

# Innovations

## No Youth, No Conflicts: The Youth Factor in the Nawuri-Gonja Conflict in Northern Ghana

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### **Abstract**

*In the 1970s, ethnic youth associations sprang up in Northern Region of Ghana out of the local concerns and desires to stimulate community development through self-help programmes. This led to the crystallization of ethnic youth associations, including the Gonja Youth Association, Konkomba Youth Association, Dagomba Youth Association, Chamba Youth Association, Nawuri Youth Association, Nanumba Youth Association. These associations dominated the local socio-political space in the region, and spearheaded the politics of self-help and ethnic identity. Few years after their formation, ethnic youth associations had become powerful organizations in Northern Ghana to the extent that their activities began to push ethnic groups to the brink of conflicts. Using a historical approach that blended data from documentary and non-documentary sources, this study examined the socio-political activism of Nawuri and Gonja youths and youth groups as well as the participation of the youth in the Nawuri-Gonja conflict of 1991/1992. It also examines the role of Nawuri youth groups in peacebuilding after the conflict. The paper argues that Nawuri and Gonja youth groups were catalytical to the Nawuri-Gonja conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding.*

**Key Words:** 1.Conflict, 2.Gonja, 3.Nawuri, 4.Northern, 5.Peacebuilding, 6.Resolution, 7.Youth

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### **Introduction**

In 1991/1992, a conflict broke out between the Nawuri and the Gonja over allodial rights in lands in Kpandai and its environs in the present-day Kpandai District in the Northern Region of Ghana. There were three battles or phases of the conflict – the first in April in 1991, the second in June in 1991, and the third in May in 1992 (Mbowura, 2012). Both in the events leading to the conflict and the conduct of the conflict, Nawuri and Gonja youth groups had been visible, and were active participants. After the end of hostilities, the Gonja were expelled from Kpandai, and Nawuri youth groups took various measures to build peace in Kpandai and its environs.

## **Studies on Conflicts in Northern Ghana**

Studies on conflicts in Northern Ghana since 1981 have received a lot of scholarly attention. Generally, the studies on conflicts in Northern Ghana can be conveniently divided into two main strands. The first strand consists of literature that examines the macro-history of conflicts in Northern Ghana, particularly the historicity (roots and causes) and patterns of the conflicts. This is mostly the traditional account of conflicts in the region (Awedoba, 2009; Lentz, 2007; Anamzoya, 2010; Anamzoya and Tonah, 2012; Brukum, 1999, 2000 & 2001; Bogner, 2009; Jonsön, 2007; Tolton, 2010; Skalnik, 1983, 1987 & 1989). The second strand shifts attention from the traditional approach, and focuses attention on variables and elements of conflicts such as mediation and peacebuilding mechanisms, conflicts and development, security in conflicts, the political economy of conflicts, gender and conflicts, the youth and conflicts, among others (Mbowura, 2012, 2014, 2014a, 2014b, 2020 & 2021; Bombandi, 2007; Mohammed, 2007; Tonah, 2007; Longi, 2013; Braimah and Mbowura, 2018; Lentz, 2007 & 2007a).

This paper contributes to the second strand of the body of literature on conflicts in Northern Ghana. It examines the roles of the Gonja and Nawuri youth groups in the outbreak and patterns of the Nawuri-Gonja conflict. It also examines the peacebuilding mechanisms of Nawuri youth groups in Kpandai and its environs in the Kpandai District after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict.

## **Youth as a Concept**

This study does not seek to wade into the philosophical discourses on the concept “youth”, and its usage to refer to a period of transition to adulthood and as a relational concept to specific social, economic and political circumstances. For the purposes of convenience, this study sets off with the discourse on youth with the UN definition of the concept. The UN uses the term “youth” to refer to young persons between 15 and 24 years (UN, 2019). According to the UN, the global population of the youth between 15 and 24 years in 2019 stood at 1.2 billion persons (UN, 2019). The UN estimates that the global population of the youth would grow up to 1.4 billion by 2065 (UN, 2019).

In Ghana, the term “youth” is officially used to refer to “persons who are within the age bracket of fifteen (15) and thirty-five (35). Ghana’s definition has been informed by those used by the United Nations Organisation and the Commonwealth Secretariate” (National Youth Policy of Ghana [NYPG], 2010: 5). While some scholars stick to this official definition (Gyampo and Obeng-Odoom, 2013; Africa Insight Desk, 2020), others use the term to refer to other age brackets. For instance, Gyampo (2013) uses the term to refer to young people between the ages of 21 and 40.

In Northern Ghana, the age brackets of youth groups do not, in practice, conform to the official age brackets espoused by the NYPG. In practice, the age brackets of members of youth groups

in Northern Ghana extends to those in their fifties. Hence, this study loosely uses the term “youth” to refer to young people between the ages of 15 and 50.

### **The Activism of the Gonja and Nawuri Youth Associations**

To contextualize the role of the activism of the Gonja and Nawuri youth associations in the Nawuri-Gonja conflict, it is important to understand their history and the exigencies of their operations.

### **The Gonjaland Youth Association**

In the 1970s, the Gonja Youth Association, which later metamorphosed into the Gonjaland Youth Association in the 1980s, was formed as part of measures of *Ngbanye* (Gonja) youth to mobilize local resources for development in Gonjaland. The formation of the Gonja Youth Association and many other ethnic youth associations in Northern Ghana in the 1970s was generally driven by the politics of ethnic identity. By the 1980s, ethnic youth associations began to exert more influence and became the official mouthpieces of the various ethnic groups in the region. As Tolton (2010: 151), the formation of the Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA) in 1977, for example, was “part of a larger trend in political activism and self-help” (Tolton, 2010: 151). Being structures for the politics of ethnic identity, the youth associations in Northern Ghana played crucial roles in the outbreak of conflicts in the region. For instance, the KOYA was fingered in the events that led to the outbreak of the inter-ethnic conflict between the Konkomba and the Nanumba in 1981 (Talton, 2010). Similarly, the Vagla and the Gonja Youth Associations were blamed for the outbreak of the inter-ethnic conflict between the Gonja and the Vagla in Sawla in the Bole District in 1984 (Ampiah, 1991).

The formation of the Gonja Youth Association in the 1970s led to the proliferation of youth associations by other ethnic groups in the Gonja-controlled areas (Mbowura, 2012: Ampiah, 1991). Prominent among these youth associations were the youth associations of the Nawuri, Nchumuru, Vagla and the Mo (Ampiah, 1991). Desirous to bring all the various ethnic youth associations in the Gonja-controlled areas in Northern Ghana under one umbrella, the Gonja redesignated their youth association to the Gonjaland Youth Association (Ampiah, 1991). It is difficult to establish the exact date of the formation of the Gonjaland Youth Association, but there are suggestions that it was formed between 1980 and 1984 (Ampiah, 1991). What was known was that in 1984 the Gonjaland Youth Association made its first public pronouncement when it issued a letter against the ban of all youth associations in Northern Ghana following the inter-ethnic conflict between the Vagla and the Gonja (Ampiah, 1991; Mbowura, 2012). It was in a letter against the ban of youth associations that the Gonja first made reference of the designation, the “Gonjaland Youth Association” as the name of their youth association.

Since its public act in 1984, the Gonjaland Youth Association had aimed at rolling out measures to entice other ethnic youth associations in the Gonja-controlled areas in Northern Ghana to

embrace its project (Ampiah, 1991). It was for this reason that they extended invitations to the Nawuri and Nchumuru in 1988 in its official inauguration, though the Nawuri and the Nchumuru declined the invitation (Ampiah, 1991). No official reason for the refusal of the Nawuri and the Nchumuru to honour the Gonjaland Youth Association's invitation, but Ampiah (1991, Part I: 30) argues that it was "obvious from the evidence of the Nawuris and the Nchumurus, that they had taken a strong objection to the formation of that Association" (Ampiah, Part I: 30).

### **The Nawuri Youth Association**

The precise date of the formation of the Nawuri Youth Association (NYA) is not known. It was probably formed in the 1970s to serve as a counterweight to the Gonja Youth Association. There are some suggestions that it was formed in 1971 (Evidence of Nana Atorsah to the Ampiah Committee, 1991: 196). Much is not known about the activities of the NYA. What was known was that, like other youth associations, its objectives were to serve as the mouthpiece of the Nawuri and to mobilize the Nawuri for activism and development (Ampiah, 1991). However, unlike the Gonja Youth Association, the NYA appeared not vibrant in its early formative years. Hence, little was known about the activities of the Nawuri Youth Association except files of it that Mr. John Seidu Karim, who was the PNDC Secretary for the Salaga District since 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1990, said existed in the district office (Evidence of John Seidu Karim to the Ampiah Committee, 1991: Part II, 172). But by 1991, the NYA had become vibrant, and rallied the Nawuri in opposition against the holding of the Gonjaland Youth annual conference in Kpandai (Ampiah, 1991; Mbowura, 2014). Between February and March, 1991, tensions began to mount in Kpandai and its environs following the Northern Regional Security Committee's (REGSEC) forceful cancellation of the Gonjaland Youth Association conference scheduled to take place in Kpandai in March, 1991. As tensions mounted, the executives of NYA held several meetings with government officials in Kpandai and Tamale as part of measures to de-escalate tension and prevent the outbreak of the Nawuri-Gonja conflict (Ampiah, 1991; Mbowura, 2014). In one of such meetings with the REGSEC in Tamale where REGSEC cancelled the holding of the Gonjaland Youth conference in Kpandai for security reasons, the executives of the NYA that attended the meeting were "enjoyed to sign a bond to be of good behaviour. Apparently, no such bond was signed the Nawuris" (Ampiah, 1991: Exh. C, 7). Instead, the executives of the NYA were said to have hired a taxi cab from Tamale, and:

were seen in Tamale busily buying calico from the market. The impression created of the white calico was that the Nawuris had achieved victory. No wonder the Nawuris in their taxi proceeded to Kpandai on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1991, clad in these white robes and publicly proclaimed that the Government had given the land to them. This naturally created a big stir among the Gonja population (Ampiah, 1991: Exh. C, 7).

### **The Ban of The Gonjaland Youth Conference and its Aftermath**

The Gonjaland Youth Association had planned to organize its conference in Kpandai for 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> March 1991(Ampiah, 1991).To this end, the Executive Committee requested the National Secretary, Mr. Jeduah, to travel to Kpandai to hold preliminary discussions with various ethnic groups in Kpandai and its environs (Ampiah, 1991).

The Nawuri, represented by the NYA, were said to have protested against the any attempts by the Gonja to organize a conference in Kpandai under the auspices of the Gonjaland Youth Association. The Nawuri argument was that the Gonja were not the owners of the land in Kpandai and its environs; hence, it was unacceptable to organize a meeting under the auspices of the Gonjaland Youth Association on a land which was not theirs (Ampiah, 1991). The Nawuri protest was borne out of the fear that, if the Gonjaland Youth Association was allowed to holds its conference in Kpandai which belonged to the Nawuri, it would provide a legitimate basis for the Gonja to prop up their claim to Kpandai and its environs (Ampiah, 1991). This view was confirmed in a National Investigation Bureau's (NIB) report (Appiah, 1991). The logic of Nawuri protest was not against the Gonja *per se*;it was borne out of Nawuri claim to allodial rights in lands in Kpandai and its environs. According to the Nawuri, they were the allodial owners of the land in Kpandai and its environs. Hence, the Gonja had no legitimate right to organize a meeting of the Gonjaland Youth Association on a land which was theirs.

Tension began to mount in Kpandai and its environs as Nawuri protests gathered momentum, and the rumours of war between the Nawuri and the Gonja swirled across the various Nawuri settlements.As reports of war between the Nawuri and the Gonja trickled down on the desk of the Secretary of the East Gonja District at Salaga, frantic attempts were made to de-escalate tension (Ampiah, 1991). First, the District Security Committee (DISEC) of the East Gonja District Assembly held separate meeting with the Gonja, the Nawuri, the Police and Cadres of the Kpandai Zonal Secretariat. DISEC's meeting with the Nawuri gauged their mood for war, as it found uncompromising and unyielding of the leadership of the Nawuri youth to allow the Gonja to organize their activities in Kpandai (Ampiah, 1991; Mbowura, 2012).

Second, the National Investigation Bureau (NIB) carried out investigations about the possibility of war between the Nawuri and the Gonja. Its report showed that war would break out between the two ethnic groups if the Northern Regional Security Committee (REGSEC) failed to undertake some security measures (Ampiah, 1991; Mbowura, 2012). Accordingly, REGSEC took immediate security measures. In the first place, REGSEC invited the leadership of the two ethnic groups to Tamale for a meeting to find pathways to de-escalate tension (Mbowura, 2012). Secondly and as a short-term measure, REGSEC banned both the Gonjaland Youth Association the Gonja Traditional Council from organizing meetings in Kpandai (Ampiah, 1991; Mbowura, 2012). Furthermore, REGSEC increased police visibility and security in Kpandai by dispatchinga number of Police personnel to Kpandai on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1991 to “strengthen the

security of the area” (Ampiah, 1991: Appendix B 4(i), Memorandum by DISEC, Salaga District, 3).

One would have thought that the above measures put in place by REGSEC would have de-escalated tension and prevented the outbreak between the Nawuri and the Gonja. Rather, the measures, particularly the ban on the Gonjaland Youth Association and the Gonja Traditional Council from holding their respective meetings in Kpandai, set the tone for war. The Gonja were bitter about the ban and were hell-bent on pouring their spleen on the Nawuri (Mbowura, 2012). On the other hand, the Nawuri interpreted the ban of the meetings as a victory (Mbowura, 2012). The Nawuri leaders who attended the meeting in Tamale with REGSEC returned to Kpandai in a taxi cab amidst jubilations and chanting of victory much to the chagrin of the Gonja (Ampiah, 1991). It was these dichotomous interpretations and moods of the Gonja and the Nawuri following REGSEC’s ban of the Gonjaland Youth Association and the Gonja Traditional Council from holding their respective meetings in Kpandai that set the stage for a clash of egos defined by politics ethnic identity (Ampiah, 1991; Mbowura, 2012). Apart from the unintended consequences of the measures of REGSEC that provided the spark for the outbreak of war, one crucial explanation for the failure of REGSEC to prevent the outbreak of war was the extent to which the momentum for war had gathered (Mbowura, 2012). The drift to war between the two ethnic groups had reached a point of no retreat. War between them became the obvious alternative for the Nawuri and the Gonja to sort out their long soured historical encounters over allodial rights in lands in Kpandai and its environs (Mbowura, 2012).

### **The Youth and the Triggers of the Conflict**

Given that the brink to war between the Nawuri and the Gonja by April, 1991, had reached a point of no retreat, it only needed a trigger. The trigger was provided by the youth in three ways. First, Nana Mbimadong (the NYA president at the time), together with other leaders of NYA such as Nana Kwaku Atorsah, prevented a Gonja man from selling a parcel of land, which was originally acquired by the Roman Catholic Church in Kpandai (Ampiah, 1991; Mbowura, 2014). No records of what ensued in the confrontation exist. However, bystanders seemed to have fed the confrontation to the rumour mill, leading to widespread rumours that leaders of NYA had embarked on a campaign to either seize parcels of land under effective Gonja utilization or prevent the Gonja from selling parcels of land that they claimed were theirs (Attah Kwame Francis, personal communication, June 15, 2022). It seemed from all indications that, by 1991, the NYA had provided the leadership capable of leading the Nawuri to resist Gonja rule even if that could lead to the outbreak of a conflict. Later events provided support to this assertion, as the leaders of NYA were accused by the Gonja of having instigated the outbreak of the conflict (Ampiah, 1991).

Second, young women of both ethnic groups provided an expression of the crucial role that the youth played in the Nawuri-Gonja conflict by engaging in a free-for-all fight over politics of identity and land ownership. As Nawuri women, who were predominantly Catholics were disgusted by the attempt of a Gonja man to sell a parcel of land originally owned by the Roman Catholic Church in Kpandai, they traded insults with some Gonja ladies when news broke out of the attempted sale of the parcel of land in the mid-morning of April 7, 1991 (Mbowura, 2012). Soon the “war of insults” between the two factions degenerated into a street fight between them (Mbowura, 2012). In the ensuing fight, the women:

pelted each other with stones and sadistically wounded themselves with manoeuvrable objects of any kind. After almost an hour of a free fight, the fighters finally dispersed. Though the fight was not widespread in scope, it was significant because it heightened the already tensed atmosphere in Alfai [Kpandai and its environs], particularly at Kpandai. It signalled the preparedness of both groups to resort to war to sort out their differences, and served as a dress-rehearsal for a more violent and widespread confrontation between their male counterparts (Mbowura, 2012: 185-186).

Third, young Nawuri and Gonja men provided the fuel, which the earlier confrontations between the two ethnic groups needed for the outbreak war. As the embers of the altercations between the women flickered out, the young men of both ethnic groups attacked each other – first, in a free-for-all street fight that led to some casualties (Mbowura, 2012: 187-188), and second, in armed confrontations in which “Anekor, a Nawuri and the war’s first victim, was shot and killed by Asimani, a Gonja” (Mbowura, 2012: 188).

### **The Youth as War Resources of the Conflict**

Basically, the war resources of the Nawuri-Gonja conflict were produced by the youth. In one sense, the youth provided the war resources of the conflict by enlisting as fighters. No records of the statistics of youth fighters in the conflict exist. Information on the youth fighting force in the conflict for this study was drawn mainly from eyewitnesses. According to a source, the fighters on both sides of the conflict were predominantly young men and some few women between the ages of 20 and 50 years (Anani Kabonwule, personal communication, June 10, 2022). According to him, the undulating terrain and the savanna grassland nature of the terrain in Kpandai and its environs required young men with the tenacity and physical endurance to fight in the war, and that the failure to meet those conditions by Nana Babamule, a Nawuri warrior in his fifties, explained why he was killed by the Gonja warriors. A Nawuri fighter in the conflict underlined the role that the youth played as the fighting forces in the conflict when he said:

in Kpandai, there were no good layouts and thoroughfares. Hence, fighters on both sides had to face each other in the open spaces in most of the battles. There was always the need to retreat when the opponents gained the upper hand. Sometimes, fighters on both sides had to run for long hours for their lives when the pendulum of the war tilted in favour of the opponents. Fighters in their fifties could not endure the physical exertions that the long hours of running required. Hence, the nature of the war made it imperative for the youth to serve mainly as the fighting forces of the conflict (Kwame Lowugyayin, personal communication, June 11, 2022).

Indeed, “some of the Nawuri warriors such as Kwabena Asane, who lost his life in the second battle were young men in their early thirties at the time. Similarly, “other Nawuri warriors such as late Yaw-Do, Kasta Awumpa and Kotoka Dare, who died few years after the conflict, were in their late thirties or early forties at the time of the conflict. There were many others such as myself, Samele Dare, Anani Kabonwule, Kwame Beyifene, Bamuntu, Acheampong Kabonwule and many other young men from Balai, Nchanchina and other Nawuri communities who were in their twenties, thirties and forties at the time they enlisted as Nawuri troops to fight in the war. In fact, the list is endless” (Kwame Lowugyayin, personal communication, June 11, 2022).

On the part of the Gonja, it was also established that their fighting forces were drawn mainly from the youth. It was estimated that about two thousand Gonja warriors from other parts of present-day Savannah Region were deployed by the Gonja to assist their counterparts in Kpandai in the first battle of the conflict (Mbowura, 2014). Eyewitnesses of other ethnic groups in Kpandai (Kotokoli, Bassare, Ewe, Anufo and Konkomba) claimed that the Gonja fighting forces that arrived in Kpandai in the first battle were predominantly made up of the youth. Similarly, in the third phase of the battle, with the exception of one Zakari (the only Gonja survival in the war in the third battle) and Alhaji Musah (the commander of the Gonja army in the third battle), who were probably in their fifties, all the Gonja warriors who came from Kpembe and Salaga to fight the Nawuri in Kpandai in the third battle in May, 1992, were all young men in their twenties and thirties (Attah Kwame Francis, personal communication, June 15, 2022).

Apart from serving as the fighting forces, the youth provided the financial resources needed to finance the conflict. Gonja youth entrepreneurs, who owned businesses and fleets of commercial vehicles at the time, including one Tafah, Omot and the wealthy sons of Alhaji Tahiru and those of Alhaji Ademu, the Kanankulaiwura (Gonja head chief in Kpandai) were said to have made hefty financial contributions to the Gonja war machinery (Nana Gao Donkor, Bassari chief in Kpandai, personal communication, June 15, 2022). Indeed, Omot was said to have personally offered his cargo vehicle to transport Gonja warriors from Kpembe and Salaga to Kpandai to fight against the Nawuri in the third battle of the conflict (Attah Kwame Francis, personal communication, June 15, 2022). In the case of the Nwuri, their young men, who had sought

refuge in many parts of present-day Nanumba South, worked as labourers on Konkomba, Bassari and Nanumba farms to raise money to finance the war machinery of the Nawuri (Attah Aniwasa, personal communication, June 14, 2022).

Furthermore, Nawuri and Gonja women traders between their twenties and forties cannot be left out in any account of youth financiers of the conflict. These traders travelled to notable markets in Kumidi and Lugni in the present-day Kpandai District and Nanumba North District, respectively, to conduct business whereupon they obtained money to finance the conflict (Mbowura, 2021). Mbowura (2021) detailed out the logistical contributions of Nawuri women (usually young women less than fifty years old) to the war efforts of the Nawuri in the conflict. According to him, young Nawuri women:

facilitated the war machinery of Nawuri troops by supplying them ammunitions. While maintaining the home economy, Nawuri women undertook the onerous task of buying bullets for their men to sustain their war efforts. Women, whether poor or rich, made contributions to this end. In some cases, women took their wares to notable markets dotted around Kpandai area, sold them and bought bullets for their husbands and the troops to ensure a smooth operation of the Nawuri war machinery (Mbowura, 2021: 41-42).

There was another capacity in which the youth provided the oils to grease the war machines of the Nawuri and the Gonja in the conflict. According to Mbowura (2012 & 2021), both Nawuri women, usually those in their youthful ages, who had mixed Gonja and Nawuri ethnic backgrounds, served as eavesdroppers in the conflict. One Iddrisu Mohamadu, a Chakosi and an albino (popularly known as Chakosi Ofiri) was said to have played an instrumental role as an eavesdropper for the Gonja due largely to the general rapport between the Gonja and the Chakosi (Anufo) in Northern Ghana (Kwadjo Dare, personal communication, June 11, 2022). There were many other Kotokoli, Bassari and Konkomba young men and women, who also served as eavesdroppers for both parties for personal and social interests, though they were not parties to the conflict (Ninkab Kambou, personal communication, June 15, 2022).

### **The Youth and Conflict Resolution**

Both Nawuri and Gonja youth were active stakeholders in all the attempts to resolve the conflict between 1991 and 1996. In all the mediation meetings between the Nawuri and the Gonja superintended by the REGSEC and other security agencies, the delegations of both parties were led by the leaders of their respective youth associations. On April 3, 1991, for instance, REGSEC was said to have "... invited the leaders of the Nawuri Youth Association who had been identified as complainants to meet the REGSEC" (REGSEC's Sub-Committee's Visit to Kpandai Area, 1991: 4). These leaders were identified as Nana Nkpanibakey Oklas, Mr. Kweku Atorsah, Richard Atabaso, Kastah Abdullahi, and J.K. Mbimadong (REGSEC's Sub-Committee's

Visit to Kpandai Area, 1991: 4). Similarly, in the delegation of the Nawuri that met REGSEC in Tamale on May 7, 1991, to resolve the Nawuri-Gonja conflict were members such as John Asunke, E.A. Sulemanah, Atorsah Kwaku Felix, R.L. Atabaso, who were all described as Nawuri youth leaders (Minutes of REGSEC, 1991: 1). In the case of the Gonja representatives in that said meeting, Mahama Jedua (Secretary, Gonjaland Youth Association) was one (Minutes of REGSEC, 1991: 1). Furthermore, a majority of the witnesses that provided oral evidence to the Ampiah Committee in 1991 on behalf of the Gonja were youth leaders from their respective ethnic groups. The witnesses of the Gonja – Alhaji Mohammed Nuurideen Jawula, Zakaria Alhassan Jawula and Alhaji George Amadu Mahama – were youth leaders of the Gonja (Ampiah, 1991: Appendix A1). Similarly, four of the witnesses of the Nawuri and the committee – Joseph Kwasi Mbimadong, Nana Nkpanibake Oclass, Felix Kwaku Atorsah and Kasta Hafize – were all Nawuri youth leaders (Ampiah, 1991: Appendix A1). From the evidence available, it can therefore be said that both the leaders of the Nawuri and Gonja youth associations provided the leadership for their respective ethnic groups or represented their ethnic groups in all peacebuilding mediations prior and during the conflict.

Youth involvement in the peacebuilding or mediation efforts were not entirely driven by good intentions; it was sometimes intended to thwart the peacebuilding process. A case in point was the resettlement scheme by REGSEC in 1992. On 5 September 1992, the REGSEC brought some Gonja young men under armed escort by the Security Task Force to resettle in Kpandai, but the resettlement scheme failed (Mbowura, 2012). Though there were a variety of reasons that accounted for its failure, reference was made to Nawuri warriors' interferences with the social space of the Gonja re-settlers (Mbowura, 2014). Nawuri young men wielding guns were alleged to have constantly sneaked into the resettled environment in an attempt to kill the Gonja (Mbowura, 2014). As Mbowura (2012: 221-222) puts it, Gonja accounts point fingers at the failure of the resettlement scheme, among others, to the "fear of insecurity arising out of alleged armed Nawuri warriors sneaking into the Primary School [where the Gonja were resettled] in the attempt to kill them." Given the failure of the resettlement project, the Gonja were evacuated back to Kpembe and Salaga after few days of the experimentation of the project, and never returned to Kpandai and its environs to date.

### **Nawuri Youth and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding**

Since the failure of the resettlement scheme in 1992, the Gonja youth did no longer directly exert any influence in the social space in Kpandai and its environs. Hence, efforts of the Nawuri Youth Association and other youth groups turned their attention to obliterating any unextinguished fires of the conflict. To this end, peacebuilding mechanisms were utilized by the Nawuri youth aimed at creating a peaceful environment in Kpandai and its environs.

In the post-conflict social space in Kpandai and its environs, various Nawuri youth groups marshalled social resources aimed at peacebuilding. One of such efforts was that of a group of young Nawuri women, known as the “League of Nawuri Women Against Violent Conflict (Mbowura, 2014a). These women organized protests against the attempts of the Gonja to reclaim their landed properties in Kpandai that had fallen into Nawuri hands as war booties two decades after the conflict, arguing that such an attempt would revive the extinguished fires of the conflict (Mbowura, 2014a; League of Nawuri Women Against Violent Conflict, 2010). Records in the Kpandai District Assembly show that the Kpandai District Security Committee (DISEC) sent a report to the REGSEC on the concerns of the League (Kpandai District Assembly’s Report on Nawuri Protest 2010). Eventually, the REGSEC took preventive steps to stop the Gonja from reclaiming their landed properties that had been taken over by the Nawuri as war booties.

Another youth group of the Nawuri that had undertaken measures to build peace in the social space in Kpandai and its environs after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict was the Nawuris’ Professional Association (NPA). Formed in 2019, the NPA seeks to mobilize social and cultural resources of the Nawuri to promote peacebuilding and development in Kpandai and its environs (NPA Constitution, 2019). It seeks “to foster unity, fraternity, education, skills development among Nawuris and to seek welfare of our members” (NPA Constitution, Article 2(C), 2019). In Article 3(13) of the NPA Constitution, the NPA seeks “to serve as a mediation body and provide mediation services to resolve misunderstandings and disputes among members and Nawuris in general.” Over the past three years, the NPA has used its annual week-long activities – christened as “homecoming” – to mobilize cultural and social tools, nomenclatures and resources to promote peacebuilding in Kpandai and its environs (Vincent Nyefene – NPA National President, personal communication, June 19, 2022). During the weeklong festivity, Nawuri cultural dances were performed, and these dances, together with peacebuilding-inclined songs, were utilized as cultural tools by the NPA to build a culture of peace and desire for peace in the social space in Kpandai and its environs (Jerry James Maafor – NPA National Secretary, personal communication, June 14, 2022). Beyond using cultural resources, the NPA uses other social networks to promote peacebuilding in Kpandai and its environs. Its local chapters and women’s wings have variously used both traditional media space and social media networks to instil a culture of peacebuilding among the Nawuri (Celestina Asunke – NPA National Women’s Organizer, personal communication, June 20, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

This study has provided a new perspective for the study of conflicts in Northern Ghana. It shifted attention from the traditional narratives on conflicts in Northern Ghana to the roles the youth and youth groups of the Nawuri and the Gonja and the played in the Nawuri-Gonja conflict. It argued that Nawuri and Gonja youth groups played catalytical roles in the outbreak, conduct and peacebuilding processes in the Nawuri-Gonja conflict. The youth of the two ethnic groups were the critical element of the engine of conflict; without them, the patterns of the conflict would

have been entirely different. The politics of identity of the Gonjaland Youth Association and that of the Nawuri Youth Association, occasioned by the questions of allodial rights in lands in Kpandai and its environs, drove the two associations at a collision point from which retreat became impossible. When the outbreak of armed conflict between the two ethnic groups needed a trigger, the youth groups provided it. At the theatre of the wars in the three battles of the conflict, the youth were mainly the combatants and providers of the critical lubricants needed to grease the engines and war machinery of the conflict. In all the attempts to mend the irreparably broken relations between the two ethnic groups before and during the conflict, the leadership of the two youth associations were at the forefront. Though the leadership of the youth associations of the two ethnic groups made representations at all forums to broker peace, there was no sign of any commitment to peace. Consequently, at the critical time when the REGSEC found it expedient to bring back Gonja evacuees to settle in Kpandai as a catalyst to a natural healing process, it was not surprising that some elements of the Nawuri youth allegedly impeded its progress. It was only after some decades after the conflict and following the evacuation of the Gonja from Kpandai and its environs that various Nawuri youth groups inundated the social space with all kinds of peacebuilding initiatives. From the above narrative of youth participation in the Nawuri-Gonja conflict, it can be concluded that the ambience of conflicts in Northern Ghana is a function of the extent of youth participation. Hence, efforts at finding lasting solutions to conflicts in Northern Ghana should necessarily take cognizance of the youth factor.

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**Interviews**

No	Name	Youth Leadership Position	Date of Interview
1	Anani Kabonwule	N/A	June 10, 2022
2	Kwame Lowugyayin	N/A	June 11, 2022
3	Attah Kwame Francis	NYA, National Secretary	June 15, 2022
4	Attah Aniwasa	N/A	June 14, 2022
5	Ninkab Kambou	Bassari Youth Activist, Kpandai	June 15, 2022
6	Kwadjo Dare	N/A	June 11, 2022
7	Vincent Nyefene	NPA National President	June 19, 2022
8	Jerry James Maafor	NPA National Secretary	June 14, 2022
9	Celestina Asunke	NPA National Women's Organizer	June 20, 2022

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