Examining the Position of the Chieftaincy Institution in Modern Political System of Ghana

Marfo Samuel[1] & Musah Halidu[1]

Abstract

In pre-colonial Ghana, the chieftaincy institution was the main system of governance and adjudication of justice. Chiefs carried out combined legislative, executive and judicial functions. However, with the advent of modern political system of governance in Ghana and its administration of justice, the chieftaincy institution now plays a subordinating role to the modern state. The institution equally in present times is ripped with a number of violent conflicts. With this development, some people are of the opinion that the institution has become an anachronistic in contemporary Ghanaian political discourse. Probing the situation, 132 indigenes from three conflict prone communities in the Northern Region of Ghana and 5 other key informants were selected through quota and purposive sampling techniques in a cross-sectional study. Data gathered through interviews revealed that in spite of the weaknesses associated with the chieftaincy institution, (1) it is the preferred point of call in terms of people's 'peace-seeking behaviour' in conflict situation, and that (2) it is highly perceived as having the capability to resolve conflicts peacefully, amicably and sustainably in Ghanaian communities.

Keywords: Chieftaincy, Peace, Conflict, Sustainable Peace, Conflict Resolution.

1. Introduction

The role of political institutions in shaping the political landscape in any country is of prime importance. The establishment and correct functioning of these institutions essentially give direction and focus to citizens' conduct and help maintain a peaceful atmosphere for the thriving of democracy and associated social and economic development. Weak or defective institutions in a political system expose a country to danger, violence, malfunctioning and breakdown of democratic governance. Conversely, strong institutions enable effective political mobilisation, respect for rule of law and increased democratic participation (Acemoglu and Robinson 2008).

In present Ghana, the traditional political institution, the chieftaincy institution – an indigenous political arrangement by which leaders with good moral standings are selected and installed in line with the provisions of their native customs and laws (Nweke 2012), and formal political institutions such as the Police, the Court, Parliament and Electoral Commission, among others, work hand-in-hand in shaping the individual's life whiles the individual equally owes allegiance to both systems (Brobbey 2008). In everyday life, however, an individual seeking for conflict resolution may choose to resort to either traditional norms and institutions or formal western-originated institutions depending on many factors including locality, issue at hand, level of education, and the individual's knowledge, preference and trust of the institution. To this effect, institutions play a vital role in both the generation and regulation of (violent) conflicts.

[1]Department of Social, Political and Historical Studies, University for Development Studies, Faculty of Integrated Development Studies, Post Office Box 520, Wa Campus, Ghana. E-mail: marfoms@yahoo.com

Thus, both traditional authorities and formal modern political institutions of democracy affect in various degrees, the internal (violent) conflicts in Ghanaian communities. Busia (1968) and Isaac (2013) have expressed that, traditionally, governance in pre-colonial Ghana was based mainly on the chieftaincy institution. The chiefs carried out combined legislative, executive, judicial, religious, and military responsibilities assisted by their Council of Elders from the village to the state level (Acquah, 2006). As noted by Isaac (2003), although these types of institutions were not synonymous to Western institutions in terms of structure, administrative procedures, substance responsibilities, or privileges attached, they nonetheless created a similar level of social and political cohesion in their respective communities as were found in Western countries at the time. The unity, peace and security of kingdoms, chieftains, and communities were largely dependent on the good leadership and protection of their kings, chiefs, sub-chiefs and community/family leaders that constituted the hierarchy of the chieftaincy institution. As Brobbey (2008) and Acquah (2006) noted, traditional governance evolved around the chieftaincy institution and the associated conflicts were resolved through customary arbitration with the chief aided by his elders constituted as customary arbitrators from the village to the state level.

With the advent of modern democratic political governance system and its adjunct administration of justice, the institution of chieftaincy including its authority and power has largely been taken away by the state. Nonetheless, the institution continues to enjoy the acceptance and recognition of the modern State (Constitution of Ghana 1992; Chieftaincy Act, 2008Act 759). A major development, however, as pointed out by Hagan (2006) is the numerous conflicts associated with the chieftaincy institution. In the view of Kendie and Bukari (2012), Ghana has often been described internationally as one of the most stable, democratic and peaceful countries in Africa. However, this image as a beacon of peace in Africa is marred by the many internal chieftaincy conflicts that have negative implications for local level development in these conflict areas. Shades of chieftaincy conflicts are witnessed across the ten regions. Notable among the chieftaincy conflicts recorded in recent times include the GaMantse succession dispute, the Anlo chieftaincy conflict, the Tuobodom chieftaincy conflict, Bimbilla chieftaincy affairs and the Yendi chieftaincy succession conflict (Boafo-Arthur 2006; Schildkrout 2006; Tonah 2007; Awedoba 2009; Prah and Yeboah 2011; Anamzoya and Tonah 2012; Kendie and Bukari 2012). The endemic nature of chieftaincy conflicts in Ghana and their implications for socio-economic development and political stability has even made Abotchie's (2006) paper entitled, 'Has the position of the chief become anachronistic in contemporary Ghanaian politics?' quite thought provoking. The institution has come under attack as many Ghanaians question its relevance in modern political dispensation.

It is against this background that three conflict prone communities namely; Yendi, Bunkpurugu and Bimbilla, all in the Northern Region of Ghana were purposely selected with the objectives of ascertaining the views of the people pertaining to the ability of the chieftaincy institution to (a) resolve conflicts amicably and (b) sustainably,(c) the respondents' peace-seeking behavior during conflicts and, (d) their view about the causes of conflicts in Ghana. It is expected that the findings from the study will enable the government and the traditional authorities in the study communities in particular to fashion out a more pragmatic policy to support and promote the work of the chieftaincy institution, especially in conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution and peace-building.

2. Chieftaincy, Governance and Conflict Resolution in Ghana

Various communities in pre-colonial Ghana were governed by their individual norms with their unique structural organisations. Principally, Ghanaian societies were organised in one of two main social and political structures, namely, centralised (or chiefly) societies, and acephalous (or non-chiefly) societies (Nukunya 2003; Brukum 2006; Awedoba 2009). Centralised societies in Ghana have an organised administration with a central figure of authority and power, usually a chief and decisions by the authorities unconditionally binding on the whole society with punitive sanctions for deviants. Examples of such organised societies as given by Nukunya (2003) are the Ashantis, Ewes and Dagombas.

Conversely, as Nukunya (2003) indicated, stateless or acephalous societies did not have a centralised authority. Such societies were organized on lineage, clan and family basis. Examples of acephalous societies included the Tallensi in the Upper East Region. This does not mean that non-centralised communities did not have institutions that ensure law and order and regulate conflicts between individuals in the society. As noted by Twumasi(1985), all societies, primitive or civilized, have at some stage in their development history formulated policies designed to regulate, if not eradicate, criminal or offensive tendencies.

Nukunya (2003) indicates acephalous societies, unlike those of the centralised societies have their own system of governance and the administration of law and order with the lineage forming the largest political unit. For decades, each of these two different systems regulated life and ensured social and political order among their individual populations until the introduction of colonial rule that tinkered with the various systems (Awedoba 2009).

Notwithstanding the changing political landscape in the country, the Chieftaincy institution is the most enduring establishment in Ghana's political history. Owusu-Mensah (2015) asserted that the chieftaincy institution has transcended the three phases of the country's political history: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras as well as the three regime types: one-party, military and multi-party which demonstrates its resilience. Further, it remains the medium of expression of social, political, religious, traditional and economic authority in most communities in Ghana. In the opinion of Adjaye and Misawa (2006), chiefs are the channel and conduits for local development programmes. As noted by Hagan (2006), several years after independence, chiefs have had the pleasure of witnessing the change of many radical leaders out of power and have also gained a reputation as spokespersons for rural dwellers and as stakeholders in state-building. Chiefs are increasingly becoming points for the evocations of local and ethnic pride. They are an epitome of pride in history and pride in home town. They are not only the repositories of local history and spirituality, but upholders of local values.

In spite of the significant role played by the chieftaincy institution in the lives of Ghanaians, Sutton (1984), Abotchie and Awedoba (2006) and Prah and Yeboah (2011), have noted the institution is bedevilled with various conflicts. According to Prah and Yeboah (2011), these conflicts are not recent developments neither are they restricted to only one traditional area. Sutton (1984) writes that one of the most striking features of the records of Ghana in the colonial time was the great number of chieftaincy disputes (stool or skin disputes). Sutton (1984) argues that almost the sole preoccupation of the Department of Native Affairs was with disputes of chieftaincy nature, and the 'Native Affairs' in the Gold Coast was almost by definition chieftaincy disputes. The chieftaincy institution is therefore perceived by some Ghanaians to have over lived its usefulness. While some of these conflicts have been peacefully resolved through both customary and legal arbitration, others have become protracted and destructive.

3. Methodology

The communities involved in this study were Yendi, Bimbilla and Bunkpurugu, all administrative capitals within Northern Region, one of the 10 political Regions in Ghana. Yendi is the capital of Yendi Municipal. Biimbilla is the capital of Nanumba North District Assembly whilst Bunkpurugu is the capital of Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo District. The choice of these communities stemmed from the fact that they have been epicentre of periodic inters and intra-ethnic clashes among the people, often rooted in chieftaincy and land ownership in recent times. For instance, both Yendi and Bimbilla have lost their traditional political overlords (chiefs) through violent conflicts rooted in chieftaincy in recent times and are now without substantive chiefs (Wuaku Commission Report 2002; Anamzoya and Tonah 2012). To be able to achieve the objectives of this paper, a cross sectional study design was used. This enabled the researchers to select and solicit information from different indigenes from the three conflict prone communities. Given the objective of the study, and in relation to the vastness of the study communities and the complexity of selecting the respondents in a more systematic manner, quota and purposive sampling techniques were employed by the researchers. Quota sampling technique was use to select 132 indigene respondents comprising 37 females and 95 males from the three communities given as follows; Yendi-46, Bimbilla-43 and Bumkpurugu-43. The discrepancy in sex composition is due to the fact that in Ghana as in Africa, the traditional political institution is dominated by men (Odotei 2006). In Yendi, 15 males and five females each from the feuding Abudu and the Andani royal gates were selected. In addition, three females and three males from other ethnic groups were also selected. In Bumkpurugu, 14 males and five females each from the Bimoba and Konkomba ethnic groups were selected. Besides, two females and three males were selected from other ethnic groups. Similarly, in Bimbilla, 14 males and five females each from the Gbuhumayilli and Bangyilli royal gates together with 2 females and three males from other ethnic groups were selected.The criteria for the selection of a respondent were that; (1) the respondent should be a resident/indigene in the study community for at least five years, (2) should be a male or female and someone of and above 18 years, (3) someone willing to participate in the research and (4) have knowledge/experience about the conflict in the study community. As indicated by Sarantakos (2005), quota sampling technique also known as dimensional sampling does not require sampling frames. He argues that it is a sampling procedure in which the researcher sets a 'quota' of respondents to be chosen from specific population groupings by first defining the basis of choice.

Given the nature and the objectives of the paper, the quota sampling technique as used in the selection of the 132 indigenes could be considered appropriate. In addition, purposive sampling technique was used to select an official each from the National Peace Council, the Ghana Christian Council, the Ghana Muslim Council, the Electoral Commission of Ghana and the UNDP that chartered the course for the drawing up of the Ghana Peace Architecture in 2010. This category of respondents in this paper constituted the key informants.

Structured interview guided by questionnaires was used to extract information from the indigenes. On the other hand, personal interview guided by interview guide and audio recording device was employed to gather relevant information from the key informants. Due to language barrier, six field assistants, two each from the three communities were selected to assist in the collection of the information from the respondents. For the purpose of neutrality and trust, the researchers considered the ethnic and traditional political affiliation of the field assistants. Tables and graph were used, where necessary to present the results of the information gathered using the questionnaire. Information gathered with the aid of audio device was first transcribed and carefully edited. Data were analysed along the objectives of the paper. The study was conducted between November, 2015 and July, 2016.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Capability of the Chieftaincy Institutions in Ghana to resolve conflicts amicably

One major objective of the study was to establish the views of the respondents pertaining to the ability of the chieftaincy institution to resolve conflicts amicably. The responses were scaled from "strongly agree" (highest) to "strongly disagree".

Amicable conflict resolution demands a win-win type of conflict resolution where conflict parties are made to understand themselves and each other's issues, leading to forgiveness and reconciliation on a given issue at a given time and space. Forty-two (42) out of the 132 respondents, representing 31.8% indicated their '*Strong agreement*' to the chieftaincy institution helping in resolving conflicts amicably, whilst 67 respondents (50.8%) '*Agree somehow*' to this assertion. Conversely, 13 respondents (9.8%) and only 6 respondents (4.5%) '*Disagree*' and '*Strongly disagree*' respectively to the assertion that traditional institutions are trusted mechanisms for amicable resolution of conflicts in Ghana. Four (4) respondents (3.0%) said they '*Didn't know*' whether traditional institutions could be trusted to resolve conflicts amicably among conflict parties or not. By aggregation, when respondents who '*Strongly agree*', 42 (31.8%) are added to those who '*Agree somehow*', 67 (50.8%), we get about 109 respondents representing 82.6% having a positive level of trust in traditional Ghanaian political institutions as being trusted mechanisms for the amicable resolution of conflicts among parties. In that sense, only 19 respondents, representing 14.3% of respondents do not trust Ghanaian traditional institutions to resolve conflicts amicably.

The perception of the indigenes was not different from that given by the key informants. They all expressed that the chieftaincy institution has the ability to resolve conflicts amicably. This is what one key informant said:

'We have respect for our traditional political institutions. Chiefs have demonstrated their competence in the resolution of conflicts amicably in Ghana and we all need to give the institution the needed boost to perform its roles creditably'.

Amicable resolution of conflicts does not necessarily end conflicts. An amicably resolved conflict is said to be sustainable when the outcome of the process is durable. The lack of durability of many peace and conflict resolution agreements has led to the relapse of such agreements in many instances. Failure of peace agreements leads to reprisals and re-escalation of conflicts. In Ghana, many conflicts such as the Dagbon, Bawku, Bunkpurugu-Yunyuo, Nkonya-Alavanyo, Osu and Tuobodom chieftaincy conflicts, among others, have defied many negotiated agreements in the course of many decades since their inception. The key role any institution can play to positively affect the status of conflicts in the country, is to ensure that negotiated peace prevails beyond temporary settlements or presenting issues (Lederach 2003).

4.2 Ability of the Chieftaincy Institution to Sustainably Resolve Conflicts

We asked respondents to indicate their level of trust in the chieftaincy institution's capability to ensure more sustainable peace in Ghanaian societies. Thirty-four (34) respondents (25.8%) '*Strongly agree*' that the chieftaincy institution in Ghana has the ability to resolve conflicts sustainably.

In addition, as many as 74 respondents constituting 56.1% "*Agree somehow*" to the same assertion. In contrast, 17 respondents (12.9%) '*Disagree*' that the traditional political institution helps in the sustainable resolution of conflicts while 4 respondents (3.0%) '*Strongly disagree*' to same, and 3 respondents (2.3%) answered that they "Didn't know" if the institutions are able to resolve conflicts sustainably or not.

If we aggregate the responses of those who agree strongly to those who agree somehow (34 respondents, (25.8%) plus 74 respondents, (56.1%)); and equally add those who strongly disagree to those who disagree (12.9%) and (3.0%), we get 108 respondents who positively perceive the chieftaincy institution as being capable of sustainably resolving conflicts in Ghana, representing 81.9% of all responses to that question; while 20 respondents representing 15.2% negatively perceive these institutions of being capable of resolving conflicts sustainably in the country.

In comparison, the results on traditional Ghanaian political institution's ability to resolve conflicts "amicably" and "sustainably" were almost the same. The results indicate that respondents have a positive perception of traditional political institutions helping in resolving conflicts amicably and sustainably, thus 109 respondents (82.6%) and 108 respondents (81.9%) respectively. These results suggest one of two things or both. One, that people have high trust in, and expectation of Ghanaian traditional authorities being able to amicably and sustainably resolve conflicts in Ghana based on their (knowledge of the) expectations of the duties and functions of such institutions. Two, that Ghanaian traditional authorities have practically demonstrated their ability to amicably and sustainably resolve conflicts through proven examples. The researchers did not include questions asking respondents if they have evidential proof of the traditional political institution's helping them resolve conflicts either amicably or sustainably. However, questions were asked on respondents' *"peace seeking behaviour"*.

4.3 Respondents' Peace-seeking Behaviour

The researchers sought to know who individuals approach when they have conflicts and need a resolution or a hearing. This was to explore the level of confidence people have in various institutional options that exist in the Ghanaian society for redress in conflict situations. The more a person has confidence in a system, the more s/he is likely to make use of that system. However, the researchers were mindful of the fact that the medium chosen by a party to redress conflicts equally depends on the type of conflict, level of conflict, as well as the parties involved in that conflict. In this situation, the focus was to see how much people use family heads, community heads, chiefs, law courts/police and other institutions as their points of call when they have conflict with other persons. Table 1 below represents respondents' recourse to the use of such options.

Table 1: Respondents' Peace-seeking Behaviour

Which body or agency do you prefer contacting for redress in case of conflict	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Household head	14	10.6
Family head	34	25.8
Police/Court	25	18.9
Opinion leader	15	11.4
Chief	39	29.5
Others	5	3.8
Total	**132**	**100.0**

Source: Researchers' field work, 2016.

From Table 1 above, 14 (10.6%) out of the 132 respondents interviewed, privileged household heads as their first point of call for conflict resolution. Thirty-four (34) respondents (25.8%) preferred family heads for resolving their conflicts. Further twenty-five (25) respondents (18.9%) and 15 respondents (11.4) preferred using the police/court and opinion leader respectively in the resolution of conflict. Thirty-nine (29.5%) and five (3.8%) prefer the chief and other means such as the media, leaders of religious faiths and fiends among others respectively as   mechanisms of resolving conflict. This data indicate that more respondents (29.5%) privileged the use of chiefs to resolve their conflicts whenever they have issues with others. This picture, at first sight, does not look convincing to say that people have confidence in traditional authorities as means of conflict resolution in the Ghanaian society.

However, when we consider what constitutes the traditional political institutional structure in Ghana, it is made up of a hierarchical ladder starting from the king or the chief at the top of this hierarchy, followed by the sub-chief, then the community or clan leader, the family head, and finally the household head or the parents (if different from the household head). Aggregating the scores of household head, family head and chief, we get 87 respondents (65.9%) out 132 respondents who resort to one level or the other within the traditional political institutional structure for the resolution of their conflicts. This is a reaffirmation of the people's trust in the traditional authorities for the resolution of their conflicts.

The responses from the respondents were not different from the responses given by the key informants. All the key informants (5) affirmed the instrumental role played by the chieftaincy institution in the prevention of conflicts and the promotion of peace especially in the rural communities. This is what one key informant indicated in an interview:

'Ghana's peace is tied to the chieftaincy institution. Most community members know the chiefs even more than the state government and its functionaries. The chiefs adjudicate conflicts involving their subjects, and also lobby the government for the development of their respective communities. They mobilise their subjects for development, and are the first point of call by any official, including government officials. Peace education and conflict sensitisation activities are channelled through them to their subjects, especially before, during and after elections. This to me is a great job carried by the chiefs in preventing conflicts and promoting peace in the country'. (Key informant, 2015)

The findings from this study affirms Acquah's (2006) work which indicated that the resolution of conflicts through customary arbitration by the chiefs in most instances is preferred by the people in that the procedure is simple, flexible and expeditious. This allows the parties to present their cases and have their witnesses give their versions of events in their own native language with no risk of distortion through interpretation as done in the normal court system.This, however, is not to discredit the use of Western mechanisms in resolving conflicts and other social disorders such as crime.

4.4 Causes of Conflicts in Ghana

Respondents were asked to tell what they consider as the causes of violent social conflicts that they have witnessed or heard of in their communities and/or in Ghana. Some possible causes of violent social conflicts in Ghana were suggested in the questionnaire based on the researchers' knowledge and experience of the terrain, existing literature and the pre-testing of the questionnaire. The respondents were given the liberty to choose as many causes as they found appropriate based on their knowledge of the causes of conflicts in their communities or in Ghana as a whole. Of the seventeen suggested options to this question, nine were collapsed during analysis into the category of "other" due to the low scores these options obtained from respondents. Asking as to the causes of those conflicts, 25 respondents, representing about 18.9% could not tell or did not know the causes. The remaining 107 respondents, representing about 81.1% however, responded in the affirmative and gave various causes as captured on Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Respondents Knowledge about Causes of Conflicts in Ghana**

What are the causes of these conflicts	Responses	
	N	Percentage (%)
Don't Know/Can't tell	95	19.20
Chieftaincy	127	25.70
Land ownership disputes	72	14.60
Political Manipulation	61	12.30
Political elections and campaign	50	10.10
Ethnic Differences	38	7.70
Dishonesty / bad leadership	18	3.00
Religious differences	11	2.20
Others	25	5.00
Total	**494**	**100**

Source: Researchers' field research, 2016

All the 127 responses out of 494 responses (because they were multiple choice responses), representing 25.7% of the responses indicated that *chieftaincy* was the main cause of conflicts in their communities and in Ghana. This was followed by *land ownership disputes* with 72 responses (14.60%). The third major cause of conflicts in Ghana, as indicated by the respondents was *political manipulation,* which obtained 61 responses (12.30%), and *political elections and campaigns* being the 4th cause of violent social conflicts in Ghana with 50 responses (10.10%). *Ethnic differences* was the 5th with 38 scores (7.70%), while *dishonesty/bad leadership* and *religious* causes recorded 18 and 11 responses, representing 3% and 2.20% respectively. Nine "other" causes of conflicts together accounted for 5% of conflicts in the country.

The above results from respondents were compared with data from the Ghana National Peace Council–United Nations Development Programme (GNPC-UNDP) conflict data to see the causes of conflict as feature prominently in the various data sets. The GNPC-UNDP programme categorises conflicts by types which, in the nutshell, indicates the issue around which the conflict is centred. This, therefore, makes it similar to our label "causes of conflicts" as captured in our field data. Figure 4 below presents the various types of conflicts that exist in Ghana as captured in the GNPC-UNDP conflict programme in Ghana.

Figure 1: Causes of violent conflicts in Ghana
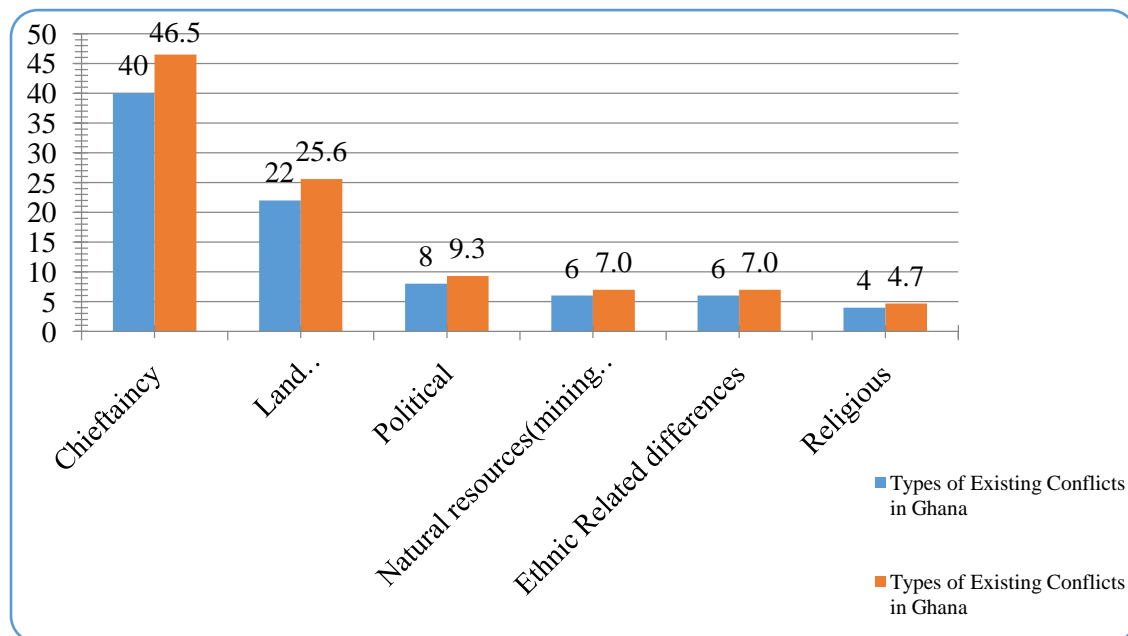
Source: GNPC-UNDP Conflict Data on Ghana (2015)

Figure 1 above indicates that there are more chieftaincy conflicts in Ghana than any other type of conflict, thus 40 conflicts, representing 46.5% of all existing conflicts in Ghana. This is followed by Land ownership and acquisition conflicts with 22 conflicts across the country (25.6%)). Political activity related conflicts occupy the third position with 8 conflicts in the country as of August 2015 (9.3%). Conflicts originating from natural resources issues, as well as from ethnic related issues concurrently occupy the fourth position with each individually scoring 6 conflicts (7.0% each). Religion plays the least role in conflicts with 4 existing conflicts (4.7%) unresolved sustainably at the time of the data.

Comparing these facts to the results on Table 2 which displays respondents' perception of the causes of conflicts in Ghana, we find similarity in data. Chieftaincy, land acquisition and ownership, politics and political related issues, sequentially and in descending order, occupy the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd most present causes of violent social conflicts respectively in Ghana. The differences occur from the 4th position where the data differ in variable but not by essential cause positioning. Whilst in the field data natural resources were not labelled or explicitly mentioned by respondents, the GNPC-UNDP data considered natural resources as a separate variable and it occupies the 5th position in its data.

Ethnic differences and religion continue the scale with "bad leadership" which is not considered in the GNPC-UNDP data occurring after "ethnic differences" and before "religious differences" in the results from the field data where it was considered.

These statistics corroborate, to some extent, the existing literature on the causes and sources of conflicts in Ghana. Tsikata and Seini (2004), identify a number of causes of communal violence in Ghana. These include, among others, in descending order, land and land boundary disputes; traditional leadership; political rivalries, and leadership contests and exclusion. Some of these causes are interrelated. For example, chieftaincy and land resources are closely related. This is because in Ghana, most lands are stool lands (or family lands) and the chief occupying the stool or the skin holds such land in custody for the current and future generations and is responsible for the allocation of such lands to members of his community and *outsiders* that may desire same for usufructory purpose (Apter, 1972). Access to the stool therefore does not only give the chief the power to rule that traditional area but also in most instances an automatic access to stool land and the resources thereof. In recent years, the phenomenon of land sales to individuals has heightened the conflict on land issues for two reasons. It has heightened the debate in some communities on the right of chiefs to sell such lands, as well as the increased conflicting competing claims to both land rights and chieftaincy positions all over the country. Even in cases of family land sales the chief or his representative must approve of any form of allocation from the family to any third party for any reason for which such land is given out or acquired.

While the study by Tsikata and Seini (2004) rates land disputes as the most rampant cause of violence in Ghana, our current data places chieftaincy as the first cause of violent conflicts in Ghana with 26% of responses. Land disputes placed second with 15% of responses. Two political related causes of conflict in Ghana were mentioned by respondents: these are *political manipulation* (12.30%) and *Political elections and Campaigns* (10.10%). If we consider these two causes as political related factors and combine their scores we get an average score of 22.40%. This places party politics in the field data as the second highest cause of conflicts in Ghana after chieftaincy and land disputes. The implication of this is that chieftaincy and political related issues must be given serious attention if conflicts are to be sustainably managed in Ghana. It is even more worrying to know that most of these conflicts have existed for over six decades or more and are as recurrent as often (Tsikata and Seini 2004).

5. Conclusion

The traditional Ghanaian political institution, the chieftaincy institution,plays critical role in modern Ghana's justice administrative set up notwithstanding the political environment in which the institution finds itself. Data gathered through personal and structured interviews revealed that the chieftaincy institution is the first and preferred point of call in terms of people's 'peace-seeking behaviour' in conflict situation, and that there is a high level of perception that it has the capability to resolve conflicts peacefully, amicably and sustainably in Ghanaian communities. On the contrary, the study revealed that the institution is perceived as the most principal causal factor of violent conflicts in Ghanaian communities. Chieftaincy succession, land ownership and party politics were perceived as the major causes of violent conflicts in Ghana. The intractable nature of the conflicts they generate and their phenomenal recurrences are even more worrying and dangerous to the development and consolidation of democracy in Ghana. However, as Deutsch (1987) and Nyong (2007) contend, conflicts are normal to everyday life and the social and scientific issue is not how to eliminate or prevent them, but rather how to have lively controversy instead of deadly quarrels. In this regard, creative efforts from people of diverse experiences including conflict management lecturers, conflict management practitioners, the judicially, chiefs and the government among others, should be galvanised to minimise the numerous violent conflicts associated with the chieftaincy institution so that it can perform its peace agent role in Ghana more creditably, especially in the rural communities.

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