



## Coexistence International at Brandeis University

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## Background

The Republic of Ghana is a small country in West Africa that borders Cote d'Ivoire to the west, Burkina Faso to the north, Togo to the east, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. Originally called the Gold Coast, Ghana was one of the colonies ruled by the British government through the indirect rule system. This system allowed the British to exercise control over large territories with minimal British personnel. Ghana became the first African colony, below the Sahara, to gain independence from the British in 1957. Ghana's first prime minister and president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, was an advocate of Pan-Africanism – promoting a united Africa and relations with other African heads of state. Nkrumah embarked on a broad economic development policy for Ghana, establishing a road network, universal education, hospitals, and other social programs that laid the foundations for a comparatively solid infrastructure in the country.

By 1964, Ghana had become a one-party state under Nkrumah's Convention Peoples Party (CPP), ostensibly with the aim of promoting unity and banning tribal politics, which, the party argued, exacerbated divisions that could lead to conflict. The genesis of military and autocratic rule began to manifest during Nkrumah's regime with the Preventive Detention Act of 1958, which led to the detention of more than 300 people without trial.

Subsequent regimes also dealt harshly with opposition groups.<sup>1</sup> For example, the National Liberation Council (1966-1969)

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implemented protective custody and banned political party activity; the Busia civilian administration (1969-1972) cracked down on organized labor and Nkrumah-CPP supporters; and the Acheampong regime (1972-1978) was alleged to have committed military and police abuses against civilians. Under Jerry Rawlings' two regimes, there were also reports of torture, confiscation of assets, extra-judicial detention, and killings – which included the public execution of former leaders of military regimes.<sup>2</sup> Under both military and civilian regimes, a culture of respect for human rights was conspicuously absent, and the cycle of bitterness created by these abuses has been a major driver of the subtle political conflict and instability in contemporary Ghana.<sup>3</sup>

## Current State of Coexistence

Ethnic groups in Ghana are classified into a few large groups, with the Akan group dominating (49.1% of the population) according to the latest national population census (2000).<sup>4</sup> Others include: the Mole-Dagbani group (16.5%), Ewe (12.7%), Ga Adangbe (8.0%), the Guan (4.4%), Gurma group (3.9%), Grusi (2.8%), Mande-Busanga (1.1%), and others (1.5%). Each of these large groups is further divided into sub-ethnic groups. For example, the Akan group has more than twenty sub-ethnic divisions. Ghana has about ninety-two separate ethnic groups.<sup>5</sup> The Akan group's majority status results in its dominance in the Ghanaian social fabric and control of the business sectors. Furthermore, the group's common language, Akan (with minor different dialects), has become the most spoken local language in Ghana. The group also dominates national politics, where the perception from the non-Akan groups is that members of the Akan ethnic group are overly represented in government.

Linguistically, Ghana has more than fifty local languages reflecting the various ethnic compositions. Although English is the official language, most ethnic groups tend to speak their local languages in the areas they occupy. The English language is mostly spoken in the capital city, Accra, but of course the Akan language is also highly spoken. Ghanaians generally accept that English is the official language and as long as no attempt is made to instill one language, for instance Akan, as another official language, the issue of language has not been

contested. The official usage of the languages of the major ethnic groups – Akan, Ga, Ewe, Dagbani and Nzema – on national television when delivering local news demonstrates respect for all ethnic groups.

Unlike some of its neighbors, Ghana has been spared the violent ethnic conflicts and the civil wars that have plagued West Africa, such as those in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire. Though composed of diverse ethnic groups, Ghana has enjoyed relative peace and stability since 1993. A well-governed country by regional standards, it is often cited as a model of successful economic reforms and a progressive democratic society. This is particularly remarkable given that Ghana is ethnically, linguistically, and religiously heterogeneous<sup>6</sup> as noted above.

Nevertheless, Ghana is not immune to conflict within its borders. It has had civilian and military dictatorships whose tenures were characterized by gross human rights violations that left indelible scars on the citizenry. Several outbreaks of ethnic and chieftaincy conflicts have occurred over the years, as well as land disputes. Religious conflicts have also been part of Ghana's history: for instance, the conflict between the Ga traditionalists<sup>7</sup> and the charismatic churches (these are the equivalent of Evangelical or Pentecostal churches elsewhere in the West) in the Greater Accra region, which also has an ethnic component.<sup>8</sup> These cleavages are a source of worry and debate over the prospects of coexistence<sup>9</sup> in Ghana.

As much as Ghana has maintained territorial peace and stability in the face of a turbulent sub-region, there is cause for concern against complacency. Recent Afrobarometer findings suggest that the majority of Ghanaians (57%) perceive themselves as much Ghanaian as belonging to a specific ethnic group.<sup>10</sup> However, there is an increasing trend (according to Afrobarometer findings) to suggest that the proportion of Ghanaians feeling only or more Ghanaian is dropping while those feeling only or more ethnic is increasing. During the rule of the immediate past government, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the public perception was that the NPP favored its ethnic members in public office appointments.

Until 2002, most of the violations and abuses during the military regimes had not been investigated, acknowledged, or officially

redressed, resulting in considerable bitterness and divisions within Ghanaian society. Long-term effects of the perpetration of these myriad human rights violations included economic hardship, the deprivation of education for children, health problems, social divisions and animosities, and disintegration of families.<sup>11</sup> Socioeconomic inequalities have also aggravated the deep suspicion and mistrust among the peoples of Ghana. The North-South divide in Ghana (the North being comparatively poorer), income and service availability disparities between urban and rural settings, a lack of opportunities for segments of the population, particularly the disabled, and gender insensitivity have all proven to be obstacles to coexistence in Ghana.

Another area where Ghana's march to coexistence remains a work in progress is the treatment and attitude towards immigrants from neighboring African states, particularly Nigerians. Ghana's record in this area, like most African states, is not good. A common perception exists that Nigerians living in Ghana are the primary source of crime and job competition, specifically in the banking industry. However, there are signs that this fear of the "other" is also abating. Certainly Ghana's record in hosting the small numbers of refugees fleeing the conflicts in Liberia has been widely praised, and political leadership in Ghana has not exploited the nascent xenophobia. Nevertheless, with globalization, the looming oil boom, and the likelihood of more immigrants coming, coexistence issues must be monitored.

Isolated violent conflicts continue to surface in parts of Ghana. There is evidence of land conflicts and disputes, especially in the Greater Accra region, due, in part, to the inability of successive Ghanaian governments to address the flaws and inefficiencies in the existing frameworks in the administration and management of public and stool/skin lands.<sup>12</sup> There is also the element of perennial non-payment of appropriate compensation to the rightful traditional and family owners of land compulsorily acquired by the state for public use. Furthermore, sometimes the government has not used the land for the original intent, infuriating the original owners and generating prolonged conflict with the state. This particular issue is prevalent in the Greater Accra region, where apart from the individual and family conflicts over land, there is also a re-occurring dispute between the natives of the region and the government. The latter has sometimes produced ethnic undertones. It must be noted, however, that government has in recent past attempted to redress some of these lapses. The new comprehensive Land Administration Project (LAP) and the government promise to return some of the compulsorily acquired land back to their rightful owners may contribute to mitigating the tension and animosity that these unresolved land disputes bring to the body politic.

Chieftaincy disputes have also been a bane to the stability in Ghanaian society, especially at the social and community levels.

Today, there seems to be no imminent end to the long-standing volatile ethnic conflict (which has its roots traced to chieftaincy dispute) between the Kusasis and Mamprusis in the Bawku area of the Upper East Region. There is also a deadlock in negotiations to find a lasting peaceful agreement in the Dagbon crisis between the two conflicting families in the Yendi chieftaincy disputes. Not even the use of traditional approaches to resolving the conflict has been successful. These chieftaincy conflicts cut across all ten regions, and they have sometimes resulted in violent clashes leading to the loss of lives and properties. For example, the Konkomba-Nanumba war over chieftaincy sovereignty in 1986, and the Bimbo war against the Konkomba in 1989, resulted in several deaths and property damages and the state spent significant resources in maintaining peace and stability. From the north to south of Ghana, pockets of chieftaincy conflicts have been recorded and they continue to manifest. Apart from the Dagbon, Bawku and the Konkomba-Nanumba, Konkomba-Bimbo conflicts cited, protracted chieftaincy disputes have also taken place in parts of the Volta, Greater Accra, Central, Ashanti, Upper West and Brong Ahafo regions.<sup>13</sup>

The manifestations of tensions and conflicts -- ethnic, religious, chieftaincy, or land -- provide a clear indication that coexistence is a goal yet to be attained by Ghanaians. There is therefore the urgent need for government, civil society, and the entire citizenry to deepen the consultation processes and strengthen both state and non-state approaches to sustainable peacebuilding and coexistence.

## Policies and Initiatives

### *Constitution*

In January 1993, Ghana made an attempt at constitutional multi-party democracy. After experiencing all forms of political arrangements -- constitutional, union government, and military -- Ghanaians decided in a national referendum in April 1992 to accept a new constitution, modeled on liberal democratic principles. The 1992 Constitution ushered Ghanaians into the Fourth Republic with a democratic transitional election during the latter part of 1992. Since January 7, 1993, Ghana has made enormous strides to develop its democratic practices,<sup>14</sup> deepen appreciation of equality, embrace its ethnic diversity, and resolve to make Ghana a more unified society. The lessons and experiences from the past have provided guidance to the promotion of coexistence in Ghana.

The 1992 Ghana Constitution, despite its design faults,<sup>15</sup> remains the basis upon which the ideals of coexistence in Ghana are to be realized. Modeled on liberal democratic principles, the 1992 Constitution affirms the preeminent role of "the people in Ghana" in promoting and safeguarding the Constitution. Its enforcement is entrusted to the people of

Ghana; Article 1 (1) says that the “sovereignty of Ghana resides in the people of Ghana in whose name and for whose welfare the powers of government are to be exercised in the manner and within the limits laid down in this Constitution.”<sup>16</sup> The directive principles of state policy contained in chapter six of the Constitution task all citizens, the president, the parliament, the judiciary and other institutions of state to seek the realization of equality, freedom, and justice for all Ghanaians. Specifically, Article 34 (5) gives the state the responsibility to actively promote the integration of the peoples of Ghana and prohibit discrimination and prejudice on the grounds of place of origin, circumstances of birth, ethnic origin, gender or religion, creed, or other beliefs.<sup>17</sup> It is upon these constitutional principles that successive governments in the Fourth Republic have initiated and developed legislative frameworks, policies, and other good governance schemes. Such measures have been the building blocks for promoting social inclusion, managing conflicts, sustaining the principles of equality, maintain the respect for individual and group rights, and strengthening interdependence among Ghanaians.

Towards the objectives of achieving equality in national political representation and national integration, the Constitution in Article 35, section 5 (b) mandates the state to take appropriate measures to achieve reasonable regional and gender balance in recruitments and appointments to public office.<sup>18</sup> Since 1993, this provision has been apparent in cabinet appointments in successive governments and has thereby ensured that each ethnic or regional block is not left out in national political representation.

In addition, the Council of State, which is a national body mandated by the Constitution to counsel the president, has one person representing each of the ten regions (this is in addition to specific national institutional representation and presidential appointments).<sup>19</sup> Similar to the Council of State, the Constitution provides for the establishment of the National House of Chiefs with a mandate to advise the government on matters affecting chieftaincy, and traditional customary law and practices. The representation within the House ensures equality and fairness to the diversity in the social structure of the country. Each region is mandated to elect five paramount chiefs from its own regional house of chiefs to the National House of Chiefs.

Finally, another significant piece of legislation that seeks to promote national integration and coexistence in Ghanaian politics is the Political Parties’ Law. The formation of a political party in Ghana with the purposes of shaping the political will of Ghanaians must reflect the ethnic and religious composition of the country. The Political Parties Law stipulates that no political party may be formed on ethnic, gender, religious, regional, or other particularistic lines.<sup>20</sup>

The rationale behind these legislative frameworks is to

recognize the diversity that exists, protect and promote it in an all-inclusive manner, and to safeguard the rights and freedoms of all Ghanaians as enshrined in chapter five of the 1992 Constitution. The constitutional requirement for equality in public office appointments has prevented excessive abuse by politicians to seek the interests of their own ethnic kinsmen against others, which has always been a source of tension and conflict in the West Africa sub-region. The national membership requirement for founding a political party has, indeed, forced political parties to strive for equality in ethnic representation in both the regional and national executive structures. This has reinforced national cohesion and coexistence among the diverse groups in Ghanaian society.

Since 1993, the Council of State has, from time to time, made its presence felt in advising the president on matters that seek to foster coexistence in Ghana. For example, it made several inputs during the discussion that resulted in the setting up of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) in 2002. The Council was one of the bodies that advised the President on the selection of membership to the NRC. The Council has also intervened in several chieftaincy disputes around the country with the aim of fostering peaceful solutions and creating opportunities for coexistence.

#### *National Reconciliation Commission*

In 2002, the NPP government established a National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) with the mandate to investigate human rights abuses since 1957 (year of independence) to January 1993 (the beginning of the fourth republic). The NRC was tasked with recommending appropriate means of redressing victims of human rights violations and fostering national reconciliation and coexistence. As previously noted, the lack of formal state response to dealing with abuses of the past had caused bitterness and social tension among sections of Ghanaian society. The NRC was one of the primary political objectives under the NPP government to seek reconciliation and foster coexistence. It was also the first time that a public forum was provided for all aggrieved Ghanaians to share their experiences of abuse, uncover the truth about the past, for perpetrators to acknowledge their guilt and seek forgiveness, and for the nation to begin to chart a new course.

The NRC operated for more than two years (January 2002–October 2004), collected over 4,000 statements of human rights abuses from victims, and conducted 1,866 public hearings throughout the country. In October 2004, it submitted a five-volume report to the government detailing its findings and making appropriate recommendations for redress and institutional reforms. The NRC identified victims, perpetrators, and various human rights violations that took place within the targeted period. It also sought factors and conditions that facilitated or enabled the occurrences of these violations. The government accepted the findings and the

recommendations in the report and has, since October 2006, been implementing some of the recommendations, particularly the proposals on reparations. To the extent that victims had the opportunity to air their grievances in public and the state acknowledged them, the NRC process could be argued to have been a success. However, whether victims, upon completion of the exercise and subsequent implementation of the reparation program, are satisfied with the whole exercise is a question that will require further research. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that some of the victims were unsatisfied with the monetary compensation they received.

#### *National Peace Council*

The National Peace Council (NPC) is another government-led initiative to assist in conflict resolution and sustainable peacebuilding in Ghana. Established in 2006 within the Ministry of Interior and with the support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it is composed of eminent religious leaders, chiefs, and private persons of high repute – selected through a broad-based consultation process with all stakeholders, including political parties, the chieftaincy structure, youth, and women groups. The NPC's mandate is to monitor conflicts and advise government and its partners on how to mediate, deepen dialogue between feuding parties, and provide a policy framework for dealing with conflict situations. The NPC also has regional and district levels – the other two levels of political administration in Ghana.

The NPC has intervened and mediated in a number of conflicts that were potential threats to the peace, stability, and development of the nation. For example, in 2007 the NPC played an instrumental role in resolving a stalemate between teachers and government that had disrupted teaching and learning in the country's high schools. The Council is currently mediating in the ongoing conflict in the Upper East Region in Northern Ghana, involving the Kusasi and Mamprusi. As an institution set up as part of the "National Architecture for Peace in Ghana,"<sup>21</sup> the NPC has also taken proactive steps to sensitize key conflict-prone institutions, such as the chieftaincy and political parties, on how to manage intra-institutional conflict through capacity-building workshops. Because 2008 was an election year, it made as its national agenda for the year to sensitize all major players on the need to avoid issues that will generate conflict and exclusion. Indeed, the NPC was called to action during the election month of December when tension arose in the electioneering campaign and election violence threatened the peace of Ghana. The NPC is, thus, another creative policy institution that the government of Ghana has put in place to strengthen peacebuilding and promote harmony in the society. The NPC is established at the national level (although it is yet to have a legislative instrument to back it), and it is independent of the established political governance and administrative structures of Ghana. It, however, works within these structures of which the local government system is part.

#### *Local Government System*

Ghana's decentralization program has also made room for peacebuilding and conflict-resolution structures. The local government system allows for Peace Advisory Councils. These councils are composed of representatives of identified groups and stakeholders, including chiefs, within the regions and districts. Gender and youth representation are also factored in the composition of these councils. The Peace Councils promote tolerance and encourage dialogue between groups and communities. The Peace Councils at the lowest level of political administration – the District Assemblies – have been the first point of call for conflict resolution in Ghana. They provide strategic advice and early warning on potential threats to peace and stability of communities. Indeed, in the past, the councils have helped in preventing conflicts that could have been violent. For example, the Yendi District (Northern region) Peace and Security Council has for the past years (since the outbreak of the Yendi conflict) acted swiftly to quell existing tension that could result in violent conflict. In doing so, the local government structures in Ghana have contributed to peace, stability, and coexistence among different groups and interests at the local level and for that matter the whole nation.

#### *Northern Ghana Development Fund*

The differences in development between the northern and southern parts of Ghana are clearly apparent, especially in the social and economic spheres. The origin of this inequality is rooted in colonial times. For several reasons, including the geographical factors, such as lower rainfall, savannah vegetation, and accessibility challenges,<sup>22</sup> the colonial administration focused its efforts on the south rather than the north. The focus on the south included developing mining industries, cocoa production in the forest regions, and other labor-intensive ventures. Unfortunately, post-independence governments have failed to consciously develop and implement policies that will lead to the transformation of the north in terms of infrastructural development and economic prosperity, except for the free education policy for the people from the north to go to school in the south under Nkrumah's CPP regime. This systematic pattern of economic abuse (favoring the south over the north in terms of the location of economic, social, and other developmental activities) has remained to date. This phenomenon has aggravated the inequality gap and created deep suspicion and mistrust among the peoples from the divide.

After years of debate and protest from the people of the north, the government in 2007 announced a policy to engage stakeholders for the purposes of developing a "Special Initiative for Sustainable Development in Northern Ghana." This proposal came to fruition when in the government's yearly budget statement for 2008, it announced the establishment of the Northern Ghana Development Fund with seed money of 25 million Ghana Cedis (about US \$25 million).

This economic policy initiative is very commendable since it demonstrates government recognition that a segment of Ghanaians has been excluded in the sharing of national resources and that there is the need for recognition and redress. If the political will needed to take this policy forward is found, the deep suspicion and mistrust will become a thing of the past.

#### *Customary Practices and Traditional Governance*

Despite the ethnic divisions and the occasional tension and conflicts that characterize certain relationships in the country, inter-cultural and inter-ethnic bonding in Ghana has historically been based on mutual trust and respect for one another. The idea that groups distinguish themselves from one another, yet are prepared to live together, is perhaps one of the lasting legacies of the first president of Ghana (Kwame Nkrumah). This has been cultivated through the promotion of values such as embracing diversity, respecting all persons, as well as acknowledging their equality and interdependence. With these as the underlying values of the traditional Ghanaian society, recourse to the use of force in solving conflicts/misunderstanding between persons and groups is not common. Thus, conflicts are resolved mainly through dialogue and most importantly mediation. Furthermore, Ghana's largely matriarchal society plays a key role in promoting peace. Traditionally, women are insignias of peace in their roles as mothers and peace advocates. The influence of women is codified by the traditional political roles of the Queen Mother.

The Queen Mother in the Ghanaian traditional governance system is considered the mother of the community, source of wisdom, and in almost all the ethnic groups (especially in the Akan group that follows the matrilineal tradition) is the person who nominates a chief or king when there is a vacancy. The queen mother usually sits at the right side of the chief when he sits in public. The Queen Mother's position in the traditional community enables her to take up a major role in peacebuilding and unity forging through the counsel that she gives to the chief and other elders. Naomi Wellings writes: "Traditional rulers such as queen mothers and chiefs are both the spiritual and the practical leaders of a community, serving as father and mother to the society, and guiding and nurturing individuals."<sup>23</sup>

Traditional governance, especially in the rural areas (where more than 50% of Ghana's population lives), is highly respected and appreciated. Chiefs and queen mothers are the embodiment of unity and leadership in these areas. They are not supposed to engage in party politics (by a constitutional ban), and, for that matter, they are expected to be apolitical. The rationale behind this provision is to promote equal leadership for all people irrespective of their political or ethnic affiliation in the areas that they govern. This respect for the chieftaincy system in Ghana places chiefs and queen mothers in a unique position to champion strong leadership and coexistence. The chieftaincy system has been instrumental in resolving disputes, including inter-ethnic ones, through

dialogue. The National House of Chiefs has been an important player in this respect. Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic, the National House of Chiefs and its regional counterparts have successfully resolved all kinds of conflicts over issues such as land (which often leads to inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts) and chieftaincy, especially where politicians have not interfered. Some of these successful resolutions have been made public and received high level publicity. Others have not been given media coverage and were resolved more quietly by the House.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Ghana Conference of Religions for Peace (GCRP)*

Ghana is a secular state. In spite of the importance that people place on their faith, Ghana has overall been spared the kind of religious intolerance and conflicts that have occurred in some parts of West Africa, and in Nigeria in particular. Nonetheless, it has also had religious misunderstanding. As noted earlier, the conflict between the Gas and the charismatic churches has occasionally (1998 and 1999) been violent and also become ethnically charged.<sup>25</sup> The initiative by all the religious groups in Ghana to form the Ghana Conference of Religions for Peace (formally known as the Forum for Religious Bodies) has been pivotal in promoting coexistence among the diverse religious groups in Ghana. The diverse composition of the group is an example of coexistence among different religious faiths in Ghana.

In addition to helping to resolve ethnic conflicts in some parts of Ghana, the group has, since 1996, trained its members to observe national elections in order to bring credibility to the process. It has intervened in a series of stalemates such as those between government and opposition, as well as between striking workers and its government employers. For example, in September 2006, the GCRP assisted in resolving a strike by professional graduate teachers for better service conditions. The group was also called upon to mediate another conflict between the former head of state Jerry Rawlings and his successor, J. A. Kufuor, that was so severe that the former president had refused to honor an invitation to participate in Ghana's 50th post-independence anniversary. The extent that religious groups from different faiths can live harmoniously as well as intervene constructively on matters of national interest in order to promote coexistence in Ghana is remarkable. It suggests the role that civil society groups in Ghana continue to play in search for peaceful coexistence and stability.

#### *Other Civil Society Initiatives*

Association between groups in Ghana is vibrant and continues to grow as the democratic space expands. Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ghana have been playing an active role in the functioning of democracy in Ghana. They have kept watch on governments in order to ensure that they follow the constitutional provisions, including those that seek to strengthen unity, peace, and stability in the body politic.

Organizations such as the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) have been playing a significant role in resolving various ethnic and chieftaincy disputes. Indeed, WANEP has been very active in the current chieftaincy impasse in both Yendi and Bawku, both in the Northern part of Ghana. Other CSOs, including the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute of Democratic Governance (IDEG), and the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) have all strengthened Ghana's democracy through election monitoring and observations, voter education, peacebuilding, and national reconciliation efforts. Gender equity advocacy groups have also surfaced in Ghana, seeking to promote respect for women and children in society. They are also deeply involved in initiating programs to increase women's representation in national political and public policy decision-making institutions. Notable among these groups are the Women in Law and Development (WILDAF) and the Abantu for Women Development in Ghana.

## Complementary Approach

The aforementioned policies and initiatives for promoting peace, stability, and coexistence have undoubtedly contributed to the mainly harmonious interactions among different ethnicities, religions, and traditions in Ghana. They have created an environment for Ghanaian society to embrace diversity. Such efforts help the population to believe that there is strength in diversity and that as a nation there will be progress through recognizing interdependence. The policies offer assurances that equality of all persons will be actively practiced irrespective of the challenges and that as a nation Ghana should approach conflict resolution by way of dialogue and through its rich customary and traditional heritage.

Developing and implementing complementary approaches to promoting coexistence in Ghana will require a stronger political will from key actors, especially the government. The 1992 Constitution has provided the basic framework for building stronger interdependence and coexistence. It has responded adequately with provisions to redress the cultural and historical categories that have tended to generate inequalities and tensions. It has, through the provisions on fundamental human rights, sought to promote equal opportunity for all Ghanaians. While several policies and initiatives as outlined above address social tensions and conflicts, more needs to be done in order to strengthen unity and coexistence among all Ghanaians.

A major challenge in the context of Ghana's political, social, and economic development is the question of enforcement of decisions, agreements, and legislation. Governments have been weak in implementing outcomes of negotiations, judicial pronouncements, and even on their own commitments and promises. The result is the reoccurrence of conflicts and persistent exclusion of minorities. Sometimes statements from

public officials undermine the seriousness of government's own policy programs. A complementary approach will, first and foremost, involve the recognition and the acknowledgement of community diversity. Portraying diversity as positive rather than negative will bring about more social, economic, and political cohesion.

Public education that highlights the strength of diversity also will ensure sustained coexistence. Government needs to establish a cross-sector collaboration of both state and non-state institutions to advance the virtues of diversity. Here state institutions, such as the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) and the Information Service Department (ISD), could play an effective role through their regular nationwide civic education activities for citizens. ISD, in particular, is mandated to inform and educate Ghanaians, especially those in the rural areas, through community forums, mobile announcement, and video screenings on state-/government-initiated programs. Cross-sector collaboration also implies greater inter-governmental collaboration, between ministries, the local government, and with civil society to identify and respond to key coexistence challenges and develop policy responses.

Implementing affirmative action<sup>26</sup> to correct imbalances in national development is also crucial. Building affirmative action into government's developmental agenda and policies to address the concerns of the marginalized and the excluded may, in the long term, help reduce tensions and suspicions and promote coexistence. But of course, such decisions to promote affirmative action must be based on national consensus so as not to create the impression that the policies are politically motivated. This is where public education becomes critical, such as the initiative by the NPP government in Ghana in launching the Northern Ghana Development Fund as a special developmental project geared towards bridging the North-South divide.

There is also the need to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of government-led as well as civil society-initiated programs that are already in place. For example, it may be useful to evaluate the extent to which recommendations outlined by the national reconciliation exercise have been implemented, and for that matter the extent to which the aim of the process – national reconciliation – has been realized. Monitoring and evaluating these programs will also help to detect overlapping initiatives, especially when Ghana appears to be experiencing the proliferation of CSOs and grassroots organizations that are engaged in peacebuilding and community coexistence projects.

Finally, complementarity may require that political leadership as well as civil society leaders/actors in Ghana consciously, through legislative reforms or some form of customs or convention, attempt to minimize the tension that is usually

associated with the “winner takes all” attribute associated with party politics in Ghana. In the past, and especially under the NPP government, there have been efforts to bring members of the other side of the political divide into government – what the NPP called “an all-inclusive government.” This approach to governance is encouraging and needs to be sustained. The newly elected National Democratic Congress (NDC) party has pledged to foster and deepen national unity through an open door policy.

## Conclusion

Ghana is made up of diverse socio-cultural groups. Ethno-regional divisions and tensions that predate independence continue to manifest in all forms – ethnic conflicts, chieftaincy, and land disputes that have sometimes turned violent. The North-South divide, the rural-urban inequalities, as well as the dominance of the larger Akan group in economic and social life also represent major coexistence challenges in Ghana. These tensions will be exacerbated by the effects of globalization, the discovery of large quantities of oil reserves in the Western part of Ghana and their residual effects of a growing immigrant population.

Questions remain regarding the effectiveness of some of these policies, whether in the design phase or the implementation phase. Nonetheless, the governance institutions that have been provided by the Constitution and those that have been established by successive governments coupled with the resilience of traditional leaders and institutions suggest that Ghanaians are in the position to confront the challenges ahead. The realities and lessons from the past and the experiences of its neighbors make it all the more important for Ghana to enhance intra- and inter-ethnic coexistence. The foundation has been laid by the 1992 Constitution, and it appears Ghanaians are on the whole receptive to the current form of governance. Indeed, Afrobarometer findings (1999, 2003, 2005, and 2008) recorded stronger and increasing support for democracy and multi-party politics, an indication that Ghanaians respect diversity and are prepared to live with one another. What is needed is the political will on the part of government to adhere to the letter and spirit of the 1992 Constitution. Government will need the partnership of civil society to achieve this objective.

As a nation that has always been the trailblazer on the African continent, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana, with unity of purpose, deepened democratic practices, communication, and a positive inter-ethnic dialogue, will remain stable and stronger in its coexistence efforts.

## Endnotes

- 1 The leadership composition of the subsequent regimes, generally did not reflect particular ethnic groups, except, perhaps that of the Jerry Rawlings’s Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), from 1981-1992 which was accused of favoring one particular ethnic group. These regimes largely targeted operatives of the former regimes and were not ethnically motivated.
- 2 Gyimah-Boadi, E., “Ghana’s Transitional Justice Experience” in Boraine Alex and Valentine Sue (eds.), *Transitional Justice and Human Security*, (Cape Town; ICTJ, 2006), p. 181ff.
- 3 Ibid
- 4 See Republic of Ghana, 2000 Population and Housing Census, (Ghana Statistical Service, March 2000)
- 5 For more on ethnic composition and divisions in Ghana, see E. Gyimah-Boadi and Richard Asante in “Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Ghana,” (UNRISD Publication, 2004)
- 6 Ghanaians are predominantly Christians, although other religions are present as well. The composition of religious groups in Ghana is: Christians (70%), Muslim (16%) traditional religion (9%), and others (5%). See Republic of Ghana, 2000 Population and Housing Census, (Ghana Statistical Service, March 2000)
- 7 The Ga people are another distinct group who occupy parts of the coastal land of Ghana. The area they occupy, Accra, also happens to be the capital of Ghana.
- 8 The tension between these two groups arises from the non-adherence by the charismatic churches to the customs and traditions of the Ga over their annual ban on drumming and noise-making as part of the Homowo festival.
- 9 The term coexistence is rarely used in Ghana. In spite of the non-usage in the Ghanaian vocabulary, the meaning of coexistence – embracing diversity, equality of all persons and interdependence – are the guiding principles that have informed Ghana’s quest for peace, stability and unity. The independence motto – Freedom and Justice – is understood by all Ghanaians, irrespective of which ethnic group one belongs, to mean that all Ghanaians are equal and that Ghana is made up of different ethnic and religious groups whose rights to live peacefully with one another in Ghana is guaranteed.
- 10 See Afrobarometer Round Four Survey Report (Accra: CDD-Ghana, June 2008). Afrobarometer is an independent, non partisan research instrument that measures the social, political and economic atmosphere in twenty countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

- 11 CDD-Ghana, *Never Again: Summary and Synthesis of National Reconciliation Commission's Final Report*, (Ghana Center for Democratic Development: Accra, 2005)
- 12 Stool or skin refers to the symbol of kingship or throne on which traditional chiefs and queen mothers occupy (they actually sit on skin or stool during public gatherings). Unlike Public Lands that are vested in the President on behalf of, and in trust, of all the people, stool or skin lands belong to communities and are held and managed by chiefs and queen mothers for the people. The 1992 Constitution vests all such lands in the appropriate stool on behalf of, and in trust for, the subjects of the stool in accordance with customary law and usage
- 13 Examples of these conflicts including violent clashes between the people of Techiman and Tuobodom in the Brong-Ahafo Region For more on these conflicts, see Dominic K. Agyeman, "Managing Diversity and Ethnic Conflicts" in Baffour Agyeman-Duah (ed). *Ghana Governance in the Fourth Republic*, (CDD-Ghana Publication, 2008)
- 14 Ghana has organized five successful general elections with the most recent being the last December 2008 elections. The 2000 election led to a peaceful and smooth transfer of power from one elected government to another and the just ended December 2008 election also resulted in a smooth power transfer from an incumbent government to an opposition party. Ghanaians have consistently, since 1999, approved of the current multi-party political arrangements. See *Afrobarometer Round Four Findings* (Accra: CDD-Ghana, June 2008)
- 15 These include the excessive powers that the Presidency holds compared to the Parliament – the national representative body. These powers have from time to time enabled the President to make decisions and public office appointments that have tended to serve the Presidency's own interest as against the national interest. In addition, the inclusion in the Constitution of an entrenched indemnity/immunity provisions has prevented any judicial investigations into human rights violations committed by all past military regimes, especially when it seeks to overturn the decisions made by them.
- 16 See the 1992 Constitution, Chapter 1, page 1, Government Printer Assembly Press: Accra, 1992
- 17 *Ibid.* Chapter 6, pg. 35
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 35-36
- 19 Ghana has ten regions divided for the purposes of political administration. To a large extent these regions reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity in Ghana.
- 20 See Political Parties Act, 2000 (Act 574)
- 21 The "National Architecture for Peace in Ghana" is a Ghana Government policy document developed with the support from UNDP to promote peace, stability and unity in Ghana. It details a national vision that is characterized by a dynamic environment where people can engage in their lawful activities confident that the institutions, mechanism and capacities for mediating differences and grievances are effective and responsive. According to the document, its broad objective is to facilitate the development of mechanisms for cooperation among all the relevant stakeholders in peace building in Ghana. This is done through promoting cooperative problem solving and by institutionalizing conflict transformation processes, social, political and religious reconciliation and transformative dialogues. The NPC is one of the structures established.
- 22 Background Papers to World Development Report (Equity and Development) "Bridging The North-South Divide in Ghana", 2006.  
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org>
- 23 Wellings, Naomi, "Between Custom and Christianity," 4 August, 2006.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5239902.stm>
- 24 Agyeman, "Managing Diversity and Ethnic Conflicts" in Baffour Agyeman-Duah (ed.), *Ghana Governance in the Fourth Republic*. (CDD-Ghana, 2008) p. 89
- 25 Although, the conflict between the Gas and the charismatic churches has its immediate cause resulting from a clash of religious beliefs, the ethnic undercurrent has been apparent. The Ga traditionalists are of the view that their indigenous religious tradition should be respected by all residents in the area, irrespective of their religious, ethnic and/or social background. The Ga youth, in particular, have felt that the non-adherence of this ban on drumming by the Christian community (mostly non-indigenous) constitute marginalization of the Gas in their own society. As noted in the paper, Accra, which the Ga occupy, is the capital of Ghana, and hence it is a cosmopolitan city attracting all ethnic groups in Ghana leaving and working in the city.
- 26 Here affirmative action is used to mean a conscious effort by governments, either through policies or programs, designed to address past discrimination and/or marginalization of a particular group. Depending on the cause of discrimination, the action may be geared towards education, as happened in Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah after independence, with the Northern Education Fund to benefit people from the north coming to school (tertiary level) in the south. It could also be to respond to resource dislocation.

## About Coexistence International

Based at Brandeis University since 2005, Coexistence International (CI) is an initiative committed to strengthening the resources available to policymakers, practitioners, researchers, advocates, organizations, and networks promoting coexistence at local, national, and international levels. CI advocates a complementary approach to coexistence work through facilitating connections, learning, reflection, and strategic thinking between those in the coexistence field and those in related areas.

### What is Coexistence?

Coexistence describes societies in which diversity is embraced for its positive potential, equality is actively pursued, interdependence between different groups is recognized, and the use of weapons to address conflicts is increasingly obsolete. Coexistence work covers the range of initiatives necessary to ensure that communities and societies can live more equitably and peacefully together.

### About the Series

In 2006, more than ninety percent of countries have populations made up of multiple identity groups. This rich diversity, full of promise and possibilities, also presents some of the most common and difficult challenges facing states today. Governments continue to wrestle with coexistence issues such as the dimensions of citizenship, constitutional and political designs that reflect the diversity within state borders, language and minority rights, land management, equality and cultural issues, and democratic participation. Understanding how diverse communities get along peacefully and equitably within a State is critical. If we can understand how some societies address issues of difference in constructive ways, then we might develop a repertoire of policy and programmatic options for countries experiencing inter-group violence or growing tensions.

With this publication series, CI seeks to describe the state of coexistence within different countries, and compare diversity and coexistence policies from countries around the world. CI has made no attempt to assess the implementation or success of such processes, or to endorse any of the initiatives mentioned in the report. We believe, however, that the documentation of the existence and scope of such efforts can contribute to a wider understanding of the variety of approaches for addressing issues of coexistence and intergroup conflict.

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