

Ghana's National Peace Council

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SUMMARY

Ghana's national peace architecture, particularly its National Peace Council, has been recognized as an important emerging model for developing state capacity to protect civilians and prevent conflict. The entire national architecture has been constructed through decades of public sector reforms, including to the security sector, as well as through constitution building and the establishment of strategic partnerships aimed at developing Ghanaian democracy.

The national peace architecture stands on six pillars: law and order by the National Security Council; rule of law by the Judiciary; traditional authority and alternative justice by the National House of Chiefs; oversight by the legislature and the independent national human rights body; electoral oversight and civic education by the independent Electoral Commission and the National Commission for Civic Education, respectively; watchdog and advocacy by civil society organizations (CSOs); and mediation and advocacy by the National Peace Council and supporting CSO bodies.

Building capacity to uphold the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) at the sub-national, national, sub-regional and regional levels is critical to managing change and assuring stability, peace and sustainable development in Ghana. With the growing importance of elections as both an enabler of democracy and a likely trigger of instability, the National Peace Council has played a key role in helping to manage change and prevent conflict.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of this century, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), Kofi Annan, declared the prevention of violent conflicts to be a central goal for the international community in the new millennium. In line with this thrust, the Bretton Woods

institutions expanded their traditional focus to include conflict prevention, peace-building and institutional development. Similarly, the African Development Bank helped provide material support to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for the establishment of an ECOWAS Peace Fund as part of conflict prevention and peace-building in West Africa.

The dawn of the new century also witnessed paradigm shifts in global values and norms. Key among these are human security (freedom from fear and freedom from want) and the Responsibility to Protect civilians from mass atrocities. As noted by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in his May 2011 Sofia platform address, "today we are moving towards a new age of sovereignty as responsibility, an era where those who commit crimes against humanity and violate human rights will be held accountable."

The concept of national infrastructures for peace is therefore emerging as a strategic framework to help effectively respond to the challenges of development, security and change in fragile societies. This is particularly pertinent given the potential instability caused by internal conflicts spreading beyond the borders of states that are incapable of protecting their peoples.

In the case of Ghana, the emerging National Peace Council (NPC) infrastructure, which is supported by Parliamentary Act 818, was established as an independent state mechanism to facilitate the prevention of conflicts. The NPC has recently initiated, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), its maiden Five-Year Strategic Plan (2013-2017) for operationalization.

This policy brief seeks to examine Ghana's National Peace Council as an evolving best practice that should benefit Ghana as well as the ECOWAS and African Union agendas for peace and state capacity to protect civilians. The humble and sometimes very challenging beginnings of the NPC will be brought into focus with a

view to highlighting the strategic role of non-state actors as key partners of government in the process of building peace infrastructure. The case is also made that national infrastructures are inherently linked to regional and global arrangements. On the basis of Ghana's experience recommendations for further action are made to national, sub-regional, regional and global stakeholders.

ORIGINS OF THE NATIONAL PEACE COUNCIL

Development in Ghana is governed at the national, regional and district levels. The country is divided into 216 districts organized within ten administrative regions or provinces. The district assembly concept, introduced in 1988 by the then military regime, helped build the foundations of Ghana's modern democracy by allowing citizens to make their own choices, including the allocation of resources, in a generally non-partisan manner. This makes Ghana one of the most decentralized states in Africa and strategically positioned for equitable development. Other reforms in the public sector starting in the mid-1980s include security sector and civil service reforms as well as constitution building.

Nevertheless, northern Ghana has lagged behind in socio-economic development by comparison to the rest of the country. This is partly due to the legacy of development policy from the colonial era. A number of post-independence challenges for Ghana have also conspired to create pockets of relative instability and armed conflict, and attempts to address imbalances have so far achieved mixed results. Correspondingly, isolated conflicts, including inter-ethnic disputes over power and control, intra-ethnic disputes over chieftaincy succession, land-disputes and election-related tensions, have continued to emerge in northern Ghana throughout the post-independence era.

Role of the Catholic Church and the Northern Ghana Inter-NGO Consortium

It is against this background that the current Catholic archbishop of Tamale, Rt. Rev. Phillip Naameh, decided to focus his initial apostolate as Bishop of Damongo on creating necessary structures and processes to address these recurring conflicts. With the help of the Catholic Relief Services, in 1995 he initiated the Northern Ghana Peace Project, which later evolved into the Center for

Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies (CECOTAPS).

Significantly, the Catholic Church, development agencies and CSOs were well positioned to fill a local leadership vacuum. The traditional authority infrastructure had been compromised by the nature of these recurring conflicts, in which they were perceived to be partisan. Meanwhile, the government's National Security Council (NSC) also suffered deficiencies in mediation capacity, particularly regarding chieftaincy conflicts and land disputes. Mediation efforts were sometimes outsourced by the government to influential and neutral traditional chiefs, such as the *Asantehene* (Ashanti king), *Nayiri* (Mamprusi king) and *Yagbonwura* (Gonja king), while at the same time the government encouraged CSOs to complement government mediation efforts.

Such was the case during a 1994 armed conflict between Nanumbas and Kokombas, when the Church, CSOs and aid agencies moved quickly to complement the efforts of the NSC. Had it not been for the timely intervention by state and non-state actors, the conflict could have become protracted. While deploying security forces to impose a ceasefire and keep the peace, the government authorized the Permanent Peace Negotiating Team (PPNT) to mediate.

To complement the government's initiatives, the Inter-NGO Consortium (comprised of Catholic Relief Services, Action Aid Ghana, World Vision Ghana, Christian Council Ghana and Oxfam International) invited the Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI) to mediate. The NPI dispatched Mr. Emmanuel Bombande, a northern Ghanaian from Bawku and executive director of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), and Professor Hizkias Assefa, an Ethiopian national, to handle the mediation. With the PPNT unable to bridge a credibility gap in the eyes of parties to the conflict, the CSO-sponsored mediation became increasingly important to the peace process.

Particularly significant was complementarity, despite sometimes seemingly competing efforts, between CSO and government-sponsored initiatives. This subsequently led to the emergence of the first regional peace council (in the northern region) and the foundation for the establishment of the National Peace Council in Accra.

STRUCTURE AND MANDATE

The National Peace Council, as established by law, is created in the same three-tier structure as the government, NSC and traditional authority infrastructure. Each level of the NPC has a board and secretariat. The national board exercises supervisory and coordinating powers over the regional and district levels.

In order to facilitate coordination with the government, a peace-building support unit is to be established within the Ministry of Interior to interface with the NPC. The Minister for the Interior, responsible for internal security and overseeing the police, immigration and prison services, is the cabinet minister responsible for NPC matters. He or she serves as a link between the NPC and the NSC and also liaises with the Minister of Finance to ensure that resource requirements of the NPC are provided through its regular budget and the peace fund.

Mandate and activities of the National Peace Council

The law stipulates that the NPC's core mandate is "to facilitate and develop mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, resolution and to build sustainable peace in the country."

In line with the above mandate, the core activities of the NPC cover mediation, good offices, reconciliation, early warning, peace education, capacity-building, networking and resource mobilization. The NPC is expected to meet at least quarterly and may establish sub-committees and recruit short-term consultants and advisers.

Membership of the Boards

According to the law, each of the boards of the NPC (at the national, regional and district levels) is composed of 13 members. Members are expected to be Ghanaians of high moral standing and professional integrity, drawn from diverse sectors or society. The following organized groups and institutions are identified by the law to provide representatives:

Christian bodies (one representative from each):

- Catholic Bishops Conference
- Christian Council
- Ghana Pentecostal Council

- National Council for Christians and Charismatic churches

Muslim bodies (one representative from each):

- Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission
- Al-Sunnah Muslims
- Tijaaniya Muslim Groups

African Traditional Religions (one representative)

The traditional authorities, i.e. the National House of Chiefs (one representative)

Four representatives nominated by the following:

- The President of the Republic (2 nominees), one of which must be female
- Other identifiable groups, including private sector and professionals (2 nominees)

Appointing Authority

The President of the Republic appoints the members of the National Board on the recommendation of the Minister for the Interior. However, the chairman is selected by the members of the Board from amongst their group. The first National Board had Catholic Cardinal Peter Appiah Turkson of Cape Coast (now President of the Vatican Justice and Peace Commission) as its chairman. The current (second) Board is chaired by Most Reverend Professor Emmanuel Asante, Moderator of the Methodist Church of Ghana.

Appointment of regional board members follows the same representational pattern as the national level, but the appointing authority is the National Board in consultation with the regional government (the Regional Coordinating Council, headed by the regional minister). Similarly, at the district level, the National Board appoints members in consultation with the district assembly. The law stipulates that the boards are to function independent of any undue influence or interference.

Each board member is elected for a renewable four-year term. Between the first National Board and the current one, only two individuals have had their mandates renewed.

Resources

To support the work of the NPC, the law also makes provision for administrative, technical and material resources. Administrative resources include a secretariat

for each board headed by an Executive Secretary. The government's current national R2P Focal Point also serves as the Executive Secretary for the National Board.

At the national level, the peace-building support unit in the Ministry of Interior serves as liaison between the ministry and government, helps mobilize government support for NPC activities and manages the government's early warning mechanism. This mechanism creates a synergy between efforts of the NSC, the NPC and the sub-regional ECOWAS early warning system.

Material resources include the regular budget of the NPC, which is charged to the national consolidated fund and administered by the Ministry of Finance through the Interior Ministry. The National Peace Fund, as established by law, is managed by the National Board and resourced by government and voluntary contributions from the private sector, CSOs and development partners.

Collaboration

Apart from the NSC and the National House of Chiefs, the NPC also actively collaborates with a wide array of stakeholder institutions. Partners include the National Small Arms Commission, the National Council for Civic Education, the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice, the Electoral Commission and the Inter-Party Political Dialogue Committee, which was established under the auspices of the Electoral Commission to handle election disputes and promote inter-party consensus building for peaceful elections.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE NATIONAL PEACE COUNCIL

The NPC's legal foundation has endowed it with legitimacy and sustainability. The body's inclusivity and transparency has also been important. For example, the initial recommendation of membership covered several Christian institutions with only one Muslim representative. However, at a validation retreat to help fine tune the draft law, convened with UNDP support, the case was effectively made for Muslim representation to mirror the diversity in Christian representation. Representation of traditional chiefs was also later incorporated. Both amendments to the draft law were at the insistence of participating members of parliament on a bipartisan basis.

Another significant achievement was local and CSO leadership. The role of the Catholic Church, the Christian Council in northern Ghana, Muslim leaders, traditional rulers and development agencies, like Catholic Relief Services, World Vision, Action Aid and Oxfam, helped to create momentum for a focused structure to deal with the northern Ghana conflicts. From this exemplary CSO leadership the seed was effectively sown for the NPC to be established.

Key to this success was stakeholder leadership. Individual efforts include the roles played by the Catholic Archbishop of Tamale and his assistant, the then Regional Minister, successive Ministers of Interior, National Security Coordinators, the current chair of the NPC and his immediate predecessor, the executive director of WANEP, the then chief executive of ECOWAS and the then governance adviser of UNDP.

Ghana's democratic consolidation has made the holding of successful elections the major focus activity for the NPC so far. The independence, integrity and convening powers of the NPC have helped reduce tensions in the very closely contested presidential and parliamentary elections of 2008 and 2012. Supporting mediation from ECOWAS in 2008 complemented these national efforts.

During 2012 a tripartite initiative in Kumasi by the NPC, the *Asantehene* and the Institute of Democratic Governance (IDEG) resulted in a peace and fair play declaration by all presidential candidates at a public event. Traditional chiefs, the highly respected Muslim Chief Imam and various other religious leaders also helped to reduce tensions. In the process, the credibility and legitimacy of the NPC was enhanced.

Furthermore, the NPC's ability to leverage technical expertise from CSOs and the executive has given its actions a long reach. The result is that Ghanaians are increasingly embracing a culture of peace, tolerance, dialogue, reconciliation and the rule of law. In the process, early warning, mediation and inter-institutional collaboration in the area of peacebuilding have been strengthened.

The most recent achievement of the NPC is the production of its first five-year strategic development framework. Under this plan, developed with support from UNDP and WANEP, the NPC expects to operationalize Parliamentary Act 818 in its entirety by 2017. Regional and district peace councils, together with their respective secretariats, will be established. Indeed, except for the Ashanti region, regional secretaries have already been appointed by the Public Services

Commission on behalf of the NPC. The Peace Fund will be made operational and capacity-building will be carried out in a number of core areas. However, the strategic plan first identifies six key strategic objectives:

- Co-ordinate and harmonize all peace initiatives in Ghana;
- Promote understanding and acceptance of the culture of peace;
- Facilitate prevention and management of electoral violence;
- Prevent tensions from erupting into violent conflict;
- Manage conflicts to prevent further escalation and contain stress;
- Identify root causes and resolve conflicts.

Accordingly, the following focus areas of activities are outlined to meet the above strategic objectives. USD \$16 million was budgeted for the plan cycle of five years, focused on:

- Gender, youth and security mainstreaming;
- Networking, partnerships and coordination;
- Public peace education and research;
- Election dispute management;
- Conflict prevention;
- Conflict management;
- Conflict resolution;
- Capacity-building;
- Resource mobilization.

CHALLENGES

The effective implementation of the five-year plan is a key challenge facing the NPC. It has the onerous task of creating 10 regional and 212 district peace councils. In effect that means appointment of members and staff for 222 boards and secretariats. The Ghana Public Services Commission has the responsibility to help recruit suitable personnel for the respective peace council secretariats. The process of recruiting regional executive secretaries is already underway, but it remains to be seen whether this can be achieved in a timely and effective manner.

Appropriate sequencing and prioritization therefore becomes a compelling challenge. One would expect emphasis to be placed on the establishment of regional and district boards along with their respective secretariats in zones identified as potential conflict hot spots, e.g. northern region, upper east region (Bawku

municipal assembly); Ashanti region (Kumasi metropolitan assembly) and Volta region (Hohoe). In the case of Accra, although a likely hotspot, it already hosts the National Board and secretariat.

From the normative and legal angles, the NPC has also recognized a need to amend the existing law to include youth and gender representation on its boards. Except for stating that one of the two nominees must be female, there is no existing provision to ensure gender balance. The current National Board has only one female and no youth representation at all. The previous board had two females and no youth.

A third major challenge is the promotion of capacity-building for the regional and district boards as well as their respective staff to enable the NPC to better deliver on its strategic priorities. Fourth, the NPC is yet to develop a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy.

Fifth, existing activities have focused on elections and related disputes. Focus areas and capacity needs should extend to other domains, including land disputes and conflicts regarding resource management, such as those in the mining and forestry sectors.

Sixth, while the NPC envisages working closely with peace research centers, it needs to actively collaborate with functioning centers like CECOTAPS, the governance and democracy center at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration and the Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy.

Seventh, once the yet to be established peace-building support unit is a fully staffed and operational entity it will place extra financial strain on the ability of the Ministry of Interior to effectively support the NPC.

Finally, in developing synergy between the NSC and National House of Chiefs as core infrastructures for peace - especially in early-warning, mediation capacity and capacity to uphold the government's primary responsibility to protect - the NPC needs to clearly define and prioritize action in these critical areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

General

In Harare at the Organization of African Unity summit in 1997, Kofi Annan advised that "human rights are

African rights.” In fact one of his significant achievements as Secretary-General was to systematically and skillfully lay foundations for taking the UN back to where it belongs: “we the peoples.” It is also significant to note that former AU Commission Chairman, Alpha Konare, and Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas at ECOWAS moved in tandem with this approach, helping introduce far-reaching institutional reforms to their organizations. The UN, AU, ECOWAS, other regional economic communities and member states need to maintain this momentum.

The concept of national infrastructures for peace needs to be taken up at the African Union and as part of the UN’s post-2015 development goals discussion on good governance, democracy, peace and security. Fifty years from now African states should be discussing enhanced capacity to compete as established players in a global community of shared values, dignity and prosperity. Creating national infrastructures for peace and building resilient communities will enable us to get there.

National: Ghana

Recommendation 1:

The NPC has already decided on the need to amend the law in order to include gender and youth membership, but the intended amendment may be kept on hold until after the first five year review. In the meantime, nothing prohibits the NPC from co-opting more women and youth to assist in its work. Diversity must also be institutionalized in the regional and district boards.

Recommendation 2:

The NPC will need to develop a clear implementation strategy that is well sequenced and prioritized. This strategy should include a process for the establishment of regional and district boards, the recruitment of staff of relevant secretariats, an outreach and peace education strategy and a resource mobilization strategy.

Recommendation 3:

The focus areas of activities should be broadened to encompass resource management disputes, especially those over land, mining and forestry. Capacity building beyond peace education in schools should also include human rights, mediation, leadership and governance training for students, student leaders, youth associations and women’s groups.

Recommendation 4:

The NPC should leverage the strategic role of faith-based institutions, the media, the National Media

Commission and professional associations, including private business, in order to implement recommendation 3.

Recommendation 5:

Strategies for mainstreaming early warning and the role of the R2P Focal Point need to be undertaken by the Ministry of Interior in collaboration with the NPC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration.

Recommendation 6:

The above should be carried out in a manner that complements ECOWAS’ current early warning and focal point system (ECOWARN) and the African Union’s Conflict and Early Warning System (CEWS).

Recommendation 7:

Action to create a functional and viable peace support unit in the Ministry of Interior needs to be expedited.

Recommendation 8:

National, regional, district and community registers of peace partners need to be created to facilitate collaboration and targeted training.

Recommendation 9:

In order serve as an incentive for peace promotion, the NPC, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, Ministry Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, the Kofi Annan International Peace-keeping Training Centre and UNDP Accra, may wish to partner with ECOWAS and Ecobank in launching what could be termed the ECOWAS/Ecobank National Peace Awards.

Sub-Regional: ECOWAS

Recommendation 1:

ECOWAS should ensure national ownership of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention and Strategic Framework, as the reference point for peacebuilding and the development of national infrastructures for peace. To that end, the role of the Mediation and Security Council at the ambassadorial level needs to be enhanced along with other relevant national initiatives.

Recommendation 2:

ECOWARN needs a major review to make it more effective. It will need to carry out an inter-departmental review, based upon the outcome of the June 2012 ECOWAS meeting on R2P, held in Abuja in collaboration with the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Recommendation 3:

ECOWAS should study the Brazilian concept of Responsibility While Protecting with a view to undertaking peacekeeping training to further ECOWAS' accountable and responsible interventions. At the national level, the rich Ghanaian experience of accountability regarding domestic deployment in northern conflict zones is worth sharing.

Recommendation 4:

ECOWAS should leverage its synergies with sister Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as well as the African Union and UN. The weak link between RECs and the UN as well as between the AU and the UN should be addressed in the UN/AU Strategic Framework of Cooperation.

Recommendation 5:

In 2002, the AU Standing Conference on Stability, Security and Development in Africa, declared that African countries should establish national frameworks for conflict prevention, management and resolution. ECOWAS should facilitate regular meetings to review progress at the national and RECs coordination levels.

Regional: African Union

Recommendation 1:

The AU should promote an effective relationship between African Peace and Security Architecture and the ECOWAS conflict prevention strategic framework. In that regard the strategic partnership between ECOWAS and CSOs is worth emulating.

Recommendation 2:

The Protocol on Peace and Security Cooperation between AU and RECs needs to be effectively operationalized and co-owned.

Global: United Nations

Recommendation 1:

More effort should be concentrated on in promoting convergence towards shared values and norms. To that end, the focus should be on explaining R2P by helping states and regional bodies build preventive capacities.

Recommendation 2:

Special attention needs to be given to the need to balance the system of reconciliatory justice versus retributive justice in African countries that have experienced conflict, without encouraging impunity. The challenge of balancing the two is particularly

complicated by the character of Africa's multi-ethnic societies.

Recommendation 3:

There is a need to help promote south-south and north-south cooperation in building resilient communities by creating platforms for sharing best practices as well as mobilizing human and material resources. For instance in the case of south-south collaboration, Latin America has a lot to share with Africa. The Atlantic Dialogue Series provides a good platform for north-south exchanges.

Recommendation 4:

The UN should find an effective approach to mainstreaming the role of RECs and the AU in the ongoing post-2015 discourse, particularly as it relates to the peace, security and governance pillar.

CONCLUSION

Against the background of impressive achievements and enduring challenges in Ghana, it is important to recognize that the building of a national peace architecture and strengthening democratic governance is a success story.

From the experience of Ghana, one can surmise that the National Peace Council has five key characteristics. First, it has strong structural foundations within the national government that also correspond to international and regional mechanisms. Second, local leadership was critical to the emergence of the NPC. Third, inclusiveness has helped build the credibility and legitimacy of the NPC. Fourth, the peace infrastructures are aligned to Ghana's multi-level development strategy. Fifth, the core areas of focus are multi-faceted and sometimes cross-cutting: peace-building, democracy and good governance, rule of law, including alternative justice, all of which combine to support resilient communities.

At the national level, the previous National Board has provided direction and integrity. At the regional level, the northern regional peace advisory committee is a strong emerging model. On the district level, previous training provided by the Peace Advisory Committee to a number of district assemblies in the three northern regions in the aftermath of the 1994 conflict in Tamale provides some early reference point. The district security council, traditional council of chiefs and district

inter-party dialogue are awaiting strategic allies for the creation of district peace councils.

However, the very magnitude of activities tied to the NPC's five year plan, including the creation of 10 regional boards, 212 district boards and their accompanying secretariat staff, is daunting. A clearly phased and carefully calibrated implementation strategy will be necessary. Finally, the Secretariat of the National Peace Council should also play a strategic role in helping solidify the R2P Focal Points mechanism at the national and sub-national levels, promoting the norm of R2P as an essential part of building an enduring culture of peace and dialogue.