

EXPLORING HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACEBUILDING IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to conflict resolution and peacebuilding promotes social justice by ensuring participation, empowerment, equity, and the incorporation of the needs of all relevant actors. However, studies indicate that factors including lack of formal education and capacity building, and political intolerance hinder the application of HRBA as an inclusive peace initiative. This study examined how the principles of HRBA are incorporated in the peace processes of some selected communities in northern Ghana. Through a concurrent mixed-method design and a combination of simple random, convenience and maximum variation sampling techniques, 306 members were chosen from seven conflict hotspot communities. The study revealed that the political empowerment and participation of ethnic minorities, women and youth in peace architecture have been insufficient. Besides, mediation appeared unsuccessful in resolving the root causes of the conflicts because it failed to address the human rights concerns of the underprivileged groups. Finally, mediation processes have not adequately captured the views and needs of the youth and women, who are mostly affected by the conflicts. The study concludes that peace initiatives fall short in adopting an HRBA, contributing to the relapse of conflicts. Therefore, the study recommends an HRBA to promote peacebuilding processes in the study areas.

Keywords: HRBA, Conflict resolution, Peacebuilding, Social Justice, Northern Ghana

INTRODUCTION

In responding to the growing global concern for more effective approaches to addressing violent conflicts, the international community has recently called on peacebuilding practitioners to adopt inclusive peace processes such as the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) that target relevant stakeholders in a conflict (UN, 2012). The HRBA seeks to ensure equity and non-discrimination through the participation, empowerment, and inclusion of the needs and views of groups usually excluded from decision-making, particularly women, youth, and minorities (Equitas 2018). HRBA contributes to global peace, security and development by protecting economic, social, and cultural rights while also promoting civil and political rights throughout the peacebuilding process. These explain its rapid adoption in many peace processes (BIHR & Just Fair, 2024; Cahill-Ripley, 2016; EU, 2015; Parlevliet, 2015).

Ghana, after some years of military upheavals, is internationally praised for its peace with entrenched democratic structures. This notwithstanding, the country continues to experience ethno-political violence and land rights disputes, predominantly in its northern part (Osei-Kufuor et al., 2016; Kendie et al., 2014; Awedoba, 2009). Classical examples include the Maprusi-Kusasi (Bawku), Abudu-Andani (Yendi), Gbugmayili-Bangyili (Bimbilla), and Jinapor-Lebupe (Bupe) chieftaincy crises and the Gonja-Nawuri (Kpandai), Konkomba-Fulanis (Gushiegu), and Konkomba-Chokosi (Chereponi) land right disputes, among others. Some of the communal violence preceded Ghana's independence, and its protracted and disastrous nature threatens the peace and security of the country (Bukari, 2013). Additionally, a large portion of these violent conflicts stems from group-based grievances related to socio-political exclusion, lack of land rights, autonomy and paramountcy, and disregard for cultural identity and recognition, which create deep-rooted feelings of injustice and unfairness, especially among ethnic minorities¹, youth and women (Boateng & Afranie, 2020; Osei-Fosu, 2020; Osei-Kufuor et al., 2016). Undoubtedly, the resolution of such conflicts requires an HRBA, which is an inclusive peace process that targets both the primary feuding parties and affected groups.

Ensuring inclusive peace processes using the HRBA principles is sometimes elusive due to various obstacles like insufficient resources, illiteracy, lack of capacity building, and a culture of subordination (Mautjana & Makombe, 2014; Aberese et al., 2013). Other hindrances include political intolerance, marginalisation, and disrespect for others' human rights (Manthwa & Ntsoane, 2018), and preferential platforms for political elites limit formal forums for meaningful participation.

In the context of northern Ghana, the application of the liberal conflict resolution model to resolve communal conflict has been characterised by low citizens' participation (Bukari, 2013; Mahama & Longi, 2013). Consequently, some studies on

¹ Ethnic minorities usually connotes non-centralised societies in northern Ghana that have no paramount chief, a traditional area and land ownership rights. They include Konkomba, Chokosi, Nawuri, Grusi, Fulani, and Nchumburu. These had historically been subjugated to the traditional political power and leadership of majority groups of Dagomba, Nanumba, Gonja and Mamprusi, who claim paramountcy and land rights and have a centralised political system characterised by hierarchical office holders (Boateng & Afranie, 2020).

the conflicts and peace processes in northern Ghana have emphasised peace strategies such as traditional methods (Yaro, 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2019; Bukari, 2013; Noagah, 2013) and a combination of traditional and liberal models (Osei-Fosu et al., n.d.). This study, however, argues that a key gap in the analysis of these studies is the lack of focus on the effective adoption of the HRBA as an inclusive peace process. Therefore, the study sought to find an answer to this key question: What is the extent of inclusion and political empowerment of women, youth and ethnic minorities in the peacebuilding processes of the study areas? To answer this question, the authors explored the level of incorporation of participation, political empowerment, non-discrimination and inclusion of needs, views and agency of women, youth and ethnic minorities into peace processes, as well as the degree of accountability and legitimacy of the peace interventions. Hence, the study is crucial as it provides some useful insight into peace architecture for conceiving a new approach to promoting peace processes in the study areas and beyond. The study is organised into five key sections. These include an overview of HRBA for peacebuilding, theoretical framework, the methodology, the results and discussion and the conclusion and recommendations.

What is an HRBA for peacebuilding?

HRBA, as a conceptual framework for peaceful coexistence and the process of human development, is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights (UN OHCHR, 2006). Indisputably, the issue of rights is not new, as it occupied the centre stage of liberation, nationalist and anti-colonial movements of the post-World War II colonial era. However, the application of HRBA to peacebuilding and development emerged in the early 1990s and received more attention after the Copenhagen Summit on Social Development in 1995 (De Man, 2018; Parlevliet, 2017).

The HRBA views the role of the state and non-state peace actors in conflict resolution and peacebuilding as a duty rather than a privilege to uphold the inherent rights of people. In terms of development, the HRBA encapsulates the promotion of the legal rights and inclusivity within the context of peace initiatives (Broberg & Sano, 2018). HRBA is implemented through five fundamental principles: participation, accountability, non-discrimination and inclusion of vulnerable groups, empowerment, and legality/legitimacy (Bultasová et al., 2022), which are sometimes referred to as “the PANEL principles” (BIHR & Just Fair, 2024; SHRC, 2022). The principle of participation suggests that conflicting parties and affected groups have the right to claim meaningful involvement in peace processes and decisions that affect their rights. State and non-state peace actors are obliged to create an enabling environment for conflict parties and underprivileged groups to assert their rights. Accountability indicates that rights-holders (feuding parties) can hold the duty-bearers (peace mediators) responsible for their actions and inactions, which ensures a power balance between them. The principle of non-discrimination, equality, and inclusion of vulnerable groups suggests that the rights and needs of the vulnerable groups must be recognised and protected to ensure social justice. Empowerment means that conflict factions must be allowed to claim their rights and discharge their responsibilities through awareness creation and capacity building. Finally, legality

(legitimacy) implies that peace processes must be grounded in the human rights recognised in domestic and international instruments (BIHR & Just Fair, 2024; SHRC, 2022).

Essentially, HRBA to conflict resolution and peacebuilding aims at making the disputing parties key actors and decision-makers in addressing the causes of the conflict and creating sustainable peace, instead of as passive recipients of the dictates of external interveners. Thus, it is a shift from the conventional or arbitration-based approach, which involves deciding for the parties according to what outside interveners deem to be effective in resolving conflicts. Therefore, applying the HRBA to sustainable peace in northern Ghana implies that the peace processes must be decided and led by the people, while the external mediators must be transparent, fair, and accountable to all the parties. In addition, peace approaches must seek to empower the minority groups, institutionalise interaction between them and the peace actors and provide an agreed-upon set of rules for handling and resolving conflicts. It must also offer common values that can bridge differences across diverse social groups, ensure non-discrimination, and consider the needs of vulnerable groups. By these, all the people become owners and partners in the search for conditions critical to sustaining peace.

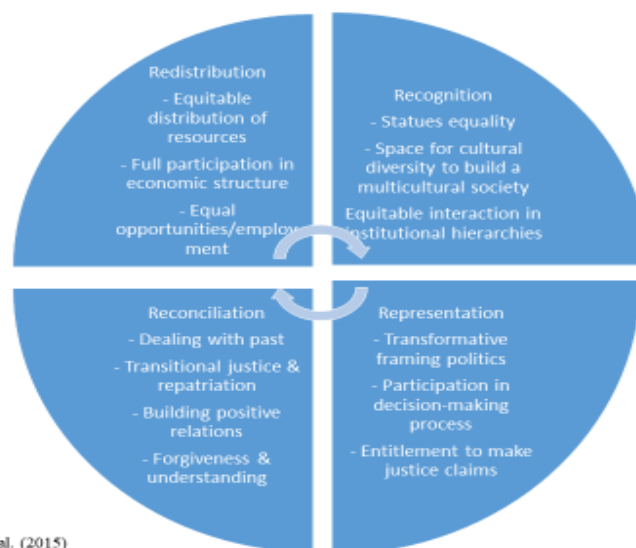
Theoretical framework: An overview of social justice

The authors adopted the 4Rs framework by Novelli et al. (2015) to comprehend how social justice ensures the safeguarding of the human rights of marginalised people in peacebuilding processes. The paramount objective of peacebuilding is to establish a peace structure anchored on justice, equity and cooperation (positive peace) which will address the root causes of conflict, prevent it from reoccurring in the future, and thus achieve social justice. An extrapolation on the nature of justice should account for the experiences and claims of the marginalised. Fraser (2005) postulates that a socially just society ensures political parity. Justice demands that citizens gain access to resources and respect, so they participate on a par with others in society. Justice thus requires social arrangements that ensure that everyone in society is allowed to participate fully in social life, irrespective of their background.

Building on the work of Fraser (2005) on social justice, Novelli et al. (2015) developed the '4R' approach that encompasses the elements of redistribution, recognition, representation, and reconciliation in building transformative societies. Redistribution provides solutions to social injustices perpetuated by unequal access to resources and a lack of opportunities to enable people to live dignified lives. Recognition deals with social injustice that borders on structural inequalities that hinder people from fully interacting in institutionalised cultural hierarchies (Novelli et al., 2015; Fraser, 2005). Attempts to reduce injustice thus require processes that aim at dismantling institutionalised structures that prevent some people from participating on a par with others. These obstacles include institutionalised hierarchies of cultural value that deny people the requisite social standing in society (status inequalities or misrecognition) and distributive injustice or being denied access to scarce resources.

Representation relates to transformative politics framing at all levels of political discourse. It seeks to ensure equal participation in decision-making or claim-making processes (Fraser, 2005), irrespective of one's ethnic background. Reconciliation deals with processes crucial for curtailing the relapse of conflict in the future. It is a long-term process of addressing conflictual and fractured relationships among disputants through consensus-building approaches. It aims at building a future where people mutually collaborate for their collective existence. Reconciliation entails five connected elements, namely the development of a collective vision of an interdependent and collective society, acknowledging and dealing with the past, building positive relationships, the need for significant cultural and attitudinal change, and massive socio-economic and political change. The integration of the 4Rs in peacebuilding goes a long way to safeguard the human rights of people. Fig. 1 below, adopted from Novelli et al. (2015), illustrates the 4Rs.

Fig. 1: *The Four Rs*



Source: Adopted from Novelli et al. (2015)

METHODOLOGY

Study area

The study was conducted in the Savannah, Northern, and North-East Regions, which formerly constituted the Northern Region of Ghana. These places have recorded more than 70% of chieftaincy and ethnic clashes in Ghana since the 1940s (Kendie et al., 2014; Kendie & Bukari, 2012; Awedoba, 2009). Based on the conflict mapping of the selected regions, seven communities, namely Yendi, Bimbilla, Makayili, Gusheigu, Kpandai, Chereponi, and Buipe, emerged as the epicentres with high incidences of protracted, deep-rooted, violent, and intermittent conflicts, which informed their selection as the most suitable study communities.

Table 1: Summary of the respondent categories, sample size, sampling techniques, and enumeration sites

	Conflict Epicentres & number sampled							Total Sample Size (102)
	Yendi	Bimbilla	Makayili	Gusheigu	Kpandai	Chereponi	Buipe	
Qualitative								
Traditional Leaders	6	6	4	5	5	4	6	36
Women	7	7	5	6	5	5	7	42
DCEs/MCEs	1	1		1	1	1	1	6
Assembly members	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
Policy and Peace actors ²								4
Quantitative								204
Youth	31	28	26	21	25	24	25	180
DISEC/MUSEC	4	4		4	4	4	4	24

Source: Fieldwork (2022)

Study design and method

The researchers adopted a concurrent mixed-method research design to comprehend the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The essence of combining quantitative and qualitative data is to provide a very powerful mix of results, which eventually will enhance the findings of a study. A combination of maximum variation, simple random, and convenience sampling techniques was utilised to select 306 respondents for the study. Through convenience sampling, 180 youth were selected principally because they were available during the data collection and time constraints faced by the researchers (Bryman, 2016; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). However, 24 members of the District/Municipal Security Council (DISEC/MUSEC)³ of the six municipal and district

² These included the former ministers of the Interior and National Security, the research officer of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP-Ghana), and a representative of the Northern Regional Peace Council (NRPC). WANEP is a regional CSO in conflict prevention and peacebuilding launched in 1998 in response to civil wars and political instabilities in West Africa. It is one of the leading mediators and coordinators of most of the peace initiatives to mitigate communal conflicts in northern Ghana. The National Peace Council (NPC) is an independent statutory body established by Act 818 (National Peace Council Act) of 2011 to prevent, manage, and resolve internal conflicts and to promote sustainable peace in Ghana.

³ DISEC/MUSEC is a nine-member statutory council established by the Security and Intelligence Agency Act, 1996 (Act 526) primarily for the local communities by providing early warning, reacting

assemblies were selected using Yamane's formula for proportion (Yamane, 1967). That is:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where:

n = minimum sample size

N = total study population

e = degree of precision, which was assumed to be 5%, hence p = 0.05

However, 10% of N must be added to cater for non-response (non-return of questionnaire)

Then, the appropriate sample size for the members of DISEC/MUSEC:

$$n = \frac{54}{1 + 54 \cdot 0.05^2} = 22.475 = 22 \text{ (sign. number)}$$

A 10% of the sample should be added to cater for non-response

This implies that 10% * 22 = 2.2

Then, to avoid sampling bias, four (4) members (apart from the DECs/MCEs) were selected randomly from every council using a simple draw method. That is, their names were written on papers and put in a polythene bag, and four were drawn out and administered questionnaires. Data was solicited from the youth and members of the Security Councils through self-administered questionnaires.

For the qualitative aspect of the study, 102 participants were selected across the seven communities through the maximum variation sampling technique. This approach was deemed appropriate because the study required participants who possessed common characteristics in terms of experiences of communal conflicts and peace processes. At the same time, they vary concerning gender, ethnicity, communities, and the levels of political participation and roles played in the peacebuilding landscape in the study areas (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The researchers thus selected 36 traditional elders, 42 women who have been affected by conflict, as well as 14 Assembly members and 6 Municipal and District Chief Executives (MDCEs) whose jurisdictions have experienced conflict. In addition, 4 key policy and peace actors who have dealt with conflict in the selected communities were chosen. Key informant interviews (KIIs) were adopted to solicit information from the MDCEs, the Assembly members, and the four key policy and peace actors.

to security threats and enforcing law and peace measures. It is responsible for imposing state of emergency and deploying the police and military to suppress violence at the district/municipal level.

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was employed to collect data from the traditional leaders and women. Three groups of 12 members were composed of the traditional leaders. In addition, three groups of 14 members were composed out of the 42 selected women. These categories of respondents were included in the study because of their special insight and roles played regarding the emergence and/or attempts at resolving the conflicts. Table 2 provides a description of the respondents, sampling framework adopted, and data collection instruments employed in the study.

Table 2: Categories of the respondents, sampling techniques, and enumeration regions

Categories of Respondents	Sample Size (N)	Sampling Techniques	Data Collection Methods	Pseudonyms
Qualitative Phase				
Traditional Leaders	36	Maximum variation	FGDs	FGD1-36
Women	42	Maximum variation	FGDs	FGD 37-78
DCEs/MCEs	6	Maximum variation	FGDs	KI 1-6
Assembly members	14	Maximum variation	KIIs	KI 7-21
Key policy and peace actors	4	Maximum variation	KIIs	KI 22-25
Total	102			
Quantitative Phase				
Members of DISEC/MUSEC	24	Simple Random	Questionnaire	-
Youth	180	Convenience	Questionnaire	-
Total	204			
Overall Sample Size	306			

Source: Fieldwork (2022)

The researchers generated data through FGDs, KIIs, and questionnaires. The researchers also conducted all the interviews and distributed the surveys

themselves. Hundred and thirty-five (75%) of the surveys were self-administered, whereas 45 (25%) were administered by the researchers due to their inability to read and write. The data collection tools enquired, among others, about the key peace initiatives and mediators and the extent to which HRBA principles were incorporated into peace processes with a focus on women, youth and marginalised ethnic groups.

Thematic analysis was adopted for the qualitative aspect of the study after interview sessions were followed immediately by data transcription. This method involved the identification, reporting, and interpretation of patterns from the interviews conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Liebenberg et al., 2020; Xu & Zammit, 2020). Member check and data triangulation were adopted to ensure the trustworthiness of the study (Shenton, 2004). Pseudonyms were employed to conceal the identities of participants. The quantitative data were analysed using multiple linear regression models to examine how sustainable peace (as a dependent variable) can be determined by the five key principles of HRBA (as independent variables). The results were presented as odds ratios (OR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and 5% significance levels (P-values) to arrive at the findings conveyed in this study.

The researchers observed the ethical principles required of social research (Jirojwong et al., 2014; Borbasi & Jackson, 2012) to protect the respondents and their families from harm. Accordingly, the study first sought and obtained ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH), University of Ghana, before data collection. This is because content and construct validity, as well as research ethics, are refined by expert judgement. Therefore, as a moral and legal obligation, the respondents' consent for voluntary participation was obtained after a full explanation of the study's intent. They were also allowed to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Besides, the respondents' safety and privacy were protected by conducting interviews privately and FGDs on an ethnic basis and in seclusion. Additionally, the researchers ensured anonymity by erasing anything that could possibly be used to trace individual participants. Finally, before leaving the field, the researchers read the field notes and played the tape recordings for validation by the participants.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results of this study were based on the analysis of the extent of application of the principles of HRBA to peace efforts with a focus on women, ethnic minorities, and youth in the study areas.

Legality of Key Peace Initiatives and Accountability of Mediators

This study established that peace and policy actors have relied heavily on four main conventional methods in an attempt to address conflicts and restore peace. These include the judicial system, mediation and negotiations, inquiry committees, inter-ethnic peace workshops, and police-military interventions such as curfew imposition. State institutions comprising the NRPC, DISSEC/MUSEC, Regional Security Councils (RESEC), and non-state peace actors, particularly WANEP, eminent chiefs, and concerned citizens, have been leading peace efforts instead of the conflict parties and affected groups. Additionally, mediation appeared unsuccessful in resolving the

root causes of the conflicts because it failed to address the human rights concerns of the underprivileged groups. Again, mediators were largely external interveners instead of representatives of the youth, women, and ethnic minorities whose human rights are violated.

Table 3: Narratives showing the key peace interventions and mediators

Participants	Narratives
Chief Executive	<i>Most of the time, the state has to station the police/military here and impose a curfew to keep the peace. ...Various entities that have been instrumental in leading peace efforts in Gusheigu include the NPC, CSOs such as the WANEP, MUSEC, and RESEC, and concerned citizens. (KI 6)</i>
Chief Executive	<i>Apart from using the judicial system, some prominent chiefs and personalities also helped in finding peace here. There was more involvement of the Asantehene, Nayiri, Yagbonwura, and some government officials. The Catholic Church and the Regional House of Chiefs also played significant roles, as well as WANEP and the Yendi Peace Council. (KI 7)</i>
Peace Actor	<i>The state has been key in initiating and leading peace interventions in the north. Security forces are deployed to keep peace through disarmament of the people, curfews, and regular patrols. Sometimes, legal approaches such as court injunctions and commissions of inquiries have been used. (KI 22)</i>
Assembly member	<i>One can say that almost all the peace and reconciliation activities were undertaken by the Yendi Peace Council, NGOs, Faith-Based Organisations, and CSOs like WANEP-Ghana, and because these bodies were neutral parties to the conflicts, they were accepted by both the Nawuris and Gonjas (KI 9).</i>

Source: Fieldwork (2022)

Participation

According to participants, the participation of ethnic minorities, women, and youth in peace architecture has been insufficient. Whenever such people were invited to peace processes, they mainly served as informants to aid the decision-making of peace actors instead of being active participants in peace dialogues. Besides, the chiefs are interested in the physical support of the youth during communal clashes instead of engaging them meaningfully in formal peace negotiations.

Table 4: Narratives on inadequate participation in the peacebuilding landscape

Type of Respondent	Narratives
Woman	We are sidelined because men think conflict is about them, and women are only victims. Therefore, they don't see why we must be represented and participate in peace efforts, but we can help so much in peacebuilding. (FGD 38, Chereponi)
Youth	Our parents call us to come home to fight during conflicts, even if we are out of the community. If you fail to support, your family will be blamed. However, we are not included in mediation processes because, traditionally, decision-making is for the elders. Therefore, during peace dialogues, we are the listeners and the leaders, and state officials are the thinkers. (Male youth respondent)
Traditional leader	Nobody used to listen to us or involve us. But there is a recent development where a team of Konkomba leadership has been set up to give their submission on conflicts involving us. However, we are still ignored in deliberations at the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs due to a lack of representation. (FGD 34)
Traditional leader	We lack the ability to affect the decisions that concern us because we don't have power, we don't have land, so no participation. We're treated as aliens (FGD 28)

Source: Fieldwork (2022)

Political empowerment

The study also explored the level of political empowerment of women, youth, and ethnic minorities concerning peacebuilding. The aim was to determine the ability of these groups to fight for their rights, gain identity, and compel peace actors to fulfil their needs during conflicts. It was discovered that there have been a few consultative meetings with, and workshops for, the chiefs and elders, and some selected youth on conflict management. However, according to the respondents, capacitation training designed purposely for women, youth, and ethnic minorities to achieve a reputable identity, share power, and have the opportunity to pressurise the duty-bearers for their rights has not been realised. Women and the youth complained of a lack of the right to claim power with men in peacebuilding due to resistance from chiefs and culture. Thus, although there exist several ethnic-based youth associations that can be used to promote peace, findings of this study suggest that the associations were engaged, more often than not, to support conflicts rather than empowering them to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding. Some Chokosi,

Fulani, and Konkomba traditional elders expressed similar concerns, as illustrated by some field excerpts shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Narratives on inadequate empowerment in the peacebuilding landscape

Type of Respondent	Narratives
Woman	Do women have the right to claim identity and power with men? Then, we have not been made to know, so we don't know. (FGDs, Yendi)
Youth	We have youth associations in our communities, but no one has formally made us aware of our rights to share power with our chiefs and elders during peace processes (Youth, Buipe).
Youth	The elders only use the youth to push their agenda. But we are not officially trained to claim some rights because they think it is their views that matter (Male youth respondent, Bimbilla).
Youth	Some NGOs have educated us on ways to promote peace, but not on our rights to make decisions with elders and hold policy-makers accountable for their actions and inactions (Youth, Buipe).
Traditional elder	Many institutions have contributed to the search for peace in this area, but they have hardly empowered us to know our rights and obligations in the peace processes (FGD 25).
Peace Actor	There has been inadequate education on the rights of the people (Chokosi, Fulani, and Konkomba) to equitable access to resources (land), and their obligation to respect others' rights. This is a key hindrance to finding a lasting solution to the persistent herder-farmer conflicts among them, especially between the Fulanis and Konkombas (KI 24)

Source: Fieldwork (2022)

Non-discrimination, equity, and incorporating needs

The study enquired how the principle of non-discrimination, including equity and incorporating the needs and views of the youth, women, and ethnic minorities, is integrated into the peace processes. According to the female respondents, peace practitioners have not ensured fairness between women and men, and their needs are not adequately considered in peace efforts. One woman stated that:

Our views and needs are not fairly represented in peace efforts because men are the target of the peace actors. The need to invest in women's healthcare, education, and adequate political, social, and economic participation is

lacking. Policy measures to eliminate discrimination and subordination by men, which have perpetuated feminisation of poverty and maltreatment of women, are not yet prioritised in the peacebuilding efforts. (FGD 40)

The youth shared a similar concern, as the overwhelming majority (87.3%) indicated that various mediation approaches have not fully considered their needs and involvement in peace initiatives. The expectation was that at least some of the educated youth and leadership of the youth associations in conflict areas could be involved in the peace process. These associations are not just peace ambassadors but are instrumental in finding lasting solutions to protracted conflicts. A participant from Buipe commented that:

To achieve a lasting peace in northern Ghana, peace and policy actors must ensure equal access for the youth, offer employment opportunities, the right to self-determination, participation in decision-making on local matters, and freedom from traditional authorities and culture that restrict the youth's rights. (KI 8)

In the same vein, the ethnic minorities indicated that peacemakers invite their leadership to make submissions on conflicts affecting them. Nonetheless, the dominant ethnic groups, who exercise power and authority over them as the overlords, do not treat them fairly. Respondents, particularly the Konkombas, claimed that their overlords, who customarily hold the sole rights to settle disputes, continue to subordinate them during mediation dialogues. A 68-year-old Konkomba man stated that:

These overlords are usually given preferential treatment in terms of when, where, and how to address issues. Besides, our freedom from obsolete traditional practices against us, and rights to autonomy and representation in the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs, cultural identity and recognition, and non-discrimination have not been addressed.

Statistical analysis of the extent of adoption of HRBA into peacebuilding

Table 6 presents multiple regression results (Model 1) showing the extent to which the HRBA principles are integrated into peacebuilding architecture in the study areas. The Wald chi-square and the observable factors are all significantly negatively related to peacebuilding, indicating that the model used fits the data. The results depict that all five principles of the HRBA to peacebuilding have low odds, indicating that they are less incorporated into the peace efforts.

Table 6: Multiple logistic regression of adoption of HRBA into peacebuilding

Principles of HRBA	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	Odd Ratio
Peace interventions are legitimate (RC=Yes) No	49.497	0.247	0.481***
GWSN empowered to claim rights and play a role in peace efforts (RC=Yes)	32.204	0.161	0.629**

No			
Peace actors are held accountable for their actions and inactions (RC=Yes)	47.141	0.236	0.500***
No			
GWSN meaningfully participates in peacebuilding processes (RC=Yes)	36.770	0.184	0.587**
No			
The rights and needs of GWSN are prioritised in peace interventions (RC=Yes)	55.154	0.276	0.439***
No			
Number of obs.	204		
Constant	1.586 *** (13.717)		
Pseudo R-squared	0.0809		
Wald chi-square	361.72 *** (10)		

Note: *P ≤0.05; **p≤0.01; ***p≤0.001, GWSN = Groups with special needs (youth, women, and ethnic minorities)

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

The study further used multiple logistic regression Model 2 to test the extent to which PANEL principles could help address the sources of conflicts and achieve sustainable peace when incorporated adequately into peace processes. Soliciting the views of the youth and members of the DISEC/MUSEC, the regression results were presented as odds ratios (OR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and 5% significance levels (P-values) as displayed in Table 7. According to the test, HRBA principles are all positively statistically significant predictors of peace.

Table 7: Multiple logistic regression of the extent HRBA can increase peacebuilding

Principles of HRBA	β	S.E	Wald	Sig.	Exp. (β)	95% C.I. for Exp. (β)	
						Lower	Upper
Legitimising peace interventions to uphold the rights of YWMEG	0.725	0.066	120.667	0.031	2.643***	0.705	0.745
Empowering YWMEG to claim rights and play a role in peace efforts	0.681	0.060	128.823	0.000	2.138*	0.617	0.877
Holding peace actors accountable for their actions and inactions	0.824	0.080	106.090	0.003	4.667**	0.771	0.877
Meaningful participation of YWMEG in peacebuilding processes	0.887	0.087	103.946	0.000	7.870*	0.844	0.930
Prioritising the rights and needs of YWMEG in peace interventions	0.814	0.078	108.908	0.000	4.368*	0.760	0.868

Constant	0.521	0.769	132.811	0.427	5.418
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Note: *P ≤ 0.05 ; **p ≤ 0.01 ; ***p ≤ 0.001 , YWMEG = youth, women and ethnic minorities

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study has identified multiple shortcomings in the peacebuilding processes among specific communities in northern Ghana regarding their adherence to the principles of an HRBA. It has been established that an excessive reliance on conventional mediation approaches appears inadequate in resolving the human rights concerns of the underprivileged groups. Besides, peace procedures inadequately integrate the perspectives and needs of young people, ethnic minorities, and women, who are predominantly impacted by the conflicts. Moreover, the participation and political empowerment of ethnic minorities, women, and youth in peace efforts have been inadequate. Findings of the study confirm previous studies that show that peace efforts in the study areas have mainly involved third-party state and non-state mediators and peace practitioners rather than women, youth, and ethnic minorities (Debrah et al., 2016; Bukari, 2013; Mahama & Longi, 2013). This often threatens the principles of accountability and legality in the peace processes, as these external interveners often act as crisis managers and peace advocates instead of conflict resolvers and true representatives of the affected groups (Quinn et al., 2013). Thus, such mediators are not partners to the conflicts and are therefore limited in their understanding of the root causes and accountability to the people. This does not result in the building of lasting relationships, which is fundamental for reconciling disputants (Novelli et al., 2015; Fraser, 2005). Legally, their ability to bring together all disputants, to ensure compliance, and to guarantee that peace interventions respond to their interests and needs for land rights and political recognition at the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs, especially in the acephalous societies, would be limited.

Besides, the logistic regression results in Table 6 show that women, youth, and ethnic minorities are 0.481 (p ≤ 0.001) times less likely to view various peace interventions as legitimate. This means that the probability of the peacemakers adopting peace interventions consistent with human rights protocols, which aim to promote social justice (Novelli et al., 2015; Fraser, 2005) and procedures that promote the rights of the youth, women, and ethnic minorities, is not guaranteed. Plausibly, this might partly account for the protracted nature of the chieftaincy and land rights disputes in the study areas. This implies that one critical element of reconciliation which entails acknowledging and dealing with experiences (Novelli et al., 2015) has not been adequately addressed in peacebuilding efforts in northern Ghana. However, the results in Table 7 suggest that legitimising peace interventions to uphold social justice is 2.643 (p ≤ 0.001) times more likely to increase peace. Besides, holding peace actors accountable for their actions and inactions is 4.667 (p ≤ 0.01) times more likely to promote peace efforts in the study areas. Therefore,

these conditions must be embraced to promote positive peace. The above attests to the immense roles that youth play in peacebuilding in Africa (AU, 2020).

Again, there is a heavy reliance on the conventional peace approaches with little or no adoption of traditional peacebuilding practices, which usually ensure the inclusion of community members. Previous studies have affirmed that the participation of ethnic minorities in the management of ethnic conflicts has been minimal or disregarded (UN, 2016; O'Reilly et al., 2015; UN Women, 2012). Our study confirms the above studies, as Table 6 indicates that the youth, women, and ethnic minorities are 0.587 ($p \leq 0.01$) times less likely to have meaningful participation in peacebuilding processes. Certainly, direct participation or representation of these groups increases the probability of having their inputs and needs factored into the peacebuilding processes, which enhances transformative politics framing (Equitas, 2018; Parlevliet, 2017; Novelli et al., 2015). Conceivably, peacemakers see women as passive participants in communal clashes, whereas the elders consider the representatives of the youth as irrelevant. For these reasons, it appears that concrete actions to ensure women's and youth's participation in formal peace dialogues are ineffectively instituted.

In addition, the needs and interests of ethnic minorities are incompatible with those of the dominant ethnic groups (Paffenholz et al., 2016; Turner, 2015). Hence, minority groups might be detached from the key interactions of addressing conflicts in their communities. Though the active participation of minority groups in the peacebuilding process is imperative (Paffenholz et al., 2016; Turner, 2015; UN, 2004), it was not satisfactorily promoted in the study areas. However, inclusivity does not necessarily require the involvement of all the stakeholders in every phase of a peace process because such a process is usually assigned to selected experts (Gruener & Larsson, 2016). Nevertheless, there must be an adequate representation of all competing groups and segments of the community to ensure equity and accountability. Besides, there should be transparent communication of details at every phase of the negotiation to keep disputants and affected groups informed. These strategies would guarantee that minority groups are adequately represented and influence the peacebuilding process.

Moreover, the data show that empowering the youth, women, and ethnic minorities to claim their rights and play roles in peacebuilding ($OR=2.14$, $CI=0.62-0.88$) is a necessary condition for an inclusive peace process (Table 7). However, women, youth, and ethnic minorities are not empowered on their rights and obligations relating to the peacebuilding processes. That is, the results from the logistic regression Model 1 support the qualitative findings that these stakeholders in the peace process are 0.629 ($p \leq 0.01$) times less likely to be empowered to know and claim their rights and play their lawful roles in peace efforts. They are also 0.500 ($p \leq 0.001$) times less likely to exercise the rights to hold duty-bearers responsible for their actions and inactions. Indeed, women are relegated in terms of participation in peacebuilding and are not adequately empowered to claim their rights related to peace processes. Similarly, the youth and Ethnic-Based Youth Associations (EBYAs) that serve as a mouthpiece on peacebuilding processes are not fully empowered

because of insufficient capacity-building programmes. Yet, education is crucial in reshaping historical memories, healing wounds of conflicts, amalgamating diverse members of the community, and enabling victims to forgive perpetrators in conflict (Novelli et al., 2015).

Ethnic minorities are not adequately represented in conflict resolution, which is addressed at the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs, although they bear the brunt of conflicts the most (UN-HR, 2010). The findings revealed that these social segments might not be able to claim their rights or contribute meaningfully to peace efforts to increase reconciliation in their communities (Novelli et al., 2015; Fraser, 2005). Many factors, such as resistance from traditional authorities, ethnic marginalisation, and preferences given to traditional leaders, politicians, and the influential class, leave the ethnic minorities as spectators and not as participants in the peacebuilding processes.

From the study, incorporating the needs and rights of minority groups ($RO=4.37$, $CI=0.76-0.87$) is likely to contribute to sustainable peace in the study areas more than the conventional peace efforts heavily used by peace practitioners, as illustrated in Table 7. Yet, the principle of non-discrimination, including equity and incorporation of the needs and views of minority groups, is inadequately incorporated in the peace architecture. Likewise, several of the peace initiatives, especially those that are implemented by non-state organisations, appear to be “charity-based” and “need-based” instead of human rights-based. These peace initiatives are neither orientated towards ensuring social justice nor allow the affected parties to hold peace practitioners accountable for their actions and inactions. Consequently, minority groups are 0.439 ($p \leq 0.001$) times less likely to have their rights and needs incorporated in peace interventions (Table 6). This suggests that the mediation interventions implemented have not addressed the human rights needs that cause occasional violent conflicts. In other words, the protracted nature of communal clashes with occasional flare-ups implies that peacebuilding strategies only help to stop physical combat and do not address the root causes of the conflict. It has failed to grant disadvantaged groups rights to access to land, autonomy and paramountcy, cultural identity and recognition, among others. Thus, concerns about the redistribution of resources, recognition, and representation in decision-making, which are critical for ensuring social justice (Novelli et al., 2015; Fraser, 2005), have not been addressed through the peacebuilding process. Finally, the confidence interval (CI) of all the observable independent variables includes zero (Table 7), and for that matter, one cannot reject the assumption that considering the rights, needs, and roles of minority groups in peace architectures is essential. This is because the field narratives suggest that the insufficient realisation of these three factors is part of the key human rights concerns influencing the conflicts and peacebuilding in the three Northern Regions. This supports the previous argument that the HRBA principles advance positive peace and ensure social justice (Equitas, 2018; Schabas & Fitzmaurice, 2007).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the extent to which HRBA is applied to peacebuilding processes in some selected conflict hotspot communities in northern Ghana, primarily in terms of participation, political empowerment, and incorporation of needs and views of youth, women, and ethnic minorities. The study discovered that the HRBA principles were insufficiently incorporated into the judicial system, mediation by eminent chiefs and people, inquiry committees, inter-ethnic peace workshops, police-military patrols and curfew imposition, all of which are commonly used as peace initiatives. Besides, in dealing with communal conflicts, greater emphasis was placed on external mediators and conventional peace methods, particularly the judicial system, which gives less regard for local context and the needs of women, youth, and ethnic minorities. Additionally, the agency of women, youth, and ethnic minorities in peacebuilding is not sufficiently recognised. Moreover, the study found that peace interventions have virtually relegated participation, political empowerment, and non-discrimination of women, youth, and ethnic minorities. This could partly explain why the communities and regions under study have still not achieved sustainable peace. Nevertheless, from the perspectives of the ethnic minorities, they can promote peace in their communities if an HRBA to peacebuilding is implemented. Accordingly, the study posits that peacebuilding processes in the study areas can be promoted if peace mediators sufficiently embrace the principles of an HRBA.

The study emphasised the importance of integrating human rights principles into peace negotiations. This knowledge will undoubtedly assist policymakers and peace practitioners in developing new, more effective approaches to peacebuilding in the studied areas and beyond. However, it is important to note that the study was limited in scope and did not address potential obstacles to applying an HRBA to peacebuilding in the studied regions.

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Author Representations

I confirm that I have reviewed and complied with the relevant Instructions to Authors, Ethical Approval, Declarations of Interest, Informed Consent noted below

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

The authors obtained ethical approval for the study.

Informed consent

The authors obtained consent from research participants.

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