Democracy and Peace-building in Ghana: Paradoxes and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The search for an efficient peace-building mechanism is an increasingly topical issue among governments, international bodies and civil society organisations as the appropriate tool for preventing or resolving conflicts. Ghana is perceived to have an efficient peace-building mechanism that has steered her away from conflicts, which have engulfed her West African neighbours, namely Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Ivory Coast. Using chieftaincy (chiefship) conflicts in Ghana as a case study, this article seeks to analyse the efficiency of the peace-building mechanism of the Ghanaian state. It also highlights the effect of the mechanism on society, rule of law, democracy, good governance and human security in general.

Introduction

Chiefaincy conflicts pose the greatest security threat to national development in Ghana. Ghana is widely perceived as an oasis of peace in a sub-region engulfed in turmoil. However, the validity of this view is questionable as the country faces serious security challenges posed by chieftaincy conflicts. Who is accepted and regarded as a chief by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana?

1 I am grateful to Dr. Emmanuel Kwesi Aning and Titi Ajaji of African Security Dialogue and Research (ASDR) for their comments. 2 S.K. Boafo, Ashanti Regional Minister, Ghana Television News, Monday 16th August 2004.
According to Article 277 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, a chief ‘means a person who hailing from the appropriate family and lineage has been validly nominated elected and enskined or installed as a chief or queen mother in accordance with relevant law and usage’. Conflicts arising from the institution of chieftaincy continuously test the efficiency of Ghana’s peace-building mechanism defined as ‘the effort to strengthen the prospects for internal peace and decrease the likelihood of violent conflict’ (Strategic Framework for the Canadian Peace-building Activities: 1997). For instance, in March 2002, the chief of Dagbon and over 40 of his elders were killed in a chieftaincy conflict. Also, thousands of cedis (at the exchange rate of 9,000 cedis to a United States Dollar USD) worth of property were lost. Subsequently, the government had spent about 4,000,000,000 cedis in less than a year on peace enforcement in the Dagbon area. In essence, the human security of the people of Dagbon and indeed many people affected by similar conflicts has been negatively affected.

Although the term ‘human security’ has been bandied around for some time now, there is a distinct lack of clarity as to its application. There is, therefore, the need to clarify the manner in which it is used in this article. Human Security means:

...protect[ing] the vital core of all human lives in the ways that enhance human freedom and human fulfilment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms-freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using situations that build people’s strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, mili-

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3 In Ghana, chiefs from the southern part of the country sit on stools hence the expression enstoolment, which means to en-throne whilst destoolment means to de-throne. In the northern part of the country, chiefs sit on animal skin hence the expression enskinment and diskinment. The difference (in the use of the stools and animal skins) can be attributed to the vegetation of the country. This is because, whereas the southern part of the country has forest where trees are used to curve stools, the north is predominantly savannah where cattle are reared. Nonetheless, some chiefs in the northern past also sit on lion’s skin to depict their strength. In addition, it is imperative to state that, the institution of chieftaincy is as diverse as the culture of the country. However, there are some common traits that run through the institution and these are what the paper will attempt to discuss.

4 Strategic Framework for the Canadian Peace-building Activities (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade/The Canadian International Development Agency, 1997). In order words, peace-building as used in this paper encompasses proactive peace-building or conflicts prevention, management, peacekeeping, resolution and post conflict reconstruction.