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Original Research

INTERGROUP COMMUNICATION AS A MECHANISM FOR CHIEFTAINCY CONFLICT RESOLUTION: INSIGHTS FROM THE AKPINI TRADITIONAL AREA (KPANDO)

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Abstract
Intergroup communication researchers emphasize the dynamic character of communication among group members, in which the prominence or valence of intergroup ties can shift in an instant. As a result, the function of intergroup communication in dispute resolution is critical in many circles, including conventional ones. This study investigates intergroup communication as a mechanism for chieftaincy conflict resolution: exploring the Akpini traditional area (Kpando). The objectives are to determine if intergroup communication was used as a tool for the Akpini chieftaincy conflict resolution and examine the effectiveness of the chieftaincy conflict resolution strategies used over the years. Using a qualitative approach, data was gathered from chiefs, sub-chiefs, traditional elders and opinion leaders in Kpando and findings were thematically analysed. It was found that intergroup communication was not the main tool used for chieftaincy conflict resolutions in the Akpini traditional area. However, conflict resolution committees have been set up to resolve chieftaincy conflicts in the study area but this has not been very effective. It was, therefore, concluded that choosing leaders to handle intergroup communication meetings has been an issue and this is a contributing factor to failed resolutions. It was, therefore, recommended that, to combat such problems, the conflict resolution committees can do their background checks on all parties involved and where applicable call in surprise witnesses to corroborate or deny accounts given by parties involved in the conflicts as this will facilitate intergroup communication.

Keywords: Communication, Intergroup communication, Chieftaincy, Conflict, Conflict Resolution

Introduction
Background to the Study
People, for example, continuously converse with members of other genders and (at least in complex societies) with members of different ethnic, religious, or cultural groups. Such communication can become contentious or violent at times, leading to overt prejudice, violence, or genocide (Gallois, Watson & Giles, 2018). Aside from that, persons with strong ethnic beliefs and orientation frequently wear their group affiliations on their sleeves, sometimes literally through uniforms and clothes, and sometimes metaphorically through language, accent, and communication patterns. Group memberships are disseminated in a variety of media and formats. For example, the meaning attributed to a uniform is merely one part of individuals wearing it is proclaimed identity (Adam & Galinsky, 2012).

Intergroup communication research may be traced back to Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum's (1960) investigation of the influence of speakers' language on perceptions

among bilingual listeners. Since then, a variety of such studies have been conducted all over the world (Giles & Watson, 2013), highlighting the complex and subtle ways in which interethnic and intercultural connections are conveyed through communication. Long-standing research has also been conducted into the arbitrary character of groups and the identities associated with them (Sherif, 1961), leading to the establishment of Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). People have both favourable and negative views about other groups, which affect the efficacy of relationships. Furthermore, IGC researchers emphasize the dynamic character of communication among group members, in which the prominence or valence of intergroup ties can shift in an instant. As a result, the function of the IGC in dispute resolution is critical in many circles, including conventional ones (Gallois et al., 2018).

Since the Cold War's end, the African continent has seen a series of deadly battles that have left major ramifications, including political, social, economic, and humanitarian issues (Ahiave, 2013). Nigeria (1967-1970), Liberia (1989-1997, 2000-2003), Sierra Leone (1992-2002), Côte d'Ivoire (2002-2010), Uganda (1979), Somalia (since 1991), Rwanda (1994), and Kenya (2007) are a few instances (McGowan, 2005; Ahiave, 2013). Even though there were a number of coups in the nineteenth century, Ghana has also endured wars, particularly intra-state conflicts (Ahiave, 2013). Chieftaincy conflicts have been rife in Ghana with some dragging for years, causing unrest and instability in the affected regions and communities (Baaberihin, 2020). Among these are the long-running confrontations between Peki and Tsito in the Volta Region (Gati, 2008; Bukari, 2016); Nkunya and Alavanyo in the Upper East Region; Konkomba and Nanumba in the Upper East Region; and Abudu and Andani in Dagbon (Mahama, 2002) in the country's Northern Region. The roots of these wars are rooted in historical, socioeconomic, and political circumstances that inspire the protagonists in the early stages and subsequent conflict escalation. Furthermore, race plays a significant influence in these internecine disputes, becoming a dominant one at times (Gati, 2008; Bukari, 2016). The chieftaincy institution is a vital institution in Ghanaian society. Governance was established around this institution prior to the arrival of colonial control. Chiefs played and continue to play a variety of roles in traditional Ghanaian society, including military leaders and defenders of their people; chief priests who perform religious roles within their jurisdictions; symbols of identity; sources of honour; and sole custodians of stool lands and unifiers (Ahiave, 2013).

However, Ghana's chieftaincy structure has been plagued by several wars. According to Prah and Yeboah (2011), these disputes are not new, nor are they limited to a single traditional territory; practically every traditional area has seen a chieftaincy dispute in some form or another. Other notable examples include the Ga Mantse succession issue, the Anlo chieftaincy war, the Adoagyiri crisis, the difficulties of Princess and Aketekyi towns, and the outbreak of the Tuobodom chieftaincy struggle (Prah & Yeboah, 2011). While some of these issues have been effectively handled, others have remained unresolved. The study area of this research work is the Akpini traditional area in Kpando which had a chieftaincy dispute for four (4) decades and was resolved in 2020.

Problem Statement

Conflict resolution is meant to bring an end to a conflict in a short period of time. In some cases, conflicts can drag where both parties are unwilling to come to a compromise but, when the conflicts drag for decades, the resolution strategy can be considered as a failure and thus, must be changed. Many chieftaincy issues in Ghana took too long to be resolved, and the consequences was dire for such communities. For instance, the Dagbon chieftaincy issue lasted for more than 17 years before, it was resolved (AJCR, 2022).

Also, the Ga Mantse chieftaincy position had been vacant ever since former chief Nii Amugu died in 2004 due to conflicts in the state (Ahinful, 2021), a new chief was installed

only in 2021. The Akpini traditional area experienced one of the longest-standing chieftaincy issues in Ghana as this lasted for forty-years before, a chief was installed (Gooddays, 2022). In all these cases, the chieftaincy conflict resolutions processes took too long and thus, deprived the communities off development, peace and stability. The lack of intergroup communication can be attributed to the protracted nature of such conflicts (Gangi & Soliz, 2016). There have been studies in Ghana on conflict resolution related to chieftaincy (Ahiave, 2013; Bukari, 2016; Ahmed-Rufai, 2018; Baaberihin, 2020), but none of these studies used intergroup communication as a tool for chieftaincy conflict resolution hence, this is a gap this study wishes to address.

Research Objectives

a. To find out if intergroup communication was used as a tool for the Akpini chieftaincy conflict resolution.
b. To examine the effectiveness of the chieftaincy conflict resolution strategies used over the years

Research Questions

a. Was intergroup communication used as a tool for the Akpini chieftaincy conflict resolution?
b. What is the effectiveness of the chieftaincy resolution strategies used over the years?

Literature Review

Chieftaincy in Ghana and its Related Conflicts

Irrespective of the fact that Ghana has remained relatively peaceful in the midst of a turbulent sub-region and has not experienced civil war, there are numerous violent chieftaincy succession conflicts scattered across the country (although there have been five coups in which constitutions have been suspended, none of these have degenerated into civil war) (Bukari, 2016). Inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts are linked with the wars, which mostly center on the search for traditional dominance (chieftaincy). Almost no region in Ghana is free of chieftaincy disputes (Bukari, 2016). Some of these confrontations occasionally erupt into violence, resulting in deaths and property loss (Bukari, 2016). The battles between the Dagbon, Bimbilla, Bawku, Winneba, and Ga are all related to chieftaincy and competing claims to traditional political power. Even the most severe conflict in Ghana's history, between the Konkomba and Nanumba/Dagomba in 1994/1995 (Tsikata & Seini, 2004; Mahama, 2003), which lost over 2000 lives, was caused mostly by the Konkomba's desire for their own chiefs. In Ghana, the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture held a record of 232 documented chieftaincy conflicts as of May 2010.

According to Abotchie (2006), chieftaincy disputes dominate 600 land disputes in Ghana. Disputes about lawful succession to stools or skins, control over stool lands and land litigation, political intervention, excessive ambition for power, and a lack of accountability and openness by certain traditional rulers are all reasons for chieftaincy conflicts (Prah &Yeboah, 2011). The phrases "stool" and "skin" signify chiefs' emblems of power in Ghana's southern and northern regions, respectively. Chieftaincy has been the most robust Ghanaian tradition, withstanding both colonial and post-colonial administrations' open intervention and destruction (Boafo-Arthur, 2006). Chieftaincy is at the heart of Ghanaian customs, providing leadership for many people across the country. Its foundation precedes colonization. Many chiefly/centralized ethnic groups, including the Akan, Ga, Ewe, Akuapem, Fante, Mamprusi, Dagomba, and Gonja, moved to Ghana with intricate chieftaincy systems. Even the Konkomba, Bimoba, Bulsa, Kusasi, Talensi, and Grunsi, who were once acephalous or non-chiefly ethnic

groups in northern Ghana, now practice chieftaincy (Bukari, 2016). As a result, chieftaincy is extremely important in the lives of various ethnic groups and Ghanaians in general. Some chieftaincy conflicts in Ghana have colonial roots. In their attempt to establish colonial control in Africa, colonial rulers constructed administrative institutions that drove various ethnic groups and traditional organizations, including chieftaincy, into cohesive structures, undermining the underpinnings of these traditional structures (Awedoba, 2009). As a result, there are still persistent conflicts in many districts of Ghana. In northern Ghana, for example, indirect rule stampeded certain traditional territories and blended some ethnic groups into other ethnic groups to govern them. Many of northern Ghana's acephalous communities were compelled to submit to the control of the main Mumprusi, Dogomba, Gonja, and Nanumba clans (Bukari, 2016).

As a result, conflicts arose between some of these acephalous ethnic groups and their chiefly masters after Ghana gained independence when they (the acephalous) demanded self-rule. For example, the Kusasis' desire to rule themselves is what has prompted the ongoing war between them and the Mamprusis. The same cause fuelled the Komkonba and Dagomba/Namumba uprisings in 1994/1995. Traditional democratic institutions, particularly consensus-based decision-making, are critical for conflict resolution and the development of robust institutions. Before European colonialists brought direct western majoritarian democracy, democratic processes in chieftaincy succession and practice existed in Ghana and many other indigenous African communities (Graeber, 2004). Chiefs, for example, controlled their regions with the support of a council of elders who counselled them as well as assisted in the creation of laws and the passing of judgements. According to oral histories, the Bulsa, who administratively inhabit two districts (Bulsa North and Bulsa South Districts) in Ghana's Upper East, are descended from the Mamprugu Kingdom. Following Sandema's capacity to organize the others in the region in defending and safeguarding the whole kingdom, notably from slave raids, Sandema became the most significant town and the paramountcy (a derived noun form of the adjective 'paramount' and refers to the highest chief of an area) (Bukari, 2016). The Sandem Naab (Naab is a title for chief among the Bulsa) reigns over key towns such as Wiaga, Siniesi, Doninga, Kanjaga, Kadema, Gbedema, Uasi, Fumbisi, Bachansi, Chuchuliga, and Gbedemblisi as the supreme chief with traditional and executive responsibilities of establishing chiefs for these cities. Rattray (1932), referenced in Bukari (2016), classified the Bulsa as one of the acephalous groups in northern Ghana, with superb organizational skills, in his seminal study, Tribes of Ashanti Hinterland. Unlike other acephalous tribes such as the Kusasi and Konkomba and their prior "masters," the Bulsa Traditional Area has stayed comparatively tranquil, with a very stable and powerful chieftaincy structure in place for over a century. With the only chieftaincy dispute in Chuchuliga in 1995 following Francis Asangalisa's refusal to come to Sandema for his installation as new chief, claiming the rightful kingmakers are in Chuchuliga and not the Sandem Naab, Ayieta Azantinlow's ascension to the Buluk paramountcy in 1931, and his subsequent reign for seventy-five years, helped to make the area peaceful and stable (Awedoba, 2009). Indeed, battles over chieftaincy succession had emerged in the area prior to Ayieta Azantilow. Even his installation was tainted by his brother, Amaama's, claims to the throne. Following Ayieta Azantilow's death in 2006, a disagreement emerged between the Afoko and Azantilow families, mostly over traditional matters such as who has the right to execute certain traditional tasks and the correct succession method. Another dispute arose following Azagsuk Azantilow's enskinment in 2012 between himself and Sylvester Atiteng Azantilow over who truly won the chieftaincy contest. In the Bulsa traditional region, the chief is chosen based on who has the most heads of home owners (Yeri-nyam). The system is designed so that electorates (Yeri-nyam) support the candidate of their choice, and the candidate with the greatest number of Yeri-nyam is declared the winner. Candidates must

be descended from the royal family of Abil-yeri and have at least one chief in their ancestry. Despite the clarity of the chiefs' election, the system is occasionally fraught with disputes arising from procedural issues and disagreements over the electorate's legitimacy (Yeri-nyam). This was the situation in 2012, when Sylvester Atiteng Azantilow disputed Azagsuk Azantilow's election, stating there were inequalities in the number of people who voted for Azagsuk Azantilow. Sylvester Atiteng Azantilow then proceeded to court to contest Azagsuk's election legality. Despite the problems that arise as a result of the selection and installation of chiefs in the Bulsa Area, the arguments seldom devolve into full-fledged bloodshed, and the disputants swiftly negotiate and come together. As a result, agreement is created among the groups, including the minority who refuse to recognize the election, and there is no governmental machinery with coercive force to coerce the minority to comply with the majority's decisions, as there is in Western majoritarian rule (Graeber, 2004; Bukari, 2016). Amaama, Naab Ayieta Azantilow's opponent, abandoned his challenge to allow for peace. Again, Sylvester Atiteng Azantilow dropped his lawsuits and acknowledged Azagsuk Azantilow as chief, leading to Azagsuk Azantilow's recognition by everybody in 2013. As a result, the people of the area have claimed that the system of succession and installing a chief is peaceful, democratic, and based on consensus-based decision-making, claiming that we argue but in the end we come together.

Socio-cultural Effects of Chieftaincy Conflicts

According to Bukari, Kendie, Sulemana, and Galaa (2017), conflict traumatizes people by causing bitterness, anger, and divisiveness among fighting parties to the point where they do not want to lay eyes on, or interact with each other because of the rift among their ranks. As a result, initiatives launched in disputing communities suffer because the disputants are unable to show a united front in pursuit of common goals for collective advantage. This paralyzes communities since they are unable to act collectively. Things that could be done in a shorter amount of time take longer or are not completed at all (Bukari et al., 2017).

This is due to the lasting scars, both physical and psychological, in the minds of disputants, victims, and caretakers (UNICEF, 2015). According to Prah and Yeboah (2011), chieftaincy dispute fosters an atmosphere of fear, insecurity, and distrust, endangering the peace and stability of the entire nation. According to UNICEF (2015), war causes people to become homeless. According to DFID (2001), hostilities caused eleven million people in Africa to become internally displaced, and these individuals now outnumber refugees by a three-to-one ratio; sadly, both refugees and internally displaced people total 14 million people in Africa. In addition, millions of people have lost their homes and livelihoods, with an increase in civilian mortality and levels of violence, abuse, and mutilation (DFID, 2001), as in Libya, where the escalation of violence in May 2014 resulted in over 434,000 people being internally displaced (UNICEF, 2015). Furthermore, Prah and Yeboah (2011) discovered 500 internally displaced inhabitants in the Tuobodom chieftaincy war, with the majority of able-bodied men, women, and children fleeing the town for fear of further retaliation. During the battle, 92 security personnel were dispatched to the region to preserve peace and order, and the National Disaster Management Organization, NADMO, was in charge of the displaced people. Because the control of such a dispute is done by security forces assigned to the afflicted areas at great expense, neglecting critical developmental concerns becomes a drain on the national purse. Furthermore, the Tuobodom dispute impedes academic development, with both students and instructors abandoning the town's lone Senior High School, which includes all basic schools (Prah & Yeboah, 2011). This has the ability to impact student learning results as well as human resource training. According to UNICEF (2015), conflict has forced people to flee their homes for fear of their lives, as they are afraid of becoming the next target to be attacked, maimed, or

killed. Even if refugee camps are built, essential amenities such as food, power, water, sanitation, and security may be disrupted or inadequate (United Nations Environment Programme, 2009). These have serious ramifications for the victims' dignity.

Economic and Political Implications of Chieftaincy Conflicts

Price increases are one of the economic consequences of chieftaincy battles (Baaberihin, 2020). According to Mohammed (2015), women in the Dagbon chieftaincy dispute said that because of gate differences with their business partners, they sometimes purposefully raise items pricing to irritate consumers at the opposite gate. They raise the price or stockpile items to deter opponents from the other gate so that they may distribute to their supporters (partners within their gate). Conflict breeds suspicion and mistrust, which manifests itself during interactions or bargaining time in markets, making it difficult for the seller and buyer from opposing gates to meet in the markets or agree on a price that benefits both parties. Because they belong to separate gates, some will refuse to conduct business with one another out of fear and mistrust (Mohammed, 2015). Poverty is one of the contributing factors to chieftaincy wars. According to Awedoba (2015), poverty caused by the exploitation and neglect of the north by colonial and post-colonial governments or leaders has impoverished the north and intensified conflict, which has led to the cause and fueling of numerous wars. This colonial and post-colonial neglect of Northern Ghana is reflected in the absence of governmental institutions, public employees such as security forces, police stations, and courts, low levels of education, and a lack of socioeconomic infrastructure, which contributes to the area's pervasive poverty (Tonah, 2012; Mohammed, 2015).

According to Ahiave (2013), one of the elements influencing the legitimate installation of chiefs is distrust. The gatekeepers typically reject their competitors' intentions strongly and see the other's ideas and beliefs as an effort to hijack or bypass peace procedures. These entrenched positions pose a significant danger to the installation of chiefs to restore peace and tranquillity (Issifu & Asante, 2015). One of the consequences of chieftaincy clashes is a drop in sales. Prah and Yeboah (2011) agreed that during conflicts, economic activity comes to a halt because stores may stop due to theft and burning of shops or attacks on shop attendants by conflict opponents. Retailers who wish to sell at the risk of their lives or from their beds struggle to get supplies from whole sale stores since the items are at risk of being stolen (Mohammed, 2015). Furthermore, one of the consequences of chieftaincy warfare is diminishing food output. According to DFID (2001), violence prevents people access to their property during important growing or planting seasons, disrupts markets, and restricts sales of agriculture supplies and output, raising costs. Access to public transportation is another impact of chieftaincy conflicts. According to Mohammed (2015), transportation becomes difficult to access during times of escalation. One unavoidable consequence is the annihilation of animals. United Nations Environment Programme (2009) highlighted that, violent conflicts can result in the physical damage of ecosystems and species. Because to the utter collapse of traditional management methods and/or the release of polluting and dangerous chemicals into the natural environment during conflicts, livelihoods and ecosystem services are harmed, degraded, or destroyed. This breakdown of governance mechanisms directly contributes to broad institutional failures across all sectors, allowing opportunistic entrepreneurs to build uncontrolled resource exploitation schemes (Baaberihin, 2020).

Conflict also has a tendency to muddy property rights, undermine desirable environmental practices, and jeopardize dispute settlement procedures. As a result, violent conflicts at the local level impede conflict resolution and make peace efforts twice as likely to fail within the first five years (United Nations Environment Programme 2009). Increasing demographic pressure and urbanization, inequitable access to and scarcity of land, and resource

depletion are all expected to intensify, with far-reaching consequences for rural and urban stability (DFID, 2001).

Furthermore, one of the consequences of chieftaincy wars is rising unemployment. According to Mohammed (2015), chieftaincy wars have left millions of African teenagers unemployed, with the majority of them living on the outskirts of social institutions and in rural regions rather than metropolitan centers

Chieftaincy Conflict Resolution in Ghana

According to Ahiave (2013), to settle chieftaincy problems, opposing parties must agree to commit themselves to supernatural arbitration through oracles, sworn statements, and an oath in the traditional territory. Fear of immediate sanction from the oracles and oaths discourages disputants who know their claim is wrong and, as a result, quits the struggle for the chieftaincy title in a traditional territory (Ahiave, 2013). According to Lanek (1999), as reported in Ahiave (2013), ingesting the bitter herb supplied by kingmakers governed by consent is an indigenous technique of chieftaincy conflict settlement. When this occurs, claimants with no legitimacy to the throne admit their wrongdoing, with the guilty repenting, begging for forgiveness, paying compensation, and being reconciled with the victim's family by drinking the bitter drink (Lanek, 1999 cited in Ahiave, 2013). It is critical to enable and embrace customary and traditional methods of resolving conflicts in traditional areas, as the heir to the throne will be a mirror and guardian of his followers' culture and tradition. Claimants with no genuine claim to the throne, on the other hand, may shelter behind their Islamic or Christian beliefs and oppose such a traditional procedure of settling the disagreement as demonic or wicked. According to Ahiave (2013), relying on security professionals would assist in calming confrontations that harm lives and property, as well as any danger to the peace and security of such communities. Mbowura and Longi (2014) confirmed that the presence of security in a conflict location such as Funsi greatly cautions and fears both groups to exercise restraint and prevent any explosive scenario. Furthermore, the deployed security personnel should be capable of detecting early warning signs to easily avert a dispute (Mbowura & Longi, 2014).

The legal system is a significant tool for dispute settlement (Mbowura & Longi, 2014). The constitution describes Ghanaian laws as including customary law, whether written or unwritten, that is relevant to certain groups. These laws include rules established by the Superior Courts, High Courts, and lesser courts (Article 2, 1992 Constitution cited in Kunbuor, 2002). According to Owusu-Mensah (2013), the legal system that can be used to resolve chieftaincy disputes is based on the constitution; enactments made by or under the authority of the Parliament established by the constitution; existing laws; orders, rules, and regulations made by any other authority under a power conferred by the constitution and Ghanaian common law. These constitute the official court or legal system utilized in the resolution of chieftaincy issues such as the Funsi Traditional Area. As a result, the prosecuting body will depend on evidence presented by the contending parties, and all applicable laws will be referenced, before the arbitrator or Judge renders a decision based on the facts and the law that is binding on the parties. Security is used to enforce the decision, especially if one of the parties plans to violate it. According to Acheampong (2010), the judicial system maintains democratic values in chieftaincy conflict settlement. According to Ahiave (2013), prominent individuals can assist resolve disagreements through third-party mediation. These are often well-respected Chiefs, religious leaders, and other respected and impartial individuals recruited from within or outside the region and utilized as power brokers to mediate the chieftaincy issue. They are chosen to function as arbiters and reconcilers in order to restore peace and foster harmonious ties amongst competing families and clans for the chieftaincy title. According to Acheampong

(2010), conflict resolution becomes fruitful via communication. This necessitates networking, lobbying, and tactical information transmission among the parties.

Intergroup Communication and Conflict Management

Some studies have found that communication plays an important role in conflict resolution and management (Putnam 2006; Aula & Siira, 2007). Hence, Ariani and Chashmi (2011) claim that the quality of communication within a group enhances community participation with current issues, leads to reduced uncertainty and interference among them, and thus minimizes conflict. Similarly, Atkinson and Butcher (2003) argue that communication is vital for creating trust among group members, which leads to fewer disputes and more positive community growth (Aubert & Kelsey, 2003).

According to Nordin, Sivapalan, Bhattacharyya, Hashim, Ahmad, and Abdullah (2014), in their quantitative research in gas and oil companies, good departmental and group communication climate associated positively with conflict management and concluded that the importance of organizational communication in conflict resolution cannot be overlooked.

Furthermore, using survey and ethnographic data from two teacher school board negotiations, the study discovered that conflict management bargaining serves a communication function by signalling potential problems, clarifying misunderstandings, and exchanging information, which aids in the resolution of conflict within work groups (Putnam, 1994). Similarly, Moemeka (1998) stated that communication may assist businesses in reducing the frequency of unwanted and avoidable conflict and saving time and energy for enhanced performance. Within an organization or community, several sorts of communication occur. Baker (2000), on the other hand, believes that the fundamental contrasts in communication are: levels; formal vs informal; direction (vertical, horizontal, diagonal); and internal versus outward focus. Interpersonal communication, group communication, organizational communication, inter-organizational communication, and mass communication are the many levels of communication (Canary, 2011).

However, the focus of this study is on group communication. Vertical communication (upward and downward communication), horizontal communication, and diagonal communication are all involved. Vertical communication, according to Tariszka-Semegine (2011), is concerned with communication between persons at various hierarchical levels, which in this case will be in a community. It focuses on downward and upward communication between community heads and members. Horizontal communication is concerned with communication amongst community members at the same level. It focuses on communication between peers, people in a community who are on equal or nearly equal levels. According to Cheney (2011), downward communication is the type of communication that flows from the top hierarchy in a community, such as chiefs and elders, down to members at lower ranks. According to Lunenburg (2010), downward communication is often effective when top levels in a society are very driven to make it work. Upward communication is the flow of information from community members to opinion leaders, who in turn report to chiefs and elders, and so communication flows from a lower to a higher level (Richmond, McCroskey & McCroskey, 2005). Ideas, proposals, reports, complaints, and critiques are typical types of information passed from community members to their superiors in the community via upward hierarchy. Although upward communication is begun by people at the community's lower levels, it can only be successful if those at the higher levels are willing to enable the communication to be effective or are willing to tolerate a level of intergroup (lower and higher level) communication (Nyarko, Muah, Mohammed-Aminu & Sarfo, 2015). The sharing of information between persons working at the same or similar levels is referred to as horizontal communication (Tubbs & Moss, 2008). This is communication that occurs inside a community (from peer to peer to

peer). Horizontal communication frequently focuses on community members' satisfaction with the progress of community initiatives and youth morale (Nyarko et al., 2015). This type of communication typically promotes individuals or groups within a community to communicate openly and freely about their feelings, the system, and issues with others who can relate with them (Greenberg & Baron, 2008). Furthermore, this is the route via which the majority of social contact occurs inside communities and organizations (Nyarko et al., 2015). Individuals are more likely to improve their knowledge, communication abilities, and sociability skills through horizontal channels. This also contributes to the establishment of long-term interpersonal ties that can help members of a community become better indigenous peoples, which promotes community development and decreases disputes (Sostek, 2006). Diagonal communication refers to contact between community leaders and people who live in separate towns within the same community (Wilson, 1992). As a result, the hierarchical level has no effect on information flow. As a result, communication can occur at several levels diagonally. Using this kind of communication, an elder in the chief's palace may interact directly with a community member in another town under authority. This style of communication is primarily reliant on collaboration among participants (Cheney, 2011).

Theoretical Review

Dahrendorf's Conflict Theory

Conflict Theory, according to Dahrendorf, is focused on the study of social institutions such as the chieftaincy Institution, which is prone to change processes in which disagreement resulting to conflict contributes to the change (Ritzer, 2008). According to the idea, society has a conflict phase and a consensus phase that coexist and are prerequisites for each other; hence, society cannot have conflict unless there is some prior consensus. It is agreement that causes individuals to relate, resulting in conflict, and vice versa. So, when individuals do not interact, there is no prior integration to serve as a foundation for the emergence of chieftaincy dispute, and conflict may always be beneficial when it leads to consensus and integration of a region (Ritzer, 2008). This paper underlined that the need for power to wield authority over others in order to maintain social order is what precipitated chieftaincy strife since authority does not lie in persons but in positions. Those in positions of power wield influence over their subordinates due of the expectations of the subjects linked to the position, not the personality inhabiting the post, which causes the numerous gates to compete for the chieftaincy title. This is due to the fact that holding the title grants one the lawful right to manage the subject and impose punishments on those who do not comply (Ritzer, 2008). The capacity to obtain the lawful power to wield the chieftaincy title through a gate does not necessarily necessitate the use of force to dominate since the subjects acknowledge the dominance as proper and in order. The chieftaincy institution holds traditional power, the validity of which is supported by beliefs and the holiness or sacredness of ancient culture (Dzorgbo, 2013). According to Robbins and Judge (2012), once a certain gate receives the nod to hold a chieftaincy title, the gate has the lawful power and formal authority to govern and utilize resources on behalf of the subordinates since the subjects have accepted the position's authority. According to Ritzer (2008), Dahrendorf's Conflict Theory sees conflict as unavoidable because the gate occupying or whoever gate occupied the chieftaincy position seeks to maintain the status quo while the other feuding parties in subordinate positions seek change, making the legitimacy of authority of any occupant to the skin always precarious due to the threat of contending gates. There is no winner in this conflict because everyone loses, especially the relatives or family members of the dead, the tortured, and the victims whose property was destroyed. Surprisingly, the conflict has remained protracted, which has implications for Dahrendorf's Conflict Theory (Ritzer, 2008). According to Issifu and Asante (2015), chieftaincy conflicts focus on values and power

contestation or chieftaincy succession struggle, which falls within Dahrendorf's Conflict Theory. According to the thesis, the conflict is unpredictable, abrupt, stunning, continuous, and savage, with worsening economic and social lives and livelihood of the people (Issifu & Asante, 2015). As a result, it is advantageously situated in relation to the dispute in the Akpini Traditional Area (Kpando).

Methodology

To achieve the research's goal, qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, one-on-one interviews, observation, and others were used. According to Kusi (2012), qualitative research designs are study methodologies in social research that are based on the knowledge, views, perspectives, aims, and belief system of the research participants. The structure of every scientific effort is its design. It provides direction and organizes the research (Berg & Lune, 2012). A research design outlines the sort of investigations that was needed for the project. Research explains the structure and the immediate objective of the study and is always based on the research questions developed (Yin, 2017). As a result, a cross-sectional descriptive research design was used for this study. Descriptive research is used to gather information on the present state of a phenomenon and to characterize what existing in terms of variables or circumstances in a given situation (Bryman, 2012).

A stud y population is also described as a well-defined group of persons or things that have comparable features (Mack, 2005). A common, binding property or attribute is frequently shared by all persons or things within a given community. As a result, the Apkini traditional territory in Kpando served as the study's population. From these people in the study area, a target population was selected. Since the study focused on intergroup communication as a tool for chieftaincy conflict resolution: a study of the Akpini traditional area (Kpando), the target population for the study included: chiefs, sub-chiefs, traditional elders and opinion leaders in Kpando.

In this study, the approach of purposive sampling was applied. The deliberate selection of an informant based on their characteristics is known as purposive sampling (Palys, 2008). It is a non-probability sampling technique that does not necessitate any underlying hypotheses or a set number of informants. Purposive sampling was employed to choose the chiefs, sub-chiefs, traditional elders, and opinion leaders in Kpando who were needed to participate in the study because to their apparent awareness of the tensions surrounding the chieftaincy situation in Akpini. The sample size, therefore, was five (5) made up of a variety of chiefs and elders in the Akpini traditional area.

In gathering data, interviews were conducted. Interviews, according to Nardi (2014), are more rewarding than questionnaires or observations since they delve deeper and disclose all hidden and undiscovered facts that may be significant to a study. The study's interview schedule was utilized to gather information from the sampled chiefs, sub-chiefs, traditional elders, and opinion leaders in Kpando. Chiefs, sub-chiefs, traditional elders, and opinion leaders in Kpando were interviewed for thorough and collective information. Thematic analysis was further used in analysis of data gathered. This is sees as one of the most effective qualitative research methods.

Findings and Discussion

Response Rate

The specific objectives of the study were to: find out if intergroup communication was used as a tool for the Akpini chieftaincy conflict resolution; examine the effectiveness of the chieftaincy conflict resolution strategies used over the years Interviews were conducted with five (5) community members with affiliations to stools coupled with knowledge on chieftaincy

conflict resolution in the study area who were also privy to communication mechanisms used in resolving such conflicts. In research studies, anonymity and confidentiality of participants is very necessary hence, each interviewee was given a code in place of their real names. The codes used were: P1 (Chief of Adevu stool), P2 (Linguist to the chief of the Kendra stool), P3 (Senior divisional chief), P4 (Chief's Regent) and P5 (Chief of Deveme).

RQ1: Was intergroup communication used as a tool for the Akpini chieftaincy conflict resolution?

Communication and Conflict Resolution

The concept of communication encompasses all forms of interactions between parties and in the case of conflict resolution, this tool is important to every step thus, in terms of progress or even a standstill. Regardless of the type of channel used, every facet of conflict resolution requires communication and this was pointed out by the study's participants. According to P1**:**

> "Communication is most essential. Because when you do not communicate and do not know your history, you cannot progress. It is therefore important to communicate to discover the truth in any given situation. In conflict resolution, communication is key between parties and as a group interacting with each other to ascertain the root cause of conflicts cannot be overstated. Whether through dialogues among group representatives, or written communication, the first step to resolving any conflict is communication".

Furthermore, P4 believed that:

> "Communication is very important and the first step to resolving conflicts. The absence of communication in conflict resolution makes the process almost impossible".

The results indicate that members of the Akpini traditional area believe firmly in using communication to resolve problems. Also, from the results it can be implied that, they prefer to communicate among themselves and resolve issues rather than going to the court of law for matters to be resolved. The bottom-line however, is that, communication is important in conflict resolution in the study area and from this, intergroup communication may manifest. According to literature, some studies have found that communication plays an important role in conflict resolution and management (Putnam 2006; Aula & Siira 2007). Hence, Ariani and Chashmi (2011) claim that, the quality of communication within a group enhances community participation with current issues, leads to reduced uncertainty and interference among them, and thus minimizes conflict.

Intergroup Communication Limitations

In many cases of conflict resolution, deliberations among group members have often led to peaceful resolutions therefore, intergroup communication as opposed to individual communication has been considered a strong tool in conflict resolution. In this study, the results gathered were inconclusive as sections of the participants thought that, intergroup communication has been used as a tool for conflict resolution whereas, others stated otherwise. For instance**,** according to P1, P4 and P5,**:**

> "Parties to the conflict have not been willing to sit to deliberate from the onset which has made intergroup communication quite difficult. Some groups have been reluctant in communicating their grievances hence making intergroup communication as a tool for conflict resolution almost inexistent".
>
> "When there is a conflict between families within the clan and the issue is brought before us at the palace, parties are summoned and issues are resolved by communicating differences and finding common grounds".

> "Yes, parties were called to resolve the conflict but there has not been an independent member of the various committees appointed to facilitate communication. Facilitators in one way or the other took sides which made the process difficult to complete".

From the results it can be implied that clans or stools in the Akpini traditional area use intergroup communication sparingly therefore, it cannot be considered as the main tool used for conflict resolution in the traditional area as yet. Perhaps, some clans have used it and did not arrive at expected results hence, its usage has not been effective enough to be considered for all conflict resolution issues in Kpando. Also, it can be implied that choosing leaders to handle intergroup communication meetings has been an issue and this is a contributing factor to failed resolutions. However, from the findings it can be implied that intergroup communications have been used to resolve some conflicts in the traditional area before hence, when implemented well; it can become the main tool for conflict resolution in the traditional area. According to the literature, the function of the IGC in dispute resolution is critical in many circles, including conventional ones (Gallois et al., 2018).

Effectiveness of Intergroup Communication

Intergroup communication can be effective when parties at loggerheads agree to meet each other and iron out their differences in a bid to find a common ground that bridges peace. According to literature, this type of communication typically encourages individuals or groups within a community to communicate openly and freely about their feelings, the system, and issues with others who can relate to them (Greenberg & Baron, 2008). This notion was highlighted by the study's participants as well. P1 for instance opined that:

> "In my opinion, parties involved in the conflict were summoned to the palace and questioned individually then later called to sit together and settle their differences. Parties must be willing to meet with each other and talk out their differences in sincerity, then intergroup communication will be an effective form of conflict resolution".

This was corroborated by P2 who stated:

> "For the Akpini chieftaincy conflict to be resolved using intergroup communication, parties to the conflict need to agree to communicate. All parties after agreeing would sit and present their arguments and grievances".

Furthermore, P4 and P5 were of the view that:

> *"*The families involved in the conflict must first be willing to communicate with each other and let go of all forms of litigation and resolve to solve matters amicably".
>
> "Intergroup communication can be used if the main parties a willing to understand each other and share their views on matters arising. Parties must also be honest and sincere in their communication without twisting the truth".

The results indicate that intergroup communication only brings positive results when used in conflict resolution because parties are made to understand each other. All grievances are listened to before a consensus is reached. It can be implied that making parties talk things over with each other is a major process in getting the best out of intergroup communication meetings. This further implies that; intergroup communication can be used to solve conflict issues in the Akpini traditional area if implemented well. According to the literature, the lack of intergroup communication can be attributed to the protracted nature of such conflicts (Gangi & Soliz, 2016).

RQ2: What is the Effectiveness of the Chieftaincy Resolution Strategies Used Over the Years?

Traditional Mediation in Conflict Resolution

There are many ways to resolve conflicts, especially in traditional settings where belief mechanisms vary considerably. However, in the Akpini traditional area, conflict resolution has been handled by mediation committees and this has brought some success over the years. P1 believes that:

> "Apart from intergroup communication, the use of fetish and oracles were adopted but this cannot be physically and scientifically proven although the people believe in them. Mediation and litigation have been used in the past where parties were summoned by the Volta regional house of chiefs and the case was tried, some policies and procedures were agreed on as reference for future generations. An example is the Kwaku Ayim committee set up by the Volta Regional House of Chiefs".

Furthermore, P2, P3 and P5 added that:

> "In the past, the Akpini conflict was directed to the Volta regional house of chiefs where committees were set for mediation. One such committee is the Kwaku Ayim committee a four-member committee set up to resolve the decades-old conflict. Arbitration and litigation have also been used previously".
>
> "In the past, the Akpini Elite Mediation Committee chaired by Dr. Ernest Aculey Ansah was set up by members of the Akpini Elite Group to help resolve conflicts in the area. The case was later taken up by the Member of Parliament of the Kpando Constituency and brought before the Volta Regional House of Chiefs, where a committee was set up (Togbe Ayim Committee) to investigate and mediate happenings and give their report. Another party also resorted to litigation which is still ongoing as we speak".
>
> "Various indigenes made attempts at resolving the conflicts by forming committees. Others resulted in mediation and petitioning the Volta regional House of Chiefs. But the main parties to the conflict resorted to litigation".

The results conclusively declare that conflicts in the past have been handled with established mediation committees in the Volta Region. Notable among them is the Kwaku Ayim committee set up by the Volta Regional House of Chiefs. In some cases, traditional or spiritual ways have been used to settle conflicts but this often results in deaths and incurable sicknesses for parties who lied in the accounts. According to Ahiave (2013), to settle chieftaincy problems, opposing parties must agree to commit themselves to supernatural arbitration through oracles, sworn statements, and an oath in the traditional territory. The results further indicate that the majority of conflict issues in the Akpini traditional area have been sent to one mediation council or the other in the hope of resolutions. However, results from the study indicate, most of these conflicts were not resolved adequately by these committees and as such the matters linger on or are sent to the law courts for settlements. This indicates that the conflict resolutions instigated by the aforementioned committees have not been very effective in resolving conflicts in the Akpini traditional area. According to literature, chieftaincy conflicts have been rife in Ghana with some dragging for years, causing unrest and instability in the affected regions and communities (Baaberihin, 2020). In addition, the Akpini traditional area experienced one of the longest-standing chieftaincy issues in Ghana as this lasted for forty years before, a chief was installed (Gooddays, 2022).

The Effectiveness of the Committees has not been Absolute

In conflict resolutions; absolution must be achieved else conflicts will still ensue. Therefore, it is incumbent on conflict mediation committees to ensure that, all parties involved in conflicts

are satisfied. However, this does not seem to be the case with the committees charged with conflict resolution in the Akpini traditional area. According to P1**:**

> "These strategies previously adopted to an extent were effective but not entirely. It was a 50/50 resolution. They had some shortcomings. Because some factions to the dispute failed to stick to their part of the agreement hence reviving the conflicts".

P2, P3 and P5 also stated that:

> "These methods have made a considerable impact on the attempts to resolve the conflict in the area. Though not one hundred percent. It is through the report and decision of the Kwaku Ayim committee that the current Togbe Dagadu the paramount chief of Kpando has been enstooled".
>
> "I would say the mediation exercise was not effective. I would say it was ineffective because an outsider cannot come and make decisions concerning the stool without considering and respecting the opinion of the three divisional chiefs. A group wrote a protest against the report of the committee".
>
> "The Togbe Ayim Committee recommendations though useful and widely accepted has not been without resistance. This is because some factions still contest the report. But this report has been accepted by majority and so is what has been used leading to the enstoolment of Togbe Dagadu IX".

The results give the impression that, generally, the conflict resolution activities in the Akpini traditional area have been unsatisfactory as some parties refuse to accept verdicts. In conflict resolution, even though this will be regarded as progress; in the long run; these resolutions have failed because all parties involved in conflicts have to agree and in acceptance of verdicts. Perhaps, this failure may be laid on the doorstep of communication breakdown, especially when intergroup communication is absent. Therefore, from the results, conflict resolution practices in the Akpini traditional area can be rated as unsatisfactory since not all parties achieve absolution. Once, there are sections in disagreement with the resolution results, there will be dissatisfaction hence, the conflict resolution strategies may be deemed ineffective. It can be finally implied that the current or ongoing conflict in the Akpini traditional area has not been resolved because the resolution strategies are not effective and thus, will not satisfy all parties involved in the conflict.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusions

The main objective of the study focused on investigating intergroup communication as a tool for chieftaincy conflict resolution: a study of the Akpini traditional area (Kpando). From the findings, it can be concluded that clans or stools in the Akpini traditional area use intergroup communication sparingly therefore, it cannot be considered as the main tool used for conflict resolution in the traditional area as yet. Perhaps, some clans have used it and did not arrive at expected results hence, its usage has not been effective enough to be considered for all conflict resolution issues in Kpando. Also, it can be concluded that choosing leaders to handle intergroup communication meetings has been an issue and this is a contributing factor to failed resolutions. However, it was concluded that intergroup communication only brings positive results when used in conflict resolution because parties are made to understand each other.

It can be also concluded that conflicts in the past have been handled with established mediation committees in the Volta Region. Notable among them is the Kwaku Ayim committee set up by the Volta Regional House of Chiefs. However, from the results gathered, it can be concluded that, most of these conflicts were not resolved adequately by these committees and as such the matters linger on or are sent to the law courts for settlements. This indicates that

the conflict resolutions instigated by the aforementioned committees have not been very effective in resolving conflicts in the Akpini traditional area. From the results, conflict resolution practices in the Akpini traditional area can be rated as unsatisfactory since not all parties achieve absolution.

It can be further concluded that effective use of communication which in this case refers to intergroup communication can be used to resolve conflicts in the Akpini traditional area effectively. From the findings, it can be concluded that previous conflict resolutions have failed because communication was not effectively used and thus, some parties have been left hard done by. Based on the results, it can be concluded that intergroup communication as an effective use of communication is what is needed for conflict resolution in the Akpini traditional area. Therefore, intergroup communication is the way to go in terms of conflict resolution but dishonesty and untruthfulness among some parties involved in conflicts may render the process ineffective. However, from the results, there is also a firm belief that, intergroup communication can do the job as long as all parties are in agreement in terms of communicating with each other and this may trump all barriers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations have been made concerning chieftaincy conflict resolutions in Ghana.

The study revealed that intergroup communication may fail to resolve conflicts because of a lack of integrity, honesty and truthfulness on the part of people who seek to turn verdicts in their favour. It is however, recommended that, to combat such issues, the conflict resolution committees can do their background checks on all parties involved and where applicable call in surprise witnesses to corroborate or deny accounts given by parties involved in the conflicts. To further avoid issues of lies and deceit during conflict resolutions; conflicting parties can be made to swear under oath as done in the courtrooms so that, if anyone is found guilty of giving a false account, face prosecution or a hefty fine. This might help guard against such false accounts so that, intergroup communication may become effective in conflict resolution.

It is recommended that communication experts be used during conflict resolution to implement intergroup communication and make the process effective. Such experts know how to get all parties involved and thus make communication effective.

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