



# HARNESSING LOCAL CAPACITIES FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE: WANEP's Experience in the 2012 Ghanaian Election

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## Introduction

Political strife and conflict in West Africa to a large extent centred on the abuse of power by autocratic regimes since independence. This gave the sub-region a post-independence chequered history characterized by repressions and resistance, numerous coups d'état and insurrections, and indeed protracted civil wars. The political conflict was largely attributed to the process of power transition under autocratic and militaristic dispensations. In this wise, multi-party democracy was hailed as the panacea to political violence in West Africa, and so it was with great expectation that the transition to democratic governance was welcomed in the sub-region in the 1990s. However, like most other change and transition, the democratisation process has faced series of hiccups and relapses. Quite worrisome is the fact that election disputes management mechanism in the sub region is limited to adjudicatory process with outcomes that usually spate various levels of violence, so much that the electoral season in many West African countries is occasioned by fear of violence culminating to wanton destruction of life and property among the populace.

Ghana, which became the first British colony in Africa to achieve independence when Kwame Nkrumah led the country to self-rule as early as 1957, has been adjudged exceptional following years of successful democratic transitions including from one party system to another. However, there is frustration particularly amongst the poor over the lack of tangible democratic dividends translated into improvements of their socio-

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economic well-being. This feeling of frustration has manifested into worrisome occurrences with potential threats to democracy. Among the danger signals is the unending struggles and fierce contest for control of power and political space which has led to communities becoming less tolerant and often resulting in the use of violent means to express grievances and settle scores. Political contests have degenerated into a bitter and acrimonious fight that does not augur well for the deepening of democracy in the country.

Moreover, in Ghana, chieftaincy remains one revered institution that plays a major role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the nation. Nonetheless, disagreements over who qualifies and becomes the chief of a traditional area remain a major source of conflict in most parts of the country, especially in the three Northern regions and in Greater Accra. While some kingdoms have effective succession procedures and consciously followed them, others have theirs truncated with severe consequences of violence and destruction of valuable properties. Evident during elections is the level to which politics has permeated the chieftaincy institution thereby making an election year even more volatile and tense such as was witnessed in the conduct of the 2012 elections in Ghana. Politicians are increasingly becoming suspicious of each other and verbal attacks and threats of war were very visible during the December 2012 Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

As part of its contribution to the promotion of peace and security during the 2012 Ghana elections, WANEP, under the platform of **'Transforming the Culture of Political Violence: Building Capacity for Response,'** project funded by Strengthening Transparency Accountability and Responsiveness in Ghana (STAR-Ghana) worked with women groups, community leaders including Queen Mothers to monitor election dispute indicators, mitigate them through innovative strategies using dialogue and mediation. WANEP's highly developed Peace Monitoring Centre provided complementing structure for analysis of the indicators

which the community leaders worked with.

Secondly, WANEP and the Catholic University College of Ghana (CUCG) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) created a joint monitoring platform tagged the Joint Party Election Results Monitoring (J-PERM) with the sole objective of reducing tensions and anxiety usually associated with elections especially, in terms of disputed figures. In order to ensure buy-in and consensus building, the collaboration included five political parties namely; the National Democratic Congress (NDC), the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the Convention People's Party (CPP), the People's National Convention (PNC) and the Progressive People's Party (PPP). A Memorandum of Understanding to define the rules of engagement for J-PERM was signed by the political parties, WANEP, UNDP and endorsed by the Electoral Commission of Ghana.

## WANEP'S CONTRIBUTION TO GHANA 2012 ELECTIONS AND TRANSITION PROCESS

### Preparatory Phase

As the leading civil society organization for peace and security in West Africa, WANEP was sufficiently prepared for the elections and set up modalities for the sustenance of peace and stability during the period. Prior to the commencement of the electoral process, an Election Dispute Management Practice Guide for West Africa was published to assist practitioners and Election Management Bodies in the peaceful management of electoral processes based on WANEP's experience in responding to election disputes across the sub region.

The Guide which was officially launched in 2012 by the Most Reverend Emmanuel Asante, the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church, Ghana and Chairman of the

National Peace Council is designed to provide relevant stakeholders including government, election management bodies, donors and civil society among others with basic information on how to respond to conflicts arising from the conduct of elections. It is divided into four related sections of: Identification of stakeholders; Context and contents of election disputes; Management of Election disputes and Cross cutting issues such as Multi-track diplomacy. The Guide clearly identified women as strategic stakeholders in the multi-track diplomacy and was effectively utilized to eliminate the risk of discrimination against women and other vulnerable categories. This deliberate gender-inclusiveness helped to reveal disparity in women's representation at the National Peace Council (NPC) and WANEP subsequently led an advocacy to the government to correct this anomaly at the level of District and Regional Peace Councils. Copies of this Guide were distributed to Political Parties, the National Peace Council, the media and civil society organizations in Ghana.

In addition, the WANEP Peace Monitoring Center generated and analysed information on the electoral process which was made available to relevant stakeholders including the ECOWAS Directorate for Early Warning. The information helped to strategize for conflict prevention in the election period and to monitor incidents related to electoral disputes and report same through the toll free lines to the WANEP situation room for analysis and response. Through this analysis, WANEP was able to debrief ECOWAS and the African Union authoritatively on election-related risks. The preparatory phases of the election met internationally acceptable standards and provided the ground for a transparent election.

#### **Development of Indicators**

A set of 36 indicators were developed in order to monitor and report on the electoral processes in view of

preventing and or mitigating electoral and political disputes. The indicators which covered the entire process from campaign, to voting and post-election periods, also specified the type of security issues and stakeholders to monitor in the election. It was divided into sub themes namely; social issues, governance and election management bodies, media, publicity and negative statements as well as security concerns. The indicators were subsequently compiled into a publication which will serve as a resource for reference purposes in other elections. To ensure ownership and buy-in, WANEP held a stakeholder's meeting comprising of Civil Society actors with background and experiences in electoral disputes to analyze the indicators and validate the pattern and trends of the electoral disputes. Arising from this exercise, nine indicators were identified as the most critical pointers to violence and needed closer monitoring and intervention in the context of the 2012 Ghanaian elections. The nine indicators selected from the three categories included;

- Proliferation and use of political pressure groups
- Campaign propaganda/Rumours
- Ethnicization and Regionalization of political affiliations
- Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferations
- Unequal access to State media/Abuse of incumbency
- Tampering with election posters and other publicities
- Disagreement over demarcation of borders and delimitation of constituencies
- Lack of confidence in the institutions that manage the elections
- Use of unofficial securities

#### **Building local capacities- Training of Eminent Persons**

Under the theme 'Developing National Capacity for Managing Electoral Disputes,' WANEP built the capacities of 20 eminent persons from the 10 regions of Ghana in dialogue and mediation. The eminent persons

comprised of Chiefs and Queen Mothers, representatives of Faith-Based Organizations and Civil Society with the clout to convene dialogue and mediation to resolve conflicts in their respective regions. Employing its gender policy, participants to the Eminent Persons training were selected at a ratio of 65% female to 35% male. Following on this training, the women were able to play unique roles in levelling the glaring disparity between men and women participation in peace processes. A case in point was the landmark achievement in ensuring equal gender representation in the recruitment of staff into the National Peace Council. Although initial interviews had been conducted for the largely male candidates into the council, however, the women demanded for the inclusion of female candidates for gender balance and subsequently submitted the CVs of 25 qualified women to the Public Service Commission for recruitment.

The Queen Mothers also contributed immensely to conflict prevention in their communities and collaborated with other key stakeholders to establish platforms for dialogue and mediation using non-violent strategies to build peace in potential flashpoints. In one instance, Dorothy Naa Dedei Tagoe, a beneficiary trained 30 Queen Mothers in the Greater Accra region.

Another Queen Mother, Nana Abena Nyarkoa III utilized her skills to intervene in a communal dispute between two communities in her region as recounted below;

*"The two towns; Twifo Hemang and Twifo Mampong, were fighting over the name 'Twifo'. Before my intervention, the two towns were involved in violent clashes that led to hospitalization of many victims. Football matches would always lead to violence between these two communities and there were fears that the coming elections may lead to violence again. After my intervention however there is now total peace in the area and the two traditional areas have pledged to live in peace and harmony"- Nana Abena Nyarkoa III, Queen mother of Twifo Hemang, Central Region.*

Other success stories were recorded in Upper East Region where eminent persons in the area mobilised to broker peace in the Talensi-Nabdam District where communal strife and conflict over small scale mining activities are undermining peace and development in the area. The two conflicting groups; small scale miners and the Chinese mining company were brought together to dialogue on finding peaceful solution to the conflict. The peace forum, facilitated by WANEP was organised through the eminent persons by the Centre for Alternative Development (CENFAD) in the Talensi-Nabdam District and the Northern Patriots for Research and Advocacy (NORPRA). The fear prior to the election was that the conflict (though unconnected to elections) could be exacerbated in the electioneering process.

The training of eminent persons drawn from the 10 regions of Ghana complemented the efforts of Government in building national capacities for the prevention of conflicts thus paving the way for smooth collaboration between the eminent persons and the National Peace Council (NPC) of Ghana.

### **Voter Education**

A total of 3500 Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials were distributed in all the 10 regions as part of efforts to sensitize Ghanaians on the need for peaceful conduct during the elections. Catchy wordings and images were effectively employed to communicate peace messages, some of which read; ***Passion for Peace, Vision for future: Elections 2012, The Future of Ghana counts; Elections 2012: Be the Peace; Elections 2012: I am the Peace; Building Peace Together, etc.*** The messages captured on t-shirts, brochures, car stickers and danglers were distributed close to Election Day to keep the messages fresh and appealing. Through the WANEP regional secretariat,

the IEC materials were also distributed in various bus terminals in the Accra Metropolis; the Youth Wing of the National Commission on Civic Education, University of Ghana, Legon; Civil society partners and other stakeholders with the aim of inculcating in the electorate the desire for maintaining peace and security. The Queen Mothers earlier trained developed a peace float and used it as a vehicle for distributing the IEC materials in the ten regions of Ghana. All these efforts contributed to the relative peaceful environment witnessed during the electioneering period.

### **Election-Day Activities**

The 2012 elections were considered to be more of issue-based as compared to the 2008 election, a testimony to the high level of decorum exhibited by the politicians in running their campaigns. There was high voter turn-out and the election was conducted with full and active participation of all stakeholders, especially during vote counting. Moreover, Ghanaians demonstrated high sense of responsibility by being patient and tolerant even in the face of long delays and technical hitches experienced during the voting process. On the other hand, the security operatives were highly professional in discharging their duties including in the way they dealt with the skirmishes that arose in some parts of the country lending credence to peaceful elections as was witnessed.

WANEP collaborated with the National Peace Council and other experts to convene and facilitate dialogue between the two main political parties and the Electoral Commission (EC) on Election Day. This effort helped to douse tension especially, over the premature claims of victory by one of the parties before the official announcement of the results and the attempt by the Commission to delay the proclamation of the results.

Prior to the elections, WANEP utilized media platforms to enlighten the voters on contemporary issues relating to elections and proffered policy insights on how to

tackle them. Various conflict issues recorded in the run-up to the elections were thoroughly addressed by the experts through these engagements. The trained eminent persons were deployed to monitor elections in their localities while a team of international election observers were also deployed to monitor elections across the region in the spirit of learning and sharing of best practices. A debrief session held after the elections with the monitors, provided a platform for experience sharing on best practices and lessons learned with regards to WANEP engagements and interventions for the achievement of peaceful elections in the country.

A communiqué issued at the end of the elections, cited corrupt practices of politicians including vote buying and offer of inducements to the electorate and also identified ethnicity, non-respect of values and principles of democracy by some politicians as factors capable of undermining the electoral process. The communiqué further raised concerns on the nature of reportage by some section of the media which created political tension before, during and after the elections.

### **Joint-Party Election Results Monitoring (J-PERM)**

The Joint-Party Election Results Monitoring (J-PERM) was created in collaboration with UNDP and the Catholic University College of Ghana principally to provide a space for disputes resolution around elections. Based on lessons learned from the 2008 Presidential elections, where issues of authentication and credibility of election results caused deep-seated rivalry between the two main political parties, J-PERM became an operational platform to monitor and collate election results as well as work with the political parties in mediating any disputes, misunderstandings or misinterpretations and misrepresentations of the 2012 election results.

Drawing from its experiences of contributing to



peaceful elections in several West African countries, WANEP provided leadership and coordination of the J-PERM Situation Room, while the Catholic University College of Ghana provided the software for data collation from the designated official Polling Agents of the Political Parties and for displaying these results in the J-PERM Situation Room where representatives of the political parties monitored these results. WANEP under the framework of J-PERM and the Civic Forum Initiative (CFI) and at the instance of the National Peace Council was engaged in behind-the-scenes mediation on disputed results raised by the opposition New Patriotic Party at the Electoral Commission before the announcement of the official results. Thus, J-PERM added value to the electoral process in the deepening of Ghanaian democratic culture.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The overwhelming success of the 2012 elections hinged on the fact that every segment of the Ghanaian society was desirous of peaceful elections and therefore worked tirelessly to achieve it. This fact was further buttressed by the united grief displayed by Ghanaians over the death of President John Evans Atta Mills, a tragic incident which galvanised the nation to unite and collectively exercise their franchise in an atmosphere of peace. For once, the Presidential and Vice Presidential debates organised by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) focussed more on issues rather than verbal attacks on political opponents.

WANEP's top level preparedness before, during and after the elections including building capacity of key stakeholders, developing relevant publications and collaboration with major partners ensured the promotion and sustenance of peace throughout the electoral process. However, despite the successes recorded, the lingering chieftaincy and communal conflicts in the country remain a challenge to the electoral processes as

political undercurrents have permeated most of them.

## CONCLUSION

In recent years, there has been a plethora of election disputes, political disagreement and sense of cynicism surrounding the complaints and appeals procedures in many countries in the sub region. This situation has become of grave concern to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the international community. Not only have legal systems and electoral management bodies often been at odds with each other, but there have also been occasions of inconsistencies and gaps in local laws, thus resulting in multiple appeal processes, confusing term-limits, and an absence of clear sanctions for non-compliance with the law.

Such as in the case of the 2012 election petition currently at the Supreme Court. However and encouragingly, the contestation of the results was through the court rather than resorting to violence as is usually the case in similar situations in other parts of the Region. Moreover, the firmness of the Electoral Commission in dealing with its constitutional prerogative by successfully creating the hitherto controversial 45 constituencies which elicited positive response from all political parties are encouraging signs. Even though the on-going court case deserves close monitoring and there is need to continue the campaign for peace until the judgement is delivered, WANEP continues to encourage investment in alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that build trust and foster relationships.



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In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.