

# Sustaining Life After Conflict: Women Self-Empowerment Strategies in Northern Ghana

Adam Andani Mohammed (Corresponding Author)

Sociology and Social Work Department, Faculty of Social Science, University for  
Development Studies, Nyankpala Ghana

Abdallah Mpawenimana Saidi

Institute of Postgraduate studies and Research  
Zanzibar University

Md. Sayed Uddin

Sociology and Social Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities, Universiti  
Malaysia Sabah, Jalan UMS, 88400, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

Yussif Abdallah

Head of the Main Registry, University for Development Studies, Tamale Ghana

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## Abstract

This study focused on the effects of conflict on the petty trade, and social organization of women as most of them depend on retail trade for their livelihood. The paper explores the coping strategies of women after conflict and the relocation of business owners and wholesalers to other areas. To achieve the aim of this study, a qualitative method and a case study approach were used to ensure a comprehensive analysis of data. The study revealed a number of initiatives employed by the women to survive the vagaries of conflict during the aftermath. The institutions of traditional leadership are found to be the center of cultural identity which plays significant part in the social and economic advancement of the people. It is found that the women devised ways to survive and to cope with the situation by initiating mechanisms that sustained them and their families, particularly in caring for their children.

The research may strengthen other women in similar situation not to wait for handouts from outside but to explore within themselves for empowerment to argument any support, in case, it is offered. This research may offer the authorities and development agencies empirical information to support women's efforts in making their socioeconomic contribution for the betterment of society. Research on coping strategy of women after conflict is not new but the researchers opined that these are not enough to demonstrate their resilience. The originality of the study is based on the fact that the women did not explore the known strategies that are normally adopted but resorted to unique ways of supporting themselves to alleviate their suffering. One of those unique initiatives to cope including skill training offered by some of the women to colleagues voluntarily just to empower them as they struggle with their traumatic past.

**Keyword:** conflict, tension, vulnerability, displacement, intimidation, combatant

## 1. Introduction

Conflict may be viewed as clash or argument among people in the mainstream society due to differences in agendas, ambitions or ideologies. As such, the challenges most countries faced today is how to fully resolve conflict since its inevitability is eminent like death. For conflict evolves in phases and it is inevitable in the process of social interaction even in advance countries conflict occur and it is found to be embedded with leadership-related concerns (Yaro, Kipo-Sunyehzi, & Danjoe, 2023; Yakohene, 2018). The members of most societies in Africa including Ghana have lived together peacefully and have their own ways of resolving conflict through tribal chiefs in the event of one (Bukari, 2013; Prah, & Yeboah, 2011; Yaro & Ngmenkpieo, 2020; Issifu & Bukari, 2022). The chiefs who constitute the center of cultural identity of people in the traditional society has to do with the organized nature of system of these institutions and the rules governing their operations (Siiba et al., 2018; Tona, 2012; Salifu, 2018). The traditional leaders in Ghana claim legitimacy of the people as they are considered the embodiment of history, culture, laws and values of their people. Besides, traditional leaders in most societies act as political figures in their traditional areas. For instance, chiefs or traditional leaders serve as the mouthpiece of the people thus putting local governance at the doorsteps of their subjects (Bukari, 2013; Yakubu, 2017; Issifu, 2015; Yaro & Ngmenkpieo, 2020; Issifu & Bukari, 2022).

The traditional leadership and chieftaincy remained the embodiment of social life of the people which is considered as the oldest political system in most African countries, Ghana not exception. The monarchs who rule in some parts of Europe and Asian countries is comparable to those practiced in most parts of Ghana in particular. Traditional leaders command respect among their subject, and have access to both human and material resources including lands, livestock, water bodies and economic trees (Bukari, 2013; Tona, 2012; Issifu, 2015; Pechenkina & Thomas, 2022). Most traditional leaders spearhead developmental project through their ability to mobilize and influence the people to participate in local governance through articulation of public morality on issues that borders on socioeconomic wellbeing of the people. The Houses of Chiefs system in the country has contributed to rural local governance. As a result, both the royal and the commoners have a strong desire to

become a chief even at all cost, especially both the urban elite and the rural people, which sometimes leads to conflict (Noagah, 2013; Yakubu, 2017; Kendie, & Tuffour, 2014; Issifu, 2015). However, the recent surge of conflicts changed the meaning of the chieftaincy institution and negatively affect the traditions and customs that galvanize the citizenry to foster unity, harmony and peaceful coexistence for development to take place. For instance, studies revealed chieftaincy conflict in parts of Ghana to include that of Sekondi, Cape Coast, Dagbon, Bawku, Anlo and Ga Mantse succession dispute (Yaro et al., 2023; Prah & Yeboah, 2011; Kendie & Tuffour, 2014; Issifu, 2015). The traditional leadership and political power overlaps each other through interrelated competition for social and economic activities opening the floodgates for conflict considering the complex nature of some traditional structure in the country. Conflict is seen as pursuit and existence of incongruent goals by varied groups in a particular society. The appearance of such differences is usually about common interest and desire shared by the contending parties. The conflicting situation is normally between two or more successors including their sympathizers where they perceived each other as taking actions that adversely affects individual's interest. In such situation, those involved resort to fierce armed struggle in order to attain their incompatible interest and objectives (Noagah, 2013; Yakubu, 2017; Yakohene, 2018).

In Ghana, studies have been conducted on chieftaincy succession disputes and conflicts between indigenous people and recent settlers as well as among members of some clans in the northern part of Ghana. For instance, studies on the causes and effects of conflict was done and called stakeholders for intervention to resolve conflicts and suffering of the people particularly women (Witter 2015; Issifu & Bukari 2022; Yakubu, 2017; Yakohene, 2018). These studies indicate efforts of various governments to limit the role and power of chiefs which is still held with high esteem and that colonial government is responsible for the conflicts in the country (Yaro et al., 2023; Prah, & Yeboah, 2011). The role and relationship between the government and these social institutions in the country were also investigated in relation to their constitutional impacts. Studies revealed that chieftaincy plays very crucial political and administrative roles as the mouthpiece of the people in their local traditional areas (Prah, & Yeboah, 2011; Tonah, 2012; Eduful et al., 2020; Yakubu, 2017). All of these have direct or indirect effects on the contribution of women which calls for coping initiatives to counteract the negative impacts of the conflict on their lives. As such, they came up with coping initiatives to avert the negative repercussion of the conflict since women are often the target of attack and sexual abuse usually employed by combatants to destabilize families and communities.

## 2. Methodology

The study adopted qualitative method and interview protocol were used to extract information from the respondents. Data and information for this paper was initially collected as part of a study into the familial and economic impacts of chieftaincy conflict on women in a suburb of Tamale in Ghana. The unit of analysis of this study was married women engaged in rice and groundnut processing as well as petty trading in the area. Out of 60 women only 20 were suitable for this research. Apart from data from secondary sources like journal articles, books and internet material, the author conducted interview with respondents and key

informants mainly chiefs, educators and social workers in Tamale.

Relevant phrases and sentences were extracted from the responds on the interview protocol to generate themes. The results were gathered, coded, generated into themes and descriptive forms which revealed the nature of strategies the women adopted to cope with life after the conflict.

**Data Quality** The following strategies were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the information gathered from the field. Firstly, the interview protocol was evaluated and modified after the review by experts in qualitative research methodology from the International Islamic University Malaysia. Secondly, the interview protocol was translated from English Language to the local language of the respondents to ensure that they understood the questions. Thirdly, the researchers pretested the interview protocol (feedback not included in the final work) before the actual data collection started. Lastly, researchers recorded the interviews verbatim and later transcribed to reflect what the respondents actually shared.

### 3. Results

These inter and intra chieftaincy conflicts have been going on since time immemorial in some part of Ghana which involves clans loyal to those kingdoms or traditional areas. The clans and lineages might have their own perspective in relation to the cause of the conflict, but the people are in dire need of social and economic developments considering the years of conflict and destabilization. Most of the women expressed concern about the disruptive and the unanticipated negative repercussion of conflict on families and the economic disorganization of communities. Such circumstances usually lead to frustration which necessitate initiatives and strategies to cope with these upsetting situations after the conflict. The mediation and reconciliation efforts by stakeholders are engaged to normalize the situation to restore the livelihood avenues of the people in the community. However, this approach alone is inadequate in bringing sustainable socio-economic developments to the women. Community and people friendly initiatives are needed to put their social and economic activities back on track. Such initiatives and strategies should target the local economy as most of the women are engaged in petty trading and therefore revitalization of these business can cushion them to withstand negative effects particularly on children who are always cared for by the mothers after conflict. The initiative should include programmes that ignite the spirit of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence to improve the lives of the women in the area. The themes on initiatives and coping strategies that emerged from the information gathered from the field is discussed in this section. The themes of women's coping strategies after the conflict include social initiatives, rebuilding of family values, economic initiatives among others.

**Economic Survival Strategy** It is trite knowledge that play crucial role in peace movement that have ended conflicts but as indicated by most respondents their efforts to bring an end to conflict are usually behind the scenes. For that matter women suggested to be more involved in conflict prevention, resolution and management efforts at all levels. Their needs and interests are not incorporated when they are not active participants so interventions are usually not appropriate or enduring as they should have been. Women normally or naturally

exhibit great interest in peace processes because the impacts of conflict weigh more heavily on their lives. Despite the difficulties these women face in conflicting situation, their role in peacemaking and family responsibilities cannot be ignored. However, they are inadequately represented in negotiating the peace process despite their remarkable contributions to conflict resolution and family upkeep. Therefore, the women suggested the need to be empowered economically, be adequately represented to participate in family decision making so as to be efficient and effective in coping with life.

The economy of Ghana highly depends on agriculture. The traditional staple crops of the region are corn, wheat, millet as well as commercial crops like groundnut and rice. This area provides the women with the needed raw materials for their economic activities as rice and groundnut processors as well as petty trading. Through the economic activities women are able to earn income and urge one another to reinvest the profit generated from the sales of their produce. The idea of reinvesting is to keep them in business all the time and to provide job opportunities for those who are directly or indirectly involved in the agricultural sector. The women have also thought of pulling the resources of various groups and associations together for diversification of income activities by venturing into the cultivation of vegetables. Azima indicated that:

*To increase production and supply of the raw material is for the government to give subsidies to local farmer, shift or provide credit facilities to us I do not need much amount to start to do business, yes many of most of us are in petty trade so we only need small amount if not because of this problem fights conflict I mean I was okay my small business was fine here*

The women identified the potential areas of investment such as Shea-butter and groundnut oil extraction, maize processing to be used in the house, processing of *dawadawa*, weaving traditional cloths, dress-making and pots-making were integrated course of action to achieve economic empowerment. They form associations in which they contribute money monthly, educate members about the effects of conflict and the need to coexist peacefully just to win the confidence of the potential investors who want to support them in the area. As a first step and requirement, the women identified the potential investors, financial institutions and donors. They invited the rural banks (Bonzali Rural Bank) interested in community empowerment to join their mission of economic reconstruction through the Community Based Associations CBA they formed. The important initiative for their development was the engagement with the Bonzali Bank in the local level associations. Gaaziya indicates that:

*everything has including business gone bad...it was normal in this community for an individual to get economic assistance from his extended family like paternal and maternal uncles, aunts or cousins. Things have change, so we have to come together, we have to mobilize...contribute money and help ourselves (bori-may noo kumya) the cock for self-help program has crown. Two heads are better than one, in a group we can do better.*

As indicated by respondents, the conflict has impacted negatively on the socioeconomic lives of the women in the area as it discouraged wholesaler to supply goods to their retail outlet

crippling the petty trading thus affect economic enhancement. So, the women invite women welfare NGOs and financial institutions like Bonzali rural bank into the community to partner with the associations and groups they have established for this purpose. The partnership steered the ongoing process and assist in getting conflict resolution in addition to building the capacities of the women in the area by bringing empowerment and its benefits as a deterrent against the resurgence of conflict. As a result, women exhort one another to proper behaviour and impress on one another the values like trustworthiness, honest behavior and attitude as well as the need to compromise certain entrenched positions. The aim is to promote harmony in the community to demonstrate their readiness to the NGOs, financial institutions and potential investors to have confidence in partnering with them.

The women also deliberate during their weekly associations meetings about the importance of girlchild education considering the rate of dropout after the conflict. The dissolution of their discussions was usually channeled through the NGOs that deal with their Community Based Association. They suggested that the government's policy on women's education should be enforced and put in place women-friendly projects designed to raise awareness about the importance of girlchild education especially during the aftermath of conflict. The women believed these efforts will encourage female education in conflict devastated areas in the country and beyond. They remarked about the already existing bias in favor of boychild in the area despite the efforts made towards equal opportunities in education. It is a common knowledge that boys are always preferred to girls when it comes to who should enroll in school even without conflict. Even where girls are enrolled under normal situations, they dropout without getting elementary level education and those who pass this level are not able to get to the junior high school both of which are classified as basic education in the country. The data indicated that the rate of education for women is low due to lack of enthusiasm on the part of most parents which raised much concern for the women especially after the conflict. As indicated by the respondents, women are required to be pious, domestic and submissive of which local parents believed that none of these ideals would be achieved through girlchild education. So, the locals prefer education of boys to girls as they have the fear that would cease to fulfill their traditional roles in the family. Thus, in educating them means efforts towards the collapse of the traditional social institutions in the area. This traditional belief has already led to a serious dropout among girls at the basic levels of education that is a great concern which the women discussed the need to remedy the situation. Therefore, educational campaigns were intensified by the women to sensitize colleagues the dangers of conflict, its negative repercussions and the urgent need to live harmoniously together while dialoguing to iron out their differences. They reminded one another during their CBA meetings that they do not have to look far to realize the disastrous impacts conflict can have on the livelihood of women in the country at large. There is already a systemic marginalization of women in society and further erosion of their families and homes because of the ongoing conflict would only worsen their situation. Therefore, investing to build the capacity of women through education will enhance the socioeconomic wellbeing of women and children. For instance, assisting them build solid economic lives will in turn enhance their healthcare needs which help to create strong civil society as advocated by the women.

The northern region of Ghana is endowed with both natural and human resources. The majority of the people in the area, especially women, are engaged in spinning cotton which is used in weaving traditional clothes. The informants revealed that another area in which the area has its niche is that the people are well adept at knitting and weaving of cane baskets as well as leather bags and felt that if supported can lead to economic independence of the women in the long run. The women in the study area have tasked their colleagues who have the skills in knitting to train those who are interested so as to empower them. As such the women mobilized resources from their financial contributions in various women Community Based Associations to revamp the local indigenous crafts as well as explores for new avenues and pointing at the clay deposit in some parts of the area. They are relying heavily on their welfare fund to motivate colleagues who volunteer to train interested members of these groups. This development initiative is to empower women to assert control over the economic and social aspects of their lives. This may open new economic investment opportunities to the people in the area particularly women since the commodities and resources remained unexplored.

**Social Integration** In the quest for amicable and feasible solution to strained relationships, the women designed their initiatives to enhance relationships on a long-term basis. The respondents indicated that there is a build-up of mistrust, social isolation and discrimination in the area due to strained relationships that emerged after the conflict. As indicated, long term initiatives like revamping the indigenous industries to increase the opportunities for effective development. With this, the women involved will familiarize with one another to develop trust and rapport an effort towards restoring normalcy among themselves. Furthermore, the development of trust and rapport will bring back the cherish traditional interpersonal relationship during marriage ceremonies, funerals and naming ceremonies which vanished after the conflict. Besides, trusting personal relationships is essential for coordination of both economic and social activities a solution to the social isolation witnessed after the conflict. The victims of strained relationships like the divorcees, single parents and their children experience eventually affect the social network as manifested in the rate of divorce or single parenting after the conflict. The women develop some sort of networking among members of this community-based associations in order to heal the social strains which emerged after the conflict.

On the individual level, the women developed a set of rather versatile psychological defense mechanisms like denial, dissociation, and suppression that can be relied upon in case of threatening developments. The informants indicated that these defense mechanisms were used to facilitate adjustment and coping. In the case of certain personal problems, it is more to live with them than to resolve them. This is particularly true in the case of adjusting to typical problems such as divorce due to a polarized conflict like the one in the area. To cope with challenging situation demands, change of attitude and behavior resulting in uncomfortable effects such as guilt feeling, anxiety or shame, the relief forming part of required adaptation. They further responded by identifying other popular responses in traumatic situation as based on their experiences. Those who are able to adapt to the environment and circumstance are able to subdue the trauma and are able to survive or cope

with any unforeseen circumstances. As part of this, they urged one another the application of defense mechanism like denial in situations of divorce, single parenthood, discrimination, mistrust and social isolation – when a spouse, friend or business partner violates fundamental traditional ethics of relationships — and to create awareness of the trauma as well as enhance well-being and survival. The defense mechanism developed is useful because the research reveals that persons who are divorced have the tendency to develop depression or anxiety leading to poor self-esteem and likely to develop psychological distress compared to those who are married.

It cannot be denied that women become the family breadwinners during and aftermath of conflicts which increases females heading households. The demographic changes due to the conflict is responsible for this turn of responsibility thus making women more vulnerable as well as impoverish in Ghana. For instance, it is believed that public sector assistance is not sustainable enough to sustain the new emerging forms of social and economic activities. One of the common initiatives generated by the women was the formation of community-based organizations (CBOs) to supplement the inadequate external support through mobilization as a development strategy aimed at self-reliance. This organization is supposed to be the foundation on which all social and economic development initiatives generated will be built upon. Abiriwa told the researcher the aim for these initiatives was:

*the idea of us coming together, developing activities are not for only economic reasons like to contribute and help one another; we want to bridge the communication gap created by the conflict we can coexist as we use to, have truce avoid isolation...the bad thinking we no longer mix well in social gathering like wedding; funerals...even if you mix at all some will not eat from there can we ever trust one another? yes we can if we communicate well*

An organization is made up of women who possess a sense of identity so that the collective interest registers emotionally in the consciousness of members as part of their individual interest; thus, realization of the collective objective gives them direct fulfillment. Their needs are both material and emotional, as such they urge one another to cultivate a sense of belonging, respect and love in the community, a sense of sharing life with others and working for common social commitments based on their own resources in a way that will not endanger future prospects. They mobilized for purposeful social development and for resistance against external forces that divide them essentially on dominant dependent relations; thus, depending on others for their livelihood. The women took it upon themselves to create the awareness of their creative assets, mental resources, solution of life challenge to make sustainable efforts in accomplishing them.

Another initiative is to provide greater support for single parent families as the number of single parent increases as a result of irreversible economic and cultural patterns due to the conflict. The analysis of social pattern leads to proactive and innovative way of helping single parents since they are here to stay and withholding assistance from them would only hurt them and their children. As such, the women were able to identify those who were in dire need and provided this support through their welfare fund instituted by women groups and

associations in the community. It is a fact that single parents and their children face problems which needs capacity building of the women and to create community awareness of the plights of children and their mothers. This programme leads the community efforts to promote responsible single parenthood and to provide services that encourage stable family life. This coping strategies are meant to restore hope for single mothers whose situations have been worsen due to neglect, divorce or separation as a result of the conflict in the area.

**Activation of Family Values** The research revealed deeper alteration in traditional family values on socioeconomic lives of the traditional area are divided. The women recognized that it is important and appropriate to appreciate the customs and traditions transmitted from past generation instead of personal interests in the community. To this far, they encouraged one another and commend for the rebuilding of traditional family values. The people, especially the leaders were reminded to reaffirm enduring spirit of the citizens and carry forward that precious gift and noble idea of chieftaincy, passed on from generation to generation from the ancestors. For everywhere in the region, there is work to be done. The state of the economic and social life in the area calls for bold and swift action. It is high time leaders are reminded to act not only to abide by traditions and customs, but to lay a new foundation for growth in social and economic life for the benefit of the people especially women. The research clearly revealed that the family in Ghana is the primary socialization agent within which a healthy child is bred. The need for rebuilding the important traditional and cultural values of the family after the conflict is laudable. To enhance family values, the women doubled their efforts towards strengthening, improving and rejuvenating of the family in the country. As a first step toward achieving this goal, the women tried to correct the negative attitude noted among the people which reflect in their traditional family lives.

#### 4. Discussion

The conflict and changes of gender roles due to the violence affect the mental stability and emotional survival of the people. Women are affected in varied ways and expected as their duty to care for the husband and children as well as the elderly members of the family. In support of this, studies indicated that the traditional gender roles for women and girls previously meant for male relatives from the traditional environments after the conflicts put unnecessary stress on them (KC, Van Der Haar, & Hilhorst, 2017; Yaro et al., 2023 Issifu, 2015). In another development, it is revealed that the household responsibilities of women turned complex after the conflict as they become responsible for healthcare needs of the sick members the aged and injured family members (Kendie, & Tuffour, 2014; Issifu, 2015; Bukari, 2013). Most of the women resort to providing childcare and extra home tuition or home schooling which put stress on the meagre resources at their disposals. The single parents are mostly emotionally derailed as a result of lack of anybody to help shoulder the responsibility of the bringing up the children as well as due to lack of break period in caring for the children and the elderly after conflict. As such attending to the emotional needs of women after divorce and during single parenthood after conflict is excruciating. The traditional worth of women in the study area is measured against the responsibilities they are able to cope with and thus identify them as mothers or a wife as expected by society. A study done by Tripp (2015) suggest that human nature contains a tendency towards irrational

behaviour which needs to be controlled before it deviates from the norms in order to maintain stability and social harmony. As such, important positions and social roles are not adequately performed which can interfere with family function economically, emotionally and socially (Noagah, 2013; Thulstrup, & Henry, 2015; Ushe, 2015) thus there are unending housework, maintenance and repairs that women have to do alone. Such economic hardship has dire consequences for parents and children because parents, especially women become depressed, irritable, hostile and punitive as such the children suffer distress because parents are less nurturing, supportive, responsive and consistent in disciplining.

Combatants in conflict are not much concern with the accuracy or inaccuracy of the perception held against one another about a particular situation resulting in violence. The perception held by two or more persons arises when an individual is seen to be engaged in activities that negatively affect others or individuals intend to pursue certain actions that has potential adverse effects on the interest of others. More recent studies indicated that conflict is inevitable in socioeconomic life process for people from same or different tribes as they engaged in struggle against one another in most African countries for survival (Hunt, 2018; Sandbrook, 2018). The contending fashions resort to the usage of force or arms in pursuance of their incompatible interest and goals. The interest or goals are sometimes informed by misconception about the situations and negative perceptions about the contending matter is of great importance to groups or individuals interest and desire. Every human will resist any attempt by others to hinder or prevent him or her from achieving the basic necessities of life as such any attempt by any group or individual in this direction will result in conflict. Scholars opined that the failure to meet the basic necessities of life or group interest may lead to conflict where there is vigorous pursuit of goals that are incompatible with different groups (Chinwokwu, 2013; Faleti, 2006; Asante, 2011). This demonstrates the dynamism in conflict or violence which means that conflict can take any shape as it is not static but can change due to the understanding of how and when to employ certain strategies or methods to cope with it. As such, the women adopted activities, efforts and interventions to alleviate their sufferings due to breakdown of social structure caused by conflict. Studies revealed the phases of conflict to include initial conflicting indicators, resistance to conflict, explosion of conflict and the deadliest levels of violence which affect the vulnerable in society (Uzueghunam 2010; Issifu, 2015) Chinwokwu, 2013; Asante, 2011). As such the women made much efforts to overcome the sociocultural and economic challenges after conflict. This strategy aimed at engaging multiple agencies and organizations for interaction towards solving the emerged socioeconomic problems to create enabling conditions conducive for development for women in a sustainable manner in the area. Such strategies were actions aimed at strengthening and creating solid social and economic progress in order to free women from hardships and to avoid conflicting situations in the future.

The research shows that the conflicts impede developments such as provision of education and recreational facilities in Ghana, particularly the Northern Region due to women's low-income levels which deny the children access to quality education. They also indicate that health facilities were negatively affected as in many cases workers refuse posting to the Northern Region and those already there run due to the insecure nature of the place (Andani,

2015; Issifu, 2015). In corroborate, studies indicate that healthcare delivery systems and health facilities were destroyed resulting in healthcare providers fleeing the area or get killed. Besides, both local and international NGOs were unable to get aids or assistance to the affected areas to support the population within the conflict zone (Witter et al., 2015; Adaku et al., 2016; Jones 2015). It is further opined that in such situations women are unable to access their reproductive healthcare needs, health facilities and others are not there or when available, the needs of men and combatants are the priority at the expense of the needs of women and children (Boerma et al., 2018; Issifu, 2015; Asante, 2011). It is revealed that when families face difficulty in making a living after conflict, women and girls are force to venture into the traditional male dominated arena like unsafe and ill paid jobs or joining the combatants or forced into early marriage or prostitution just to survive (Taras, & Ganguly, 2015; Tripp 2015). Such situations usually lead to challenging health issues especially when the women become pregnant at a younger age for the bodies to cope with which thus results in drop out of school. Again, the provision of adequate utilities such as water, electricity and other development projects was inadequate in most parts of the area because funds meant for development were channeled into conflict management and peace keeping in the area at the expense of development. The women in those areas suffer as they have to go far distance before they could get water putting their life in danger.

As revealed by the respondents, women were challenged in terms of social, economic and emotional support as well as experience of great deal of loneliness and isolation in relation to their spouse and relatives. As environment that is opened to social integration devoid of threat is essential to promoting and enhancing the self-esteem that reaffirm the traditional identity of women during conflict situations which initiate circumstances to cope with. Abdullahi, (2015) religious and ethnic conflict disproportionately disadvantaged women as they are exposed to several unfavorable conditions like physical and emotional abuse coupled with lack of access to economic resources carry out their household responsibilities, thus by implication they are excluded from the mainstream which leads to relative poverty. Studies suggest that the first two years following family disintegration is faced with serious challenges particularly women and their children experience emotional problems and profound challenges in adjusting to the new responsibilities (Muscat, 2015; Agbese, 2017; Warren, & Troy, 2015). This is one in which women can survive.

The problem of conflict has severe and negative socioeconomic impacts on the lives of the people of Ghana in general and women of study area in particular. The socioeconomic system witnessed total breakdown due to the conflict and leading to vulnerability as the women are left idle and redundant. Such situations put their lives in danger as they are compelled to move out to fend for themselves. There is a complex relationship among the women with regard to their economic behaviour (Mohammed, 2015). The modes of marketing and distribution become increasingly unstable because of competition between different resource users turning the situation to struggle for clan survival. The conflict has destroyed the ways in which women earn to care for the family since the struggle to control the market involves contacts and influence. As such, economic activities in the northern region were no longer viable as before the conflict in the face of insufficient supplies and low

sales hence the change in economic behaviour (Mohammed, 2015). The study reveal middlemen as well as some women hoarding goods, boycotting their business partners which cause strained relationship thus, resulting in discriminatory trade, suspicion and economic isolation (Andani, 2015). The barriers to women's economic advancement as indicated in Martha Walls (2000) revealed widespread direct and indirect discrimination thus gender discrimination in which female headed households have lower economic advancement. However, the economic discrimination witness in the area after the conflict is among same gender thus discrimination among women in business which affects all irrespective of one's status whether single parent, divorce or married (Mohammed, 2015).

The women in the country occupy varying social and economic position in performing differing roles within the traditional system. They however face different form of vulnerabilities to include lack of ready market for most of the indigenous local product like pots and cane baskets that some of them weave. Such situations are attributed to the lack of peace and stability in the area due to the conflict which affect social units and wellbeing of communities and the individuals. Most of the women undertake certain interventions that are geared towards alleviation of their challenges due to breakdown of social structure as a result of conflict. This is aimed at engaging many alternatives to solve socioeconomic problems just to facilitate development in a sustainable manner. Studies show that violent conflict is an act against an individual or group, with the intent to cause injury or death which affect women's participation in activities in the community (Thomas & Eric, 2006; Grace, & Danfulani, 2015; Asante, 2011). There is no security in the informal sector of the economy due to lack of regulations which posed serious problems to the economic discovery of the women. There is a good side to every misfortune as this study found the conflict to have opened up the minds of women to gain problems solving and some leadership skill after conflict. As revealed, women were typically engaged in various forms of small businesses including food vending, street hawking, head porters *kayaye*, petty trading and hairdressing. With these initiatives, young women were able to gather assets in preparation towards their future marriage processes which is very important in the enhancement of their social status and traditional wellbeing. All the accumulation of these assets constitutes a step towards the marriage of the young women while the older women lean helping hand by contributing to the preparation of their daughters' marriage as expected of them as mothers (Wumbee, 2018; Lattof, 2017; Owusu-Ofori, 2018). The interest of women in this direction is to accumulate enough cooking utensils and clothes after the devastating destruction of property after conflict.

## 5. Recommendations

The manuscript suggests the inclusive design of policies and community-based initiatives to demonstrate the importance of technology and the new media as a strong intervention to empower and mitigate gendered marginalization especially during peace building after conflict. Tech-solutions and tech-problematizing features in peacebuilding may make it possible to demonstrate how digital technologies are embedded in society and politics. Reflexively, digital peacebuilding engages with the technical and the social in practical terms thus dealing with the relationship between assumptions about technology and assumptions about conflict and peacebuilding. Hirblinger et al., (2023) the highly specialized

technological tools like video conferencing and social media platforms drawn on virtual reality could enable new approaches to peacebuilding through these digital collections. Studies have shown that media platforms are not just tools but also move into a complex sociotechnical issue that shape public discourse and influence the creation of social, political and economic inequalities (Ali et al., 2024; Seedat-Khan & Khan, 2025). This explains why the feminist and movements at the grassroots suggest the deployment of innovative strategies to leverage artificial intelligence and social media in countering oppression and pushing for justice to foster sustainable peace after conflict. With the new media and digital tools, opportunities may be provided for advocacy and mobilization of knowledge for determination in communities even though the approach may be considered as a threat to gender inclusivity and equity in online and offline spaces for peacebuilding engagement.

## 6. Conclusion

The traditional leadership and institutions are crucial in the cultural identity, social and economic development of the inhabitants. This social institution provides leadership and serves as the embodiment of culture, traditions and customs as well as ways to enforce harmony and peaceful coexistence in various traditional kingdoms. Despite these positives, the seeking these traditional titles often than not lead to conflict among the contenders and robbing in their sympathizers which exacerbate the situation and in turn bring about hardships. It is common knowledge that people who are displaced, thus including women, are poor due to the numerous needs that outstripped the means to those needs as well as limited or inadequate livelihood avenues. At this stage, women do not only need appropriate safety network and harmony but economic opportunities to lessen their vulnerabilities. In their efforts to come out of the doldrums, they are able to come up with socioeconomic initiative through community-based organizations to counter the negative effect of the conflict and also serve as a spring board for their economic empowerment and emancipation. The majority of these women has access to few resources and sometimes have to engage in energy sacking activities in order to maintain their livelihood and to meet the family needs. They also expense their meagre income to access some basic necessities of life just to supplement the family budget. The coping strategies of the women in the conflict area brings to limelight role of traditions and culture in relation to the entire organization to their livelihood activities.

### Competing interests

Authors have declared no competing interest.

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### Author's contributions

AAM initiated the research, collected the necessary information and transcribed the recordings from the field.

MAS helped to interpret and drafted the report.

MSU analyse the data and redrafted report

YA did the final proofreading and editing

The revision, reading and approval of the manuscript was done by all the authors.

### **Researchers personality and potential biases**

The researchers are collaborator who value teamwork, seek input from others and prioritize data or interpretations that confirm pre-existing beliefs or hypotheses. There is no influence of researchers' cultural background on study design, data interpretation or conclusions. The researchers did not allow expectations to influence the outcomes, observations or interpretations.

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