION**

The causes of the ethnic conflicts in Northern Region especially the 1994 ethnic conflict may not render themselves easily to categorisation. Nevertheless, it is a common practice that such causes are delineated under some broad categories. For the purpose of this paper, the broad categories of causes of ethnic conflicts are summarised below.

### **5.1. Struggle for Paramountcy and Autonomy**

One of the main causes of conflict between Konkomba and other ethnic groups i.e. Dagomba, Nanumba and Gonja is the struggle for paramountcy. The Konkomba feel that they are “equal” to the other ethnic groups and if the other ethnic groups have their own paramountcy, then they also deserve the right to have one.

This is buttressed by a “Petition for Paramount Stool” sent to the National House of Chiefs by Konkomba Chiefs, Elders and Youth. The petition to the National House of Chiefs proposed the creation of a paramount stool for Konkomba land to be known as “Ukpakpabur”. The petitioners stated that they were “speaking on behalf of the entire Konkomba in Ghana.” The basic demand of the petitioners was for “Paramountcy and Traditional Council”. They wanted a paramountcy and a “defined traditional area of their own”. The seat of the Paramountcy was to be sited at Saboba (Mahama, 2003).

Many argue and evidence supports the contention that this petition ignited the ethnic conflict in the Northern Region in 1994. The petitioners provided reasons for their demand for paramountcy in their petition to include:

- (1) The population of the Konkomba in the Northern Region as one of the grounds for their demand. “The Konkomba are number two in terms of tribal numerical strength in Northern Region” said the petitioners.
- (2) The linguistic and cultural differences between Konkomba and the four tribes – Dagomba, Mamprusi, Gonja and Nanumba who dominate traditional politics in the Northern Region was another ground for the Konkomba demand for paramountcy and traditional council.
- (3) The Konkomba attributed the lack of paramountcy for them now to the “Apostles” of the policy of indirect rule who are said to have wrongly described the Konkomba as “stateless people without chiefs or central authority” and who are said to have elevated the Head Chiefs of Dagbon, Mamprugu, Nanum and Ngbanya (Gonja) to the status of paramountcy and placed under them “the so-called chiefless societies including the Konkomba” in order “to make their rule over the region less expensive and restrictive.”

They regarded their lack of paramountcy as denial of “Traditional Independence.” “The time has now come”, the Konkomba said, “for all to reflect over this issue and accord tribes without paramountcies their right to live in a clearly defined traditional area of their own practicing their own culture and traditions and helping to promote the same culture and tradition for the national good.”



“In Ashanti Region where the people all speak the same language and have almost the same culture, there are over 30 paramountcies and traditional councils apart from the Asanteman Council,” the Konkomba reminded the National House of Chiefs in their petition for paramountcy and traditional council. The petition further stated that, the Upper West Region “had over twelve of their chiefs” raised to paramount status. Finally the petitioners indicated that since the Konkombas have their own land, their own political district and a different culture and language, they ought to be given traditional independence. “The cry of those who had been denied traditional independence in the country is so loud and clear that it has rendered Ghana’s independence from the British in 1957 meaningless to them,” the Konkomba asserted.

The demand of the Konkomba was not just for paramountcy but a right to live in a clearly defined traditional area of their own, practicing their own culture and traditions, and helping to promote the same culture and tradition for the national good. After a cursory look at the petition of the Konkomba, one can summarize their demand as one for paramountcy and a traditional Council for all Konkombas in Ghana, a right to live in a clearly defined area of their own, the grant to them “traditional independence.”

Implicit or explicit in their demand is their claim of the ownership of some land; “Konkomba have their own land, their own political district and a different culture and language.” “What made the Konkomba request for a separate paramountcy reprehensible?” They asked. In their view, a grant to them of these demands will rather “encourage the development of each ethnic identity and promote inter-tribal co-operation and bring trust, confidence, and peaceful coexistence among all the tribes in the North.”

The YaNa in a speech at the inauguration of Dagbon Youth Association in December 1993 had observed that, “the Konkomba demand for a paramountcy to be known as Ukpakpabur has far-reaching implications for Dagbon and its citizenry.” The YaNa reiterated that, the current generation is yet to enjoy what their forefathers left for them, their children have not tasted it yet nor their grandchildren, how can they give away an inch of what they have not fully enjoyed.” The Dagombas, he said will not give “an inch of their land away.” The Dagombas have shown before and after their war with the Konkomba that it was not the Konkomba demand for paramountcy, but it was the Konkomba demand for Dagbon land that was the major issue of conflict. The Dagombas saw the Konkomba demand for a “right to live in a clearly defined traditional area of their own” as a demand for Dagbon land. “Those desires of the Konkomba, the Dagomba are not prepared to grant”. YaNa was clear



in his reply to the Konkomba petition that if the Konkomba had routed their application through the Dagomba Traditional Council “solely for paramountcy”, he might grant the Konkomba request.

Most Dagombas see the Konkomba demand for Paramountcy and a Traditional Council as one of the major causes of ethnic war in Northern Region. On the contrary, in Nanumba there had been no petitions, no demand and no known disputes of Konkomba in Nanum regarding either land or chieftaincy. Similarly, in Gonjaland there had been no petitions, no demand and no known disputes of Konkomba in Gonjaland regarding either land or chieftaincy.

What other reasons might have caused the ethnic conflict especially the 1994 ethnic conflict?

## **5.2. Ownership and Control of Land**

Land is yet another major source of ethnic conflicts in Northern Region, both in the long term and in the short term. For a long time in the history of this country, land has remained a thorny economic and political issue which has generated a lot of ethnic conflicts between communities and ethnic groups.

The interviews confirm that, the remote causes of most of these inter-ethnic conflict is land. All the Konkombas interviewed claimed the Saboba-Chereponi land belongs to them and not the Dagombas, and the Nawuris on the other hand claim Kpandai lands belong to them and not the Gonjas. The first time the Konkomba made a claim to part of Dagbon land officially was in 1978 before the committee on ownership of land and position of tenants in the Northern and Upper Regions (refer to the Issifu Alhassan Committee, 1978). The Konkomba however did not make any claim to Gonja or Nanumba land to the Issifu Alhassan Committee.

Again, in 1993 the YaNa decided to promote some of his divisional chiefs to the status of paramount chiefs. The Konkomba sent a petition to the National House of Chiefs demanding that the Konkomba headman of Saboba be made a paramount Chief. In addition, the Konkomba demanded the creation of a Traditional Council for Konkomba. Their petition stated that the petitioners wanted “the creation of paramount stool for Konkomba land”. The YaNa dismissed the Konkomba petition.

When the 1994 “Guinea Fowl” war ended and the Government called for peace among the warring factions, the Konkomba again made the acquisition of land at the peace talks unequivocal. “Our arguments for and against the question of whether Konkombas have any title to land in the country, especially in the Northern Region will be based on oral traditions of the Konkomba, writings of scholars, work of ethnographers and historians.”

The Konkomba then presented to the Permanent Negotiation Team set up by the Government to bring peace to the warring factions in Northern Region a map in which they showed an area they claimed to have inhabited before they were expelled from there by the Dagombas. They called this area their historical area. They also showed an area on the map which they wanted the Dagomba to release to them to constitute their traditional area. “Since nobody can undo history we are not advocating that all lands in the Oti Basin we occupied as aborigines before the invaders (conquered us) should be returned to us. However, land which was effectively under our control during and after the plebiscite cannot be taken from us by twist of the law”. This conflict in my vivid and candid opinion is linked with chieftaincy, and chieftaincy is linked with land.

### 5.3. Leadership

Although mystery still surrounds the root causes of the recent clashes between the Konkombas on one hand and Gonjas, Nanumbas, Dagombas on the other hand, one fact that is clear from field interviews, reports, newspaper articles, press statements and other documents is that leadership played a crucial role in fueling these clashes. Indeed, what has been heard from the field, written or pronounced in the aforementioned conflicts, implicates the leadership of the day i.e. top government officials, top ranking members of the ruling party and opposition parties, and other high ranking members and elite of the various groups/combatants.

Ninety percent of the respondents attributed leadership as one of the main causes of ethnic conflict in Northern Region. A Committee of Enquiry was appointed after the ethnic conflict between the Nawuri and Gonja and between the Gonja and Konkomba in 1989 and 1990. While the Committee was still at work, the Chairman of the (PNDC) is reported to have made a speech at Tamale Secondary School in 1991 during the fortieth anniversary of the school to the effect that no ethnic group came to earth with land. He wanted to “know whether any of the chiefs claiming ownership of land in Northern Region can carry a barrel of sand. Therefore it was not right for any majority tribe to lay claim to land and deny any minority tribe the use of any land”. Some commentators therefore trace the causes of the Guinea Fowl War to this remark by the PNDC Chairman.

The Presidential Advisor on Chieftaincy Affairs of Government in October 1993, made a speech in Accra on the occasion of the out-dooring of the newly installed Dagomba Chief for Greater Accra Region as guest speaker, and said, “Government has recognised some cheating in chieftaincy. Government has decided that every group of people should have their own chief. Immigrants should be allowed to be installed as chiefs. Dagomba Chief in Accra is only helping the Ga Chief to rule in Accra. Government wants me to tell you that chieftaincy is not only for one group of people. Every group must be able to install chiefs.”

In his address to the Northern Region House of Chiefs, Nana Akuoku Sarpong, reiterated; “...what lies at the base of the threatened peace is the right to be recognised as minorities in the midst of majorities and I am here to give expression to this desire. I am also to give expression to the feeling of the majorities that minorities must respect the customs of the majority....”

When the Government was being implicated as taking sides, the Government sent a twelve-member delegation to the Northern Region to meet the chiefs, opinion leaders, and the youth to reiterate Government's neutrality in the matter. The chiefs gave the delegation the assurance that they would not disturb the peace and tranquility in Northern Region.

As the Government delayed in finding a solution to the Konkomba-Dagomba impasse, tension mounted on both sides. Many groups made it clear to Government that, there was tension and sense of insecurity prevailing in Northern Region. Many groups including The Dagomba Youth Association took cognizance of the mounting tension. They called on Government to, “Take all necessary steps to contain the threat to peace and security in Northern Region.”

On 25<sup>th</sup> January 1994, a three member committee under the chairmanship of Nana Obiri Yeboah, visited the region to hold discussions with the chiefs to find solutions to the impasse. When the three-member committee left for Accra on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1994, they left without a road map to peace in Northern Region. Ironically, on the same day that the three-member delegation concluded its discussions with the Saboba Chief, there was confusion and chaos in Bimbilla between the police and some indigenes over the release of confiscated arms and ammunition back to some Konkomba. The police seized arms and ammunition belonging to some Nanumba and according to the Nanumba, the police refused to return their arms and ammunition to them and took them to the police station. The disgruntled Nanumba reported the two incidents to their kinsmen. Rumor quickly spread that the Police had confiscated arms and ammunition belonging to Nanumba and had meanwhile released their seized arms and ammunition to the Konkomba.

The Nanumba mobilised to the Police Station to demand the release of the confiscated arms and ammunition. Warning shots were fired to disperse the crowd, unfortunately some Nanumbas were hit. This infuriated the Nanumba and they attacked and overpowered the Police on duty and set the Police station ablaze with the arms and ammunition. This incident should have been enough to warn the Government that war was imminent for it to take preventive measures, unfortunately nothing concrete was done. The Government described it as an isolated incident citing indiscretion on the part of both police and some Nanumba. The Government did not see the importation of ammunition into the area by both Nanumba and Konkomba as a threat to the security of the area. A few months later, war broke out between the Konkomba on the other hand and the, Namumbas, Gonjas and Dagombas.

After the war, the President of the Republic in November 1994, decided to embark on a tour of the conflict area to talk to the parties involved. At Banda and Saboba, the President advised the Konkomba that, as settlers they are required to pay farm dues to their landlords and that no land in Ghana is without an owner. The Konkomba this

time were very surprised at the President's speech and they issued a press statement condemning the speech. At Keta-Krachi the President advised the Konkomba to learn to live peacefully with their hosts. This statement it was felt, meant that the President had prejudged the Konkomba as guilty with regard to the conflict in Northern Region<sup>3</sup>. This time, while the Konkomba were protesting the President's speeches, the Dagombas, Nanumbas and Gonjas were jubilating and celebrating the speeches. They concluded that if the President had made the statements he made during his tour before the start of the conflict, the conflict would not have erupted. The Dagomba, Nanumba and Gonja see this statement as forming the foundation to finding a lasting solution to the ethnic conflict in Northern Region.

#### **5.4. Struggle for Self-esteem and Need for Separate Cultural Identity**

Many of the respondents (about 95% of Konkombas) reiterated that, the other tribes; the Nanumbas, Gonjas and Dagombas do not respect them. Hence, the need to fight to restore their self-esteem. "The Nanumba, Gonja and Dagomba see us the Konkomba as second class citizens although we are all Ghanaians with the same rights", reiterated a Konkomba man at Saboba. The self-esteem of individuals is deeply connected to the self-esteem of the ethnic group. Given the need for a positive self-esteem, identification and recognition, ethnic groups reveal a fundamental drive towards establishing a favourable self-esteem vis-à-vis other groups through processes of inter group comparison and the subconscious filtering and censoring of information concerning other groups. Perceptions about other groups are therefore negatively influenced by a group's need to establish its own self-worth that would favour it and its offspring. The problem with ethnic conflicts is that some of the key issues in it are not about material resources that can be negotiated. They often involve status, culture and identity.

#### **5.5. Relative Deprivation and Perception of Discrimination and Marginalisation by Some Ethnic Groups**

Again, about 90% of the Konkombas interviewed, were of the opinion that, they live in relative deprivation compared to the Gonjas, Dagombas and Nanumbas. This they attributed to the fact that, when they farm, these major tribes mentioned come to tax them. They take many of their produce to the chiefs and this makes their situation worse. They reiterated that, the other ethnic groups are lazy and rely on them for produce for their chiefs through taxes (both in cash and kind). Some Konkombas and

Nawuris attributed the cause of the war to misuse of authority by the Dagomba, the Nanumba and Gonja. “The chiefs of Dagomba, Gonja and Nanumba exploited and collected large sums of money in the form of taxes from us.” Similarly when we hunt in Dagbon, we have to give the hind leg of the animal killed to the Dagomba Chiefs. When we brew “pito” or “akpeteshie” we have to send a pot or gallon to the local Dagomba Chief. When we send our cases to the chief for arbitration we pay heavy fees, depending on the status of the chief to settle the case. We also have to give some farm produce to the Dagomba Chief after every harvest.” “Are we slaves?” asked a Konkomba elder.

Ethnic groups make an assessment of their well-being in the first place not through an analysis of their objective conditions, but rather through comparisons with other groups. They will determine their status of deprivation by establishing the discrepancy between what they have and what they feel they are entitled to. What they feel they are entitled to is determined by their perceptions of relative status. This dynamic of relative deprivation has been indicated as an important contributor to ethnic conflict in Northern Region. If an ethnic group feels strongly that it is being discriminated by another ethnic group, it becomes a potential for ethnic conflict. Being a victim of discrimination or oppression is in itself a cause for serious conflict. The fact that the greater majority of conflicting ethnic groups in Northern Region, especially Konkomba are seen to be marginalised and discriminated against or are seen to be in the minority increases the prospects for ethnic conflict. Marginalised and threatened minority groups are always seen to be in conflict with other groups.

## **5.6. Socialisation and Inferiority Complex Syndrome**

Many of the Konkomba say the other major tribes regard them as inferior human beings. Again, because of this perception, they have to fight to prove to the other tribes that, they are not inferior, but a strong tribal group. “You have to understand that, there is a stereotype hate preaching about we Konkombas by the other ethnic groups.” A Konkomba man reiterates. Ethnic groups who find themselves in conflict or who feel other groups consider them inferior may employ various psychological mechanisms to move from perceived “inferiority” to “superiority”.

Through socialisation processes, there are exaggerated perceptions of the justifiability and moral superiority of their own position and the basic evil of 'the other'. The creation and nurturing of an 'enemy image' is passed from generation to generation and this is an important cause of ethnic conflict in Northern Region.

## **5.7. Selective Interpretation of Past Historical Events**

Almost 98% of the Konkombas, see the other ethnic groups as perceived enemies. In the same way, the other ethnic groups, i.e. the Gonjas, Nanumbas and Dagombas also see the Konkomba in a similar light. An important part of the process of maintaining ethnic identity is the continuous interpretation of historical events. This interpretation is invariably selective and aimed at enhancing the self esteem and image of the group and its sense of victimhood. By attaching ideological differences to such selective interpretations, they are strengthened to the point of acquiring the status of absolute truth. Particular importance is the fact that new generations are socialised into a selective understanding of the past and thus internalises these perceptions.

## **5.8. Perception of Threat from Other Ethnic Groups**

Under conditions of great insecurity and uncertainty (as prevails in certain parts of Northern region) due to previous occurrences, an ethnic group might tend to exaggerate the potential threat of other ethnic groups to its own security and consequently adopt a worst-case scenario of the threat posed by opposing groups. This so-called threat led to continues purchase and stockpile of arms, which creates unnecessary panic and tension. These arms are used at the least provocation.

When the question, “Do you foresee an outbreak of an ethnic war similar to the 1994 ethnic conflict?” was posed, ninety percent of the respondents responded yes. Only ten percent responded not sure. When asked, do you see the other ethnic group(s) involved in the 1994 ethnic conflict as posing any threat to your existence, all the respondents responded yes.

## **5.9. Perception of Discrimination by the Government**

If an ethnic group feels strongly that it is a victim of state discrimination it becomes a great cause of serious conflict (Andries, 1998). The group always has the feeling that, the Government is not on its side, it must therefore take its own destiny into its own hand, hence “fighting for its rights” instead of relying on the Government and state institutions to resolve its differences. Despite this perception, the state remains the single most important institution to deal with and to manage ethnic conflict.



## **6. THE IMPACT OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NORTHERN REGION WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE GUINEA FOWL WAR**

### **6.1. Introduction**

The Guinea Fowl War was the most widespread and longest lasting ethnic war in Ghana. The war covered an area approximately 45,000 square kilometers and involved a population of about two million people. Seven Administrative Districts were involved; East Gonja District, Yendi District, Bimbilla District, Gushiegu-Karaga District, Zabzugu-Tatale District, Tamale Metropolitan and Saboba-Chereponi District. The impact as well as the consequences of ethnic conflicts in Northern Region especially the 1994 ethnic conflict may not render themselves easily to categorisation. Nevertheless, it is a common practice that such impact and consequences must fall under broad categories such as social, economic, political, religious, as well as psychological. The impacts discussed in this section are in particular reference to the 1994 Guinea Fowl War.

On 12<sup>th</sup> February 1994, the President of the Republic of Ghana decided to make an official visit to the conflict area to assess the extent of damage. He was horrified by what he saw; dead bodies littered on the roads and in the villages. Between Bunjai and Salaga there was not a single village un-affected by the massive burning. Between Salaga and Bimbilla the story was the same. The President witnessed a worse situation on the Bimbilla-Yendi road. He saw many more burnt villages. It was alleged that, at a point, the President's convoy had to stop to clear some dead bodies on the way before they could pass. The whole road was littered with dead bodies of children, women, the aged, and youth. The President was flabbergasted by the ugly scene.

### **6.2. Burnt Villages.**

It is a deliberate attempt not to classify losses especially burnt villages according to ethnicity e.g. Konkomba, Dagomba, Nanumba and Gonja. The reasons are that, in most of the villages the Konkombas co-habitat with the other ethnic groups. Although, it is possible to classify settlement as purely Konkomba, Nanumba, Gonja, Dagomba, the author prefers to classify burnt villages according to districts. Classifications according to ethnicity can be subjected to several interpretations and this can fuel tension. On 1<sup>st</sup> February 1994 the first village in Nanumba District went



down in flames, the village was Nakpayilli where the disagreement over the purchase of the guinea fowl had taken place some months before. By the close of the day more than two hundred people lay dead. In all about 52 villages were burnt down completely.

On Friday 4<sup>th</sup> February 1994 Sambu was completely burnt down and more than a hundred people lost their lives. Villages around Sambu were also burnt. Sunson which is about 13 miles from Yendi was also completely burnt down and more than fifty people died. Demon was also completely burnt down with more than twenty people feared dead. In Namongbani, the chief and his second in command died with about fifty others. Ngani a small village was burnt down on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1994 and about twenty people died. Nakpali-Woribogu in the Zabzugu-Tatale District was also completely burnt down and several people died. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1994, Sabari was burnt down, the chief and about fifteen others lost their lives. On 10<sup>th</sup> February 1994, Tibrundo, Abalado and Gyanntido were burnt down. On 11<sup>th</sup> February 1994, Kpatinga in the Gushiegu-Karaga District was also completely burnt down with several people left dead. Sapka was burnt down on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 1994, Dabogushie on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1994, Bachiboriya and Kpabia on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1994, Sang on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1994, Tusaani and Kuligaduli on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 1994 and Andoyill on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1994. The number of villages burnt in the Dagbon Traditional Area included 83 villages in the Yendi District. In the Gushiegu-Karaga District, about 74 villages were burnt down. In the East Gonja District, 71 villages were either partially or completely burnt down.

The inter-NGO consortium gave the total number of villages burnt down in the 1994 ethnic war as three hundred and fifteen (318). The break down is as follows; Zabzugu-Tatale District – 30 villages, Yendi District – 82 villages, East Gonja District – 73 villages, Gushiegu-Karaga District – 77 villages and Bimbilla District – 56 villages. The total number of houses burnt down in the Bimbilla District alone was about 17,520. In July 1994, the inter-NGO consortium report put the total number of displaced people at about 160,000. About 60,000 were Dagombas, 30,000 were Gonjas, and 50,000 were Nanumbas. The remaining 20,000 were Konkomba.

### **6.3. Losses of Livestock**

One other significant loss after the 1994 ethnic conflict was the loss of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, guinea fowl, poultry etc. In most of the villages burnt down, the livestock were looted. Most of the people who lost their cattle may never be able to recover the losses. In Northern Ghana, cattle are family properties which take several

years to accumulate. It was difficult to ascertain the exact number of livestock lost, however, the figure estimated from the interviews runs into several thousands of cattle, sheep and goats.

#### **6.4. Social Consequences**

The social consequences of the clashes were enormous and cannot be easily quantified, especially the psycho-social ones. Most of the victims of these clashes were left homeless, landless, destitute, injured, dead, abused, to mention only a few of the atrocities resulting from the conflict. There was loss of security in the clash-prone areas as the civilians took the law into their own hands, targeting perceived enemies. As a result of insecurity, there was massive loss of human life. Many people sustained physical injuries and others were traumatised. The state of insecurity interfered with the day-to-day socio-economic and political undertakings within the conflict areas. There was loss of life among the Konkombas, Nanumbas, Gonjas, Nawuris, Dagombas and Basaris. The actual death toll of the 1994 clashes could not be ascertained. However, the death toll was quoted in thousands. Some put the death toll at about 5,000 whilst others put it approximately 10,000. The injured also run in thousands and those displaced approximately 122,000. Whole families were “wiped out”. Mr. John Bawah, a Minister of State collapsed at his village Kitoe when he saw many of his family members had been massacred and murdered in cold blood during the ethnic conflict. Most of the people who died were buried in mass graves.

A flashback on the Government figures of those who died, those who were injured and those who were displaced, reported a far lesser number than the above estimates. This was one of the far-reaching social consequences of the clashes. The conflict has also created mistrust, prejudice and psychological trauma characterised by mental anguish and general apathy, among the various ethnic groups in Northern Region. As a result of the clashes, thousands of school-going children were displaced. Some dropped out due to financial and socio-economic constraints. In all the affected districts, there was a mass exodus of teachers who feared for their lives whilst teaching in the hostile districts. Since then, many schools have had to do without the services of experienced teaching staff and the effect of this problem on the performance of examination results was very serious and is still serious. The clashes prevented some of the primary and secondary school graduates from continuing with higher education and training because of financial constraints caused by the conflict. Many of the schools and pupils lost their textbooks, exercise books and uniforms.

Most students in second circle and teacher training institutes could not take their examinations and others had to drop out, whilst others were transferred to schools in Southern Ghana.

However, during and after the clashes, there has been a crisis in terms of identity and culture, especially for the offsprings of the ethnic groups that fought each other. Several families have torn apart and single parenting increased. Children of mixed families are at crossroads in terms of ethnic and cultural identity. Some have been forced to live on the paternal ethnic side, while the others live on the maternal side, depending on where the pressure is most. This trend has created a new dimension in societal lives where children (potential marriage partners) are forbidden from engaging in any affairs with the 'enemy' ethnic group. This has affected inter-ethnic marriages and interactions. In short there is ethnic hatred and polarisation among the combatants. Those who survived the war still retain its physical and psychological scars.

## **6.5. Economic Consequences of the War**

The total economic impact of the clashes in the affected areas is literally unquantifiable. There was wanton destruction of property and economic resources. The clashes had lasting consequences that will continue to alter the Northern Region's economic development for many years. One overall observation that emerges from the clashes is the fact that the economic consequences go far beyond the available statistics. For example, many undocumented assets such as corn mills, grinding mills, lorries, cars, farm produce, houses, cattle, goats, sheep, markets, stores and shops were destroyed. Virtually any thing that one could lay his hand on was destroyed. Most women lost all their properties and several years down the line, some women's income generating activities are yet to be activated. Only a few have been able to start their income generation activities. Most of the women and men have lost everything they had accumulated in life.

As a result of the clashes, thousands of families lost a lot of personal, family and household possessions. Many of the victims have still not received any assistance from government. Many of them have not been able to recover from the loss. They still live in penury and squalor. Again, the once booming and brisk markets of Salaga, Chamba, Bimbilla, Nyakpayilli, Kpandai are no longer vibrant.

## **6.6. Fear of Renewed Clashes**

Many well-meaning Ghanaian and the ethnic groups involved in the 1994 ethnic conflict have expressed fear of renewed ethnic clashes in Northern Region.

## **6.7. Lack of Interest to Invest in the Northern Region**

Many investors are afraid to invest in the Northern Region for fear of renewed clashes and lost of investment. It can be deduced from development trends in Ghana and Government pronouncements that Government has lost interest in developing the Northern Region. The Government always says that, hundred million Ghana cedis is spent every month on peace keeping in the Northern Region. Government insists this money could have been better used for the development of the Region.

## **6.8. Bad Image of the Northern Region**

The image created in the minds of many about Northern Region is that of a Region in chaos, anarchy and mayhem. Northerners are also seen as violent people.

## **6.9. Land leasing impediment**

Since the Overlord of Dagbon was assassinated in 2002, it has become virtually impossible to get a lease on land in Dagbon and this has affected drastically the development of land and land related issues. The Regent in Dagbon, according to the peace map, is not vested to adjudicate land issues and has no power to issue lease on land.

## **6.10. Political consequences**

The aftermath of the intra-ethnic conflicts and inter-ethnic conflicts in Northern Region has revealed that, general elections and support for parties are not issue based or ideologically based, but that, political parties have become vehicles of ethnic interest and sentiments.

# **7. CONFLICT RESOLUTION EFFORTS SINCE THE CLASHES**

## **7.1. Government Response to the War**

According to available evidence, the Government made little or no effort to house or assist the victims who were unable to return to their former homes after the 1994 ethnic conflict. There was no attempt to resettle and compensate the thousands of victims who had been rendered homeless and without property. The provision of

relief assistance seemed woefully inadequate. Most of the people who received some of the relief items were not the real victims of the conflict. Some of the victims were quick to claim that much of the relief assistance went only to those who were well connected.

The Government invited the warring parties to a peace talk in Accra after the ethnic conflict in 1994. The Government delegation met the warring parties in the 1994 conflict separately on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1994. The Dagomba, Gonja and Nanumba delegation told the Government delegation that they would work together as a team. At the meeting, the Government delegation made it clear that, it did not have any peace proposal.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1994 the Government announced the appointment of a committee to investigate the causes of the 1994 ethnic conflict with a view of finding a permanent settlement of the conflict and establishing a lasting peace in Northern Region. The committee was called Permanent Negotiation Team. It was a seven-member Committee under the Chairmanship of Nana Dr. Obiri Yeboah II, Omanhene of Efutuakwa and Member of the Council of State. The other members of the committee were; Mr. Peter Nanfuri (Director of BNI), Colonel James Annoh (Director of Military Intelligence), Mr. C.K. Dewornu (Former Inspector General of Police), Nana Adjei Ampofo, E.O. Mensah (Member of Parliament for Wenchi East) and Hon. E.K.D. Adjaho (Member of Parliament for Avenor). On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, 1994 under the auspices of the Permanent Negotiation Team, the warring parties signed a cease-fire accord. Interestingly, the Nawuri, Basari and Nchumuru also signed the cease-fire accord as demanded by the Gonja delegation.

The signing of the cease-fire by the warring parties was a positive step to ending hostilities in the Northern Region. It was permanent, immediate and unconditional. Again, during the sittings of the committee, the issue that came out strongly was the Konkomba claims of part of Dagbon land. The Dagomba had always insisted that there would be no peace until the Konkomba whom they regarded as starting the war had apologised. The Permanent Peace Negotiation Team after several difficulties got the Konkomba to Yendi to render an apology to YaNa and the people of Dagbon for their involvement in the war at a ceremony on the 20<sup>th</sup> December 1994. What happened in Yendi received mixed reactions from the Konkomba and the Dagomba. While the Dagomba were happy about the apology by the Konkomba, the Konkomba Youth

Association reacted as follows, “We Konkombas, have been compelled by the regular and persistent enquiries of both the public and our people to bring to your attention and knowledge the effect of the use of the word 'apology' and how the Dagomba as usual have turned this achievement of the year to their undue advantage and request you, the team, as arbitrators, to let the world, Ghanaian public, and especially the Konkomba know the truth of what really happened at Yendi on the 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1994.....We wish to emphasise here that the ceremony was surely a RECONCILIATION GESTURE and NOT an apology, as the world is being made to believe.” The hope of peace which the ceremony had intended to bring was shuttered and dashed by the letter of the Konkomba Youth Association. At long last, through the efforts of the Permanent Peace Negotiation Team, the YaNa elevated the chief of Sanguli Lana, Chereponi Fame, Nambile Na, Nakpali Lana and the SabobaNa to Paramountcy on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November, 1995 together with twenty other Dagbon chiefs.

The elevation of the Saboba Chief to paramount status was a major breakthrough in the Northern Conflict and a major achievement of the Permanent Peace Negotiation Team. However, the Konkomba were unhappy about the elevation of the Saboba Chief alongside the SanguliNa and Chereponi Fame to paramount status, it did not meet their demand for a single paramountcy. The SabobaNa threatened that if the elevation of the Saguli, Chereponi Fame is allowed, the peace being sought in Northern Region will not be achieved. Despite the threat, the status quo remains.

## **7.2. Religious Organisations Response to the Conflict**

The major religious organisations i.e. Christian organisations and Muslim organisations have done very little to bring about lasting peace among the combatants. Religion could break ethnic and cultural barriers between the various ethnic groups.

## **7.3. NGOs and Donor Agencies' Response**

One of the major responses of the NGOs during the clashes apart from intervening with relief assistance, was the formation of the inter NGO Consortium. This network did tremendously well in bringing peace to the Region. They succeeded in bringing the various combatants to a workshop and a series of meetings in Kumasi. Many of the combatants especially women were assisted to go into income generation activities with funds from the consortium. Many of the combatants were helped by

various NGOs to resettle in their new localities. The Nairobi Peace Initiative, an international peace organisation, headed by Professor Hizkias Assefa, deserves the praise of all Ghanaians for the tremendous success they achieved in bringing a lasting peace in Northern Region through the Kumasi Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation.

#### **7.4. Traditional Institutions**

Traditional leaders, apart from the Asantehene (King of the Asantes), have done very little to bring about lasting peace in the Region.

#### **7.5. The Elites**

They have done virtually very little to bring about peace. They and their families are not affected directly by the conflicts. Most of them live in Accra, they fuel the war from Accra, they write all the beautiful petitions, yet none of them goes to the battlefield. In addition, most of them benefit directly or indirectly from the conflicts.

### **8. DISCUSSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

It is the responsibility of political leaders and leaders of civil society to manage ethnic conflicts and to devise appropriate political and socio-economic measures to control the eruption of conflicts. While it is certainly useful and necessary to learn from historical examples, the immense difficulty of finding a workable formula has to be acknowledged. The search for a workable formula is still ongoing. This situation makes it imperative that political and social leaders should engage in their own struggle to find solutions that will fit their conditions. Their solutions have to be discovered and forged by themselves because they have to implement and maintain them (Basara, 1997).

Imposed models fail precisely because they are imposed and because they invariably ignore aspects of the local condition. Interventions in ethnic conflicts by the international community and NGOs should serve to support the struggle of local leaders to find workable and realistic solutions. There is need for a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the causes and conditions of the conflict, taking all the different perceptions and opinions seriously. This should inform conflict resolution strategies. Superficial and one-sided views invariably do not bring lasting peace.



Conflict resolution processes should be inclusive of all parties that are involved. Conflict resolution interventions should empower disputants to deal more creatively with their conflict. In this light NGOs should facilitate communication between parties in conflict when levels of antagonism make normal communication difficult or impossible. Secondly, there is the need for facilitation of an analysis of the causes of the ethnic conflicts, preferably as a joint effort involving all conflicting groups (Zartman, 1985).

There is no single workable strategy to resolve ethnic conflicts. However, this does not preclude us from making recommendations towards the process of conflict management in Northern Region. At the end of every war, the most important things that need to be done are; restoration of peace to the conflict zone, the reintegration of the warring parties, and the reconstruction of the war zone. The question we pose at this point is whether these have been adequately done. In our opinion, certain issues need urgent attention and these among others include the following:

- The need to formulate a comprehensive peace accord to be signed by all parties involved in the 1994 ethnic conflict.
- The need to urgently address the remote causes of the 1994 ethnic conflict between the Nanumba and Konkomba and the Gonja and the Konkomba.
- The need to adequately address or lay to rest the Konkomba demands for part of Dagbon land they can call their own.
- To critically consider the role of Youth Associations in preventing future ethnic conflicts. It is a known fact that many of the Youth Associations played a key role in the 1994 ethnic conflict.
- There is an urgent need to resolve the impasse between the Gonja and the Nawuri in Kpandai and also the Konkomba and Nawuri in Kpandai.
- There is the need for a real, sincere and complete reintegration of the warring factions. As we write today, Konkombas cannot freely visit and sleep in Tamale, Gonjas cannot visit Kpandai freely, the displaced Gonjas from Kpandai cannot return to Kpandai, Dagombas cannot sleep in Saboba-Chereponi, Konkombas cannot sleep in Bimbilla and Salaga.
- The situation where chiefs are imposed on settlers or minorities must give way to the one where settlers or minorities elects their own head chiefs, and to maintain checks and balances, the head chief should swear an oath of



allegiance to the traditional authority. It is easier to rule the minority and settlers through their elected head chiefs whilst at the same time, maintaining allegiance through the traditional authority.

Conflict management strategies should include the following:

### **Positive and Conscious Socialisation**

The process of acquiring social learning is known as socialisation. It is through the process of socialisation that individuals or groups acquire knowledge, skills and dispositions that enable them to participate as responsible members of their ethnic groups and the entire society. The process of creating social order is essentially one of devising means whereby mankind's innate drives can be controlled for the sake of harmony in the society (Akinsola, 1964). Unfortunately, the leadership in our traditional homes who are supposed to champion this cause have abandoned this crucial responsibility of socialising the youth positively to learn to forgive. Instead, they have resorted to ethnic indoctrination of hatred. People should be socialised to learn to forgive one another. They should be socialised to learn to live in harmony with their neighbours and other ethnic groups.

### **Civic Education**

The various civil society organisations and NGOs in the region should implement civic education programmes within the school system and outside. The school curricula and civic education programmes should include fundamental issues that affect the essence of interdependence between different ethnic groups and peaceful co-existence between different ethnic communities. Vigorous civic education is necessary for the re-orientation of the various conflicting ethnic groups. This type of education should include the following special programmes: effects of ethnic conflict, peace education, inter-ethnic harmony and peaceful co-existence, the need to forget about the "bitter" past, coping with social and cultural diversities without conflict, counseling and consoling people who are traumatised, conflict and conflict resolution. Politicians from the conflicting ethnic groups should be the ambassadors of this campaign. They should lead the campaign and the traditional authorities and youth organisations should follow suit. Leaders and civil society organisations should take the initiative of organising seminars and conferences to sensitise the ethnic groups in general and their opinion leaders in particular, on the need for inter-ethnic harmony, peaceful co-existence and the need to promote lasting peace for development.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

The information contained in this paper, should guide the government, policy makers, donor agencies, civil society, religious organisations and non-governmental organisations, local and international civic institutions, traditional institutions, and other interested parties to come out with workable strategies to bring about lasting peace in Northern Region. There is an urgent need to examine the potential dangers of another inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflict in Northern Region. There is the saying that, there is no smoke without fire. Early warning signs must be noted, and adequate measures adopted, because the 1994 ethnic conflict was not in doubt, although the politicians and traditional leaders denied the possibility of war. There is enough evidence to prove that, all the ethnic groups that were involved in the 1994 conflict are fully prepared in case of “another ethnic war”. Should we sit doing nothing till another war similar to that of 1994 erupts again? If adequate measures are not put in place to resolve the Northern conflict once and for all, the eruption of another ethnic conflict would be disastrous. It could degenerate into a civil war.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Refer to various annual reports for the Northern Territories, ADM/5/1, available from the National Archives, Accra, Ghana.
2. Refer to the *Daily Graphic* Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1995 page 1 for details of the story.
3. Press statement by Konkomba and Basare Youth Association, Baskom, November 1994.

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