

Addressing Conflicts over Resource Use in Ghana: The Case of Operations Vanguard and Cow Leg

Osman Alhassan and Richard Asante

Abstract

Ghana is endowed with natural resources including forests, minerals, water and grazing lands which have made significant contributions to national development. At the same time, competing demands for these resources have created many conflicts that have proven difficult to manage. This paper seeks to further understand the challenges associated with resource use in Ghana, in particular the nature of conflicts and conflict resolution mechanisms under two joint police–military operations: Operation Cow Leg, which deals with long–running conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and local farmers over grazing rights; and Operation Vanguard, which addresses conflicts between the state and those involved in illegal small–scale mining popularly known as *galamsey*. Drawing on the literature on international peacekeeping, and using data collected via qualitative methods, the paper argues that while joint police–military operations such as Cow Leg and Vanguard are necessary, their implementation has failed to involve local people, and paid insufficient attention to the ways that local conflicts follow traditional processes of resolution.

Keywords: conflict resolution, UN peacekeeping, mining, grazing rights, resource use, Ghana

Résumé

Le Ghana est doté de ressources naturelles, notamment de forêts, de minéraux, d'eau et de pâturages, qui ont largement contribué au développement national. En même temps, les demandes concurrentes pour ces ressources ont créé de nombreux conflits qui se sont avérés difficiles à gérer. Cet article cherche à mieux comprendre les défis associés à l'utilisation des ressources au Ghana, en particulier la nature des conflits et les mécanismes de résolution des conflits dans le cadre de deux opérations conjointes police–armée : L'opération Cow Leg, qui traite des conflits de longue date entre les bergers Fulani et les agriculteurs locaux pour les droits de pâturage, et l'opération Vanguard, qui traite des

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conflits entre l'État et les personnes impliquées dans l'exploitation minière illégale à petite échelle, connue sous le nom de *galamsey*. S'appuyant sur la littérature relative au maintien de la paix sur le plan international et sur des données recueillies par des méthodes qualitatives, l'article soutient que si les opérations conjointes police-armée telles que Cow Leg et Vanguard sont nécessaires, leur mise en œuvre n'a pas réussi à impliquer les populations locales et n'a pas accordé suffisamment d'attention aux manières dont les conflits locaux suivent les processus traditionnels de résolution.

Mots clés: résolution des conflits, maintien de la paix de l'ONU, exploitation minière, droits de pâturage, utilisation des ressources, Ghana.

Introduction¹

A growing body of literature reveals that participation in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping has important consequences for domestic security of the countries that send troops and police officers (Cunliffe, 2017; Sotomayor, 2014; Dwyer, 2015). Since the 1990s, governments have started to rely more heavily on soldiers for internal security, in what Harig (2019) has referred to in the case of Brazil as “peacekeeping at home.” Along similar lines, Sotomayor (2014) argues that participation in international peacekeeping encourages the armed forces to increase their role in internal security when they return home. Indeed, in some cases the armed forces use their participation and experience in UN peacekeeping as a legitimization strategy for demanding favourable and permissive legislation, including the use of force and exemption from prosecution when conducting internal or public operations. Drawing on these studies, this article explores the processes and practices whereby Ghanaian military and police officers engage with other non-state security actors (formal, traditional and local groups including youth and women's groups) in internal security operations, with a focus on resource extraction in the Northern, Eastern and Western Region of Ghana.

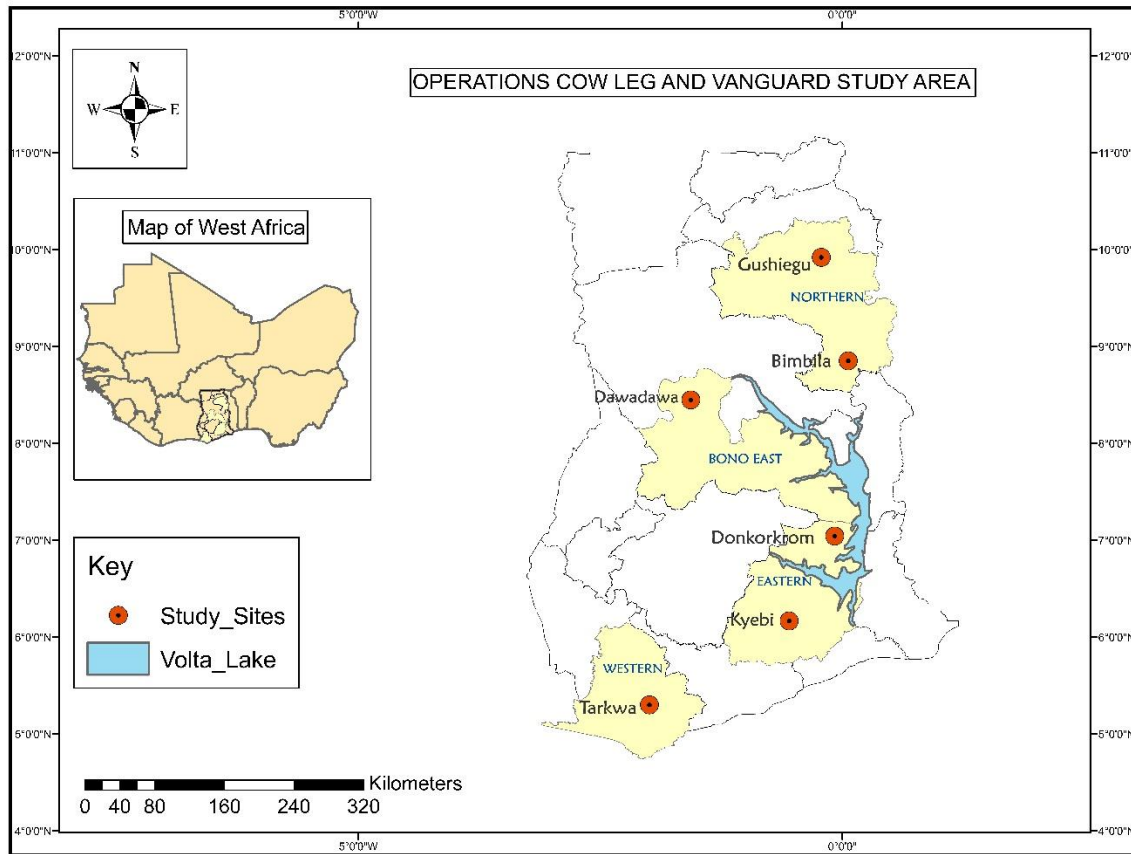
Ghana is a relatively stable country, with a longstanding history of exporting peacekeepers to other countries within and beyond Africa (Danida, 2014; Amedzrator & Aning, 2017). Yet the country also faces a wide range of internal security challenges, especially regarding resource use such as mining and grazing rights which everyday policing cannot deal with effectively (Tonah, 2003; Tsikata & Seini, 2004). In light of these challenges, the government has deployed internal security operations involving both the Ghana Police Service (GPS) and the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF), what is often referred to as “internal peacekeeping” in Ghana (Aubyn et al, 2019). These operations were established because of the inability of local security actors to keep the peace and ensure security for the populace. This article investigates why these operations are deployed to regulate resource use and resolve local conflict in Ghana. It also explores the extent to which they influence and shape local conflicts. Addressing these questions will deepen our understanding and knowledge of how professional security forces are deployed to conduct internal peacekeeping and how they, in the process, interact and cooperate with non-state actors at the local level to deal with resource-related conflict (see Albrecht, 2022a).

This article draws on a combination of qualitative fieldwork and secondary data sources to explore the operational practices underpinning two long-term internal operations where the GAF is involved: Operation Cow Leg, deployed to deal with farmer-herder conflicts across the country; and Operation Vanguard, established to deal with illegal mining. The study builds on fieldwork carried out in six communities across Ghana in February 2019 and April 2021. The study sites included Gusheigu and Bimbilla (Northern Region), Donkorkrom and Kyebi (Eastern Region), Dawadawa No. 2 (Bono East Region) and Tarkwa (Western Region) (see map of study sites below). These are places where water, land, grazing and water resources are concentrated, and therefore they are also the main arenas for conflicts over these resources.

Following consultation with local assistants and community leaders during earlier reconnaissance surveys and community entry visits, purposive sampling was used to select these areas since the towns are noted for prolonged and sometimes violent conflicts over mineral and grazing rights. Gusheigu and Bimbilla are in the Guinea savanna zone where cattle grazing is dominant because of its grassland endowments. Dawadawa No. 2 and Donkokrom are located in the moist forest-savanna transition zone which is also ideal for cattle rearing and crop farming. These two settlements are agricultural frontiers and have attracted a growing number

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of farmers due to the effects of climate change further north. Simultaneously, the increasing dryness of the north of Ghana has pushed nomadic Fulani herdsmen down south to find better pasture and water sources. The overall result of these dynamics is increasing competition for land and water, which often leads to competing use rights and open conflicts. Kyebi and Tarkwa are sites for illegal gold mining, popularly known as *galamsey* and have experienced recurrent conflicts over gold mining rights.



Data collection has included interviews involving key informants such as district authorities, chiefs, and leaders of women's and youth groups. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with local community groups as well as local farmers, Fulani herdsmen and cattle owners. Most of these people are community leaders and could provide both general and specific information about the livelihoods and dynamics of their community. In addition, interviews were carried out with relevant government departments, including officials of the district assemblies, Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the two security agencies involved in Cow Leg and Vanguard: the GPS and GAF. The general and specific information gathered centred on resource-use regimes, causes of conflicts and various levels of conflict resolution mechanisms, community relations with combined military-police forces, as well as strategies to minimise community conflicts over the use of resources.

In Donkorkrom, the research team interacted with selected community opinion leaders during key informant interviews and an FGD with a well-known Fulani cattle herders' association (Filotobe Jonde Jamhakude). Also, a discussion was held with a female Fulani group to gather first-hand information about their livelihoods, everyday life and community conflicts. We explored respondents' relationships with the local community, local government officials, security actors, and other community concerns affecting their daily survival. In Bimbilla, Gusheigu, Kyebi and Tarkwa, women and youth groups were interviewed in FGDs where respondents detailed the nature, causes and implications of resource conflicts, particularly in relation to being vulnerable people in their specific contexts. The sampling of different women's groups included homemakers, food vendors, traders and farmers, which enabled the study to document both the general perspectives as well as the specific contexts within which various community groups operated and experienced the issues at stake. These groups also provided details of how they perceived internal security operations by combined GPS-GAF teams, and the roles of the district authorities and other community groups during these operations. To understand the issues surrounding land-use conflicts, conflict resolution mechanisms, and security provision in the field sites under scrutiny, we also employed secondary data collection and analyses. The community violence experienced in Ghana is extensively documented by the media through radio, television, newspapers and many online sources. These sources were reviewed in line with the objectives of the study and complemented or verified other information sources during the analysis stage.

The data collected for this article show that, although Cow Leg and Vanguard are seen as necessary by local informants, there have been significant failings in the operations' implementation. The article argues that the operations have not fully involved local populations nor paid sufficient attention to the ways in which local conflicts follow traditional conflict resolution processes. After giving an overview of the context of international and internal peacekeeping, the article explores the creation, deployment and justification of Cow Leg and Vanguard in the specific case study areas. It suggests that, rather than being relegated to the background, the dynamics of the local setting should be seen as crucial to understanding and resolving tensions around natural resources.

Context of international and domestic peacekeeping operations

A lot of contemporary literature on the GAF focuses on its role in international peacekeeping (Amedzator & Aning, 2017; Levine, 2016). This literature emphasises how soldiers individually and collectively benefit from participating in peacekeeping missions and the stability that doing so has brought to Ghana as a troop contributor that has hosted several missions, including in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d' Ivoire. While debated consistently in Ghanaian media, much less academic attention is given to the GAF's regular deployment within the borders of Ghana to deal with conflicts over the use of resources, and even less so to the link between international peacekeeping and internal security operations. However, international peacekeeping is – apart from internal security operations – the GAF's only source of experience, and it is therefore to be expected that the professional development that soldiers, in particular, are said to go through on mission, transpires in how they act as they are deployed elsewhere, including in domestic conflicts.

Ghana has been a major troop contributor to UN peacekeeping operations since the 1960s, and particularly from the early 1990s as the number of peacekeeping missions multiplied (Aning & Danso, 2012; Parth & Schneider, 2017). Much literature emphasises the positive effects of these experiences on Ghana's local and national security actors (Aning & Aubyn, 2013; Levine, 2016). Peacekeeping has helped the government to obtain resources, equipment and financial rewards that have influenced the conduct and practices of internal security provision with respect to both the GPS and GAF, and provided economic incentives on both institutional and individual levels (Aning & Aubyn, 2013; Parth & Schneider, 2017). In addition, both UN and African Union peacekeeping policies and standards regarding recruitment and training are said to have instilled a degree of discipline, professionalism and respect for human rights into the GAF overall, and thereby contributed to institutional developments and the consolidation of democratic processes and security governance (Levine, 2016; Interview, member of Operation Vanguard, Accra, Dec 2019). Equally, international training assistance programs in preparation for peacekeeping have been argued to improve the GAF's operational performance (Parth & Schneider, 2017:117).

The overall question that this article explores is how these notions of professionalism – purported to result in part from long-term engagement in peacekeeping – transpire in the GAF's and the GPS's responses to conflicts across Ghana. The involvement of the military as well as the police in internal security operations is bound to reveal both positive and negative security practices. Soldiers and police officers engaging in operations such as Vanguard and Cow Leg might display professional behaviour because of international peacekeeping, but the opposite is certainly also the case, as discussed below (see also Aubyn, 2022). Furthermore, many military and police personnel have not been deployed in international peacekeeping operations, which brings into question the all-encompassing transformative effect that can be expected from deploying troops abroad (see Albrecht, 2022b).

Operation Vanguard and illegal small-scale mining

In Ghana, artisanal and small-scale gold mining dates back to the fifteenth century (Hilson, 2010; Crawford & Botchwey, 2017). Historically, it was perceived by many Ghanaians as an indigenous activity involving the use of rudimentary tools and means of extraction (Hilson, 2010). There are now two types of small-scale miners: legal (those who have acquired a mining license from the Minerals Commission of Ghana) and illegal (those mining without the requisite license). In the 1980s, the increasing prevalence of neoliberal policies, particularly structural adjustment, led to the introduction of various forms of subsidies and tax exemptions to attract foreign investors to the mining sector. These incentives favoured large-scale miners at the expense of small-scale miners, and further pushed local small-scale miners into *galamsey*, the popular name that has been coined for illegal mining.

Small-scale mining is an important source of livelihood for low-income households and a significant contributor to the Ghanaian economy (Debrah & Asante, 2019). However, small-scale mining activities are also associated with environmental degradation. In 1989, the government passed the Small-Scale Gold Mining Law (PNDCL 218) to curb the activities of illegal miners. Despite the law, illegal mining has increased partly as a result of frustration and difficulties in the registration process (Akabzaa, 2009; Reisenberger, 2010). Also, the Minerals and Mining Act 2006 (Act 703) reserves small-scale mining to Ghanaian citizens only and bars non-Ghanaians from participation in that sub-sector. Yet, since 2006 the small-scale mining sector has expanded considerably with participation of non-Ghanaians, particularly the Chinese (Crawford et al, 2015; Aidoo, 2016; Debrah & Asante, 2019).

In addition to non-Ghanaians' comprehensive engagement in *galamsey*, another major issue has been the introduction of mechanised and sophisticated machinery into the process, including heavy-duty excavators, bulldozers, explosives and wash plants that destroy riverbeds and turn natural streams into muddy, frothy ponds (Graphic Online, 2020; Debrah & Asante, 2019). The activities of non-Ghanaian illegal miners and their Ghanaian collaborators – including chiefs, politicians and security personnel – increase environmental degradation of water bodies, agricultural land and forests (Crawford et al, 2015; Debrah & Asante, 2019).

The negative impact of mining on the environment has led to successive governments introducing security operations that involve the use of military force to deal with illegal mining. In May 2013, John Mahama's National Democratic Congress (NDC) government introduced a high-level inter-ministerial task force (Crawford et al, 2015; Asante, 2017) that was mandated to: (a) seize all equipment used by those who fail to comply with the new directives of obtaining licenses or renewing their licenses; (b) arrest and prosecute Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians involved in illegal small-scale mining; (c) deport all non-Ghanaians involved in small-scale illegal mining; and (d) revoke the licenses of Ghanaians who have sub-leased their concessions to non-Ghanaians. In addition to these measures, the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) intensified the arrest and repatriation of non-Ghanaians without requisite work and resident permits. The task force and other measures had limited success because of institutional weaknesses, cases of extortion and corruption, lack of transparency in the workings of the taskforce, and inconsistent application of laws. For example, some of the excavators that were seized from miners ended up back with them without due process (Asante, 2017).

The interventions by the Mahama government failed to curb illegal mining. Therefore, when Nana Akufo-Addo and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) assumed office in January 2017, the public and media outcry over the environmental deterioration, coupled with a growing number of local conflicts resulting from *galamsey*, pushed the new president to relaunch internal security operations. First, the government placed a moratorium on all forms of small-scale mining from March 2017 to December 2018. Then in July 2017, the government launched Operation Vanguard, officially led by the GPS with GAF backing, in Burma Camp, the headquarters of the GAF in Accra. Vanguard's official purpose was to safeguard water bodies and the environment, and to protect life and property from the activities of illegal miners (Myjoyonline, 2018). The security personnel were equally drawn from the GAF and the GPS: 400 in total, with 200 from the former and 200 from the latter (Myjoyonline, 2017).

This joint military and police taskforce was divided into three groups and deployed to the most affected regions: Ashanti, Eastern and Western (Myjoyonline, 2017). Prior to deploying to their forward operating bases, as they were called, personnel undertook intensive pre-deployment training at the Bundase Training Camp in the Ningo Prampram District in the Greater Accra Region to prepare adequately for the operations (Myjoyonline, 2018). They were exposed to a series of lectures on respecting human rights and adhering to the rules of engagement, which mainly focused on putting an end to *galamsey*. Their mandate did not include fighting terrorist groups or engaging in war against rebel groups (Myjoyonline, 2018; for more on counterterrorism in Ghana, see Christensen, 2022).

Vanguard confiscated over 12,000 'changfans' (the main equipment used to process the minerals), destroyed other equipment and weapons employed in illegal mining (Graphic Online, 2021), and arrested several miners. However, some of the seized excavators have since gone missing and have been subject to police investigation (Myjoyonline, 2020a). Furthermore, both the operation itself and the inter-ministerial committee overseeing it have come under heavy criticism for corruption, extortion and the disappearance of the seized excavators (Myjoyonline, 2020b). Following these developments, the government on 10 January 2021 dissolved the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining (IMCIM) (Myjoyonline, 2021). In addition, the government in March 2020 withdrew the military from the field, making Vanguard entirely police-led (Interview, commander, Operation Vanguard, Tarkwa, 21 April 2021). However, after the president proposed national dialogue with stakeholders to chart a new course for small-scale mining in Ghana (Graphic Online, 2021), Vanguard was reformed in mid-2021, indicating not only the many political interests at stake when it comes to *galamsey*, but

also the inability of the government to address what has become a considerable challenge to stability and the environment in Ghana (for more on Vanguard, see Edu-Afful, 2022).

Operation Cow Leg and farmer–herder conflicts

Fulani herders' seasonal migration to Ghana in search of green pastures for their cattle long predates the country's independence in 1957 (Tonah, 2005). Settled Fulanis have a long history in Ghana as well, because the colonial administration used some Fulani herdsmen to assist in improving livestock development in Ghana (Tonah, 2006). Fulani herdsmen have historically been an integral part of pastoral life in Ghana as they have in all parts of West Africa. However, in the wake of media reports and public debate about increasingly intense conflicts between indigenous farmers and migrant cattle herders across the country, the issue of pastoralism has been increasingly politicised and seen as an emergency. Dealing with the rising tension between farmers and herders came to be seen as a greater problem than could be solved by a routine law enforcement assignment for the GPS. This led the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), Ghana's military government during the 1980s led by Jerry Rawlings, to establish a joint military–police force, Operation Cow Leg, in April 1988. The sole aim of this security operation was to flush out alien Fulani herdsmen from Ghana's territory as a prerequisite for maintaining peace and security, and to promote the livelihood of the country's subsistence farmers (Tonah, 2002; 2006). From the perspective of the Ghanaian government at this time, the Fulanis were seen as coming primarily from Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali.

Since 1988, there have been two nationwide expulsions of Fulani herders jointly organised by central and local governments (Tonah, 2005), both aiming to deport those who in large part have been seen as 'invading' pastoralists. The first deportation occurred in 1988 and appeared to calm widely reported herder–farmer conflicts. However, due to the extent of Fulani herders' presence in Ghana, especially as most of them grazed their cattle in remote areas, the operation was prolonged to 1989 (Tonah, 2005). After 1989, the need to continue the exercise was considered and, indeed, over time, Operation Cow Leg was institutionalised as communities and districts prone to conflict continued to report incidents, including to the regional level. On an ad hoc basis, Cow Leg's combined police–military force would carry out evictions in specific localities in the name of restoring peace and order. In 1999, a second nationwide eviction of Fulani pastoralists was carried out. It was extended into 2000 because of reports that tensions between farmers and pastoralists was re-emerging, caused by the destruction of food crops and farms in a similar series of events to those a decade prior (Tonah, 2005).

Several media reports indicated that there were many farmer–herder clashes in and around Atebubu, Agogo and Nkoranza districts, among others (Tsikata & Seini, 2004). The reports said that there were large numbers of cattle that were destroying the environment, including trees, grass, water bodies and farmland in the host communities. Since 2000, local authorities including chiefs and opinion leaders have been assisted by district and regional administrations to expel all illegal Fulani herders under Cow Leg so that farmers and other community members can go about their normal lives. Bukari and Schareika (2015) have indicated that similar expulsion policies under Cow Leg were executed in 2010 and 2015. Indeed, in 2011 alone more than eleven operations were carried out, which drove many Fulani herdsmen and their cattle out of the country (ibid).

The official motivation to implement Operation Cow Leg was to end conflicts between farmers and herders, but the exercise has rarely yielded its intended results despite considerable government spending (Tonah, 2002; Moritz, 2006). The operation's failure has been attributed to the fact that some landlords, chiefs, indigenous cattle owners, influential businesspeople, politicians and other local authorities derive enormous benefits from the cattle, and do not in fact endorse expulsion of the herders (Tonah, 2002; for more on community leaders' influence on policing, see Abdallah & Aning, 2022). Fulanis who work for Ghanaian cattle owners are normally not included in expulsions because local and traditional authorities vouch for them as being legal residents in the community (Tonah, 2002). As reported by group discussants in Donkorkrom, it is widely believed that some herdsmen are informed about an operation beforehand, and therefore are not caught (FGDs, Donkorkrom, 8 March 2019).

Indeed, there is broad agreement among researchers that as a method for ending farmer–herder violence in Ghana, Cow Leg has not been effective (Tonah, 2002; Abubakari & Longi, 2014; Bukari & Schareika, 2015). Indeed, Tonah (2002) in particular, notes that the expulsion of Fulanis with military support has exacerbated more than helped to resolve farmer–herder conflicts. At the same time, the fact that Cow Leg has been active since 1988 indicates its continued relevance in the sense that tensions between farmers and herders continue to pose a considerable challenge to local stability in Ghana.

Fulani: A regional rather than national question

Although the herder–farmer conflicts appear to have escalated in recent times, there is no evidence to suggest that the situation would have been better without Cow Leg. Climate change and resource scarcity have more than ever necessitated that Fulani herders migrate from Burkina Faso and Northern Nigeria in search of water resources and grazing lands in Ghana. The resulting tensions are heightened by the international obligations that Ghana has signed up to, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) protocol on the protection of the Fulani herdsman irrespective of which country they come from, and which areas in Ghana they trek across.

As part of the move to find lasting solutions to the escalating conflicts between herders and farmers, ECOWAS and the government of Nigeria held a high-level meeting on pastoralism and cross-border transhumance in Abuja in April 2018. ECOWAS had already approved a resolution (C/REG.3/01/03) on the implementation of transhumance regulations between ECOWAS member states in 2003, which was expected to be the cornerstone of regional integration. Indeed, Nigeria alone has recorded an annual average of more than 2,000 fatalities from 2011 to 2016, at times exceeding the casualties arising from the Boko Haram insurgency (ECOWAS, 2018). The meeting urged ECOWAS leaders to make these regulations operational through the implementation of regional programs to develop pastoral areas and infrastructure for transhumance. It is also an imperative on the part of the government to ensure equal and unfettered access to justice for all by creating strong state-sanctioned institutions that can manage conflict. The long delays in adjudicating disputes and political interference in the legal institutions weaken feuding parties' confidence in the system of justice at both local and national levels. More investment is needed to strengthen existing formal justice system mechanisms and involve locally-trusted conflict prevention and mediation processes. The weakness of institutional arrangements for local dispute resolution was seen as a considerable worry for most community respondents during our fieldwork in February 2019 and April 2021. They explained that many times conflicts escalate because individuals who feel aggrieved and need immediate redress do not get an appropriate response. Often, this leads to people taking the law into their hands, resulting in reprisal attacks which further escalates violence.

Operations Vanguard, Cow Leg and local conflict resolution

Evidence from interviews and FGDs during fieldwork indicates that violent conflict arises over resource use in cattle rearing as well as mining areas, which calls for the deployment of security personnel. However, following several years, indeed decades, of Operation Cow Leg to stabilise farmer–herder relations, it has, like Operation Vanguard in the context of mining, neither reduced the number of conflicts nor the scale of violence. The underlying rationale of both operations has been to swiftly restore normal life and order, and yet Vanguard as well as Cow Leg have lingered on, described variously as corrupt, unnecessarily violent and biased. However, community respondents in Donkorkrom generally felt that it was better to have Cow Leg than not. Though farmer–herder conflicts still persist, the frequency and scale of the clashes and accompanying violence would have been higher if there was no Operation Cow Leg security operation in this area. (FGD, farmers, Donkorkrom, 8 March 2019)

Respondents in Kyebi also felt that Vanguard was needed. The main economic livelihoods of the people in this community is farming which relies on land and water. These are being polluted by *galamsey* operators whose activities need to be halted before the land and water bodies become wastelands. (FGD, adult men, Kyebi, 10 March 2019). These statements endorse the generally held perception that Cow Leg and Vanguard have significantly reduced the community conflicts arising from competing land rights and uses.

One of the main problems in the day-to-day operation of Vanguard and Cow Leg is that decisions are taken in a top-down manner. Local-level community-based groups and associations that perform consultations to solve local disputes are nearly always disregarded. Indeed, state-sanctioned operations do not even officially recognise their existence. In this light, the next section explores existing conflict resolution mechanisms across the locations where Cow Leg and Vanguard have deployed. Understanding these mechanisms is vital. Only through more cooperation with local actors can joint operations between the military and police genuinely deal with resource conflicts that are growing in intensity. Certainly, professionalisation, as a derived benefit from international peacekeeping, does not prevent security personnel from being drawn into local-level dynamics and fights over resources.

Existing conflict resolution mechanisms

To what extent do the local actors complement, cooperate and/or compete when providing domestic security? In the areas where we conducted fieldwork, workable mechanisms for conflict resolution exist that commonly involve not only traditional leaders, religious and political opinion leaders, youth groups and women's associations, but also state-centred institutions like the GPS, courts, district assemblies, and forest and agriculture departments. The GPS and district assemblies are often beset with logistical, organisational and personnel challenges, especially in remote districts and local communities where access to transport and communication frustrates conflict resolution efforts. Below are details of some field evidence concerning the existing variety of local initiatives used to resolve or mitigate resource-use conflicts when they arise.

The Municipal Security Committee and Operation Vanguard: The case of Tarkwa

Focus group discussions with NGOs and small-scale miners, with further corroboration by officials from the Minerals Commission, revealed that the Municipal Security Committee (MUSEC) has been active in mediating between the communities and the mining companies that often dispute over blasting (FGDs, Tarkwa, 20 April 2021). Such blasts often cause cracks in buildings, especially on floors and walls. For example, in the specific conflicts involving mining companies and some communities over damages resulting from blasts, MUSEC set up a technical committee comprising of the Minerals Commission, mining companies and representatives of communities, with MUSEC presiding (ibid). They agreed on the modalities for blasting including the intensity and time of blast which would be convenient to all parties. Group discussants emphasised the importance of the outcome of this conflict resolution process as it brought compromise to the disagreements they held (ibid).

MUSEC has also been instrumental in resolving conflicts associated with encroachments on acquired concessions by *galamsey* operators (FGDs, Tarkwa, 20 April 2021). State officials and community members were in praise of MUSEC for resolving a number of the conflicts among various land users. They also acknowledged the immense challenges associated with achieving peace and security in the municipality. Respondents stressed that there was still a lot to be done in the Tarkwa-Nsuaem municipality especially with *galamsey* activities which continue to destroy the environment and threaten peace and security (ibid). It was clear that the local police force and MUSEC alone could not deal with the mining challenges, particularly *galamsey*. This is the reason why Vanguard was deployed in the municipality. Group discussions with chiefs, MUSEC, NGOs and small-scale miners indicate that, initially, Vanguard was able to achieve some measure of success such as reducing the prevalence of *galamsey*, restoring water bodies, arresting *galamseyers* and seizing their mining equipment (ibid).

During the three years that Vanguard has existed, many challenges have confronted its operations and raised questions about its relevance. Vanguard personnel have been accused of not only treating suspects brutally and extorting money, but also becoming too familiar with some *galamsey* operators/communities and colluding with the miners rather than arresting them. There have also been challenges associated with logistics, lack of collaboration with local and other key stakeholders such as the local police, traditional authorities, youth groups and MUSEC. These concerns led to Vanguard being disbanded in May 2021. In its place the government deployed some 400 personnel from the GAF in a mission called Operation Halt II to remove persons and their equipment found mining illegally in water bodies and forest zones (GhanaWeb, 2021b).

Vanguard and conflict resolution in mining areas: The case of Kyebi

Despite the decline in economic activities following the ban on *galamsey* in the Kyebi area, some of the local population remain happy with the ban because of the detrimental effects of mining on water sources and the environment in general. Although the local police force is not trusted by a section of the informants because of the belief that they are easily influenced by bribery, the work of the officers involved in Vanguard was often considered effective and praiseworthy by community members. Organisations such as the district sub-committee on mining and the Forestry Commission have complemented the work of Vanguard by using guards to arrest *galamseyers* who operate in the forests and other areas not covered by the operation. There is ample testimony from community respondents and the municipal security committee that Vanguard has helped to resolve several conflicts. Even after its disbandment, individual security personnel who served under Vanguard still attend pending cases in court to give evidence in the prosecution of *galamsey* and related offenses (Interview, Kyebi, Feb 2019).

The police, chiefs and local assembly members: The case of Gusheigu

In Gusheigu, both formal and informal community organisations exist for resolving community conflicts when they arise. In an FGD, Fulani herdsmen said that whenever their cattle destroy farmers' crops, they are willing to settle the issue through existing channels such as the police, chief's palace or community leader as an intermediary, or with an assembly member depending on where the farmer or herder lives (FGD, Gushegu, 4 March 2019). They were quick to point out that most of the destruction is caused by the itinerant herdsmen, and not the settled Fulanis. Though this has been a problem for more than 20 years, it has attained crisis status due to increases in population of both people and cattle.

Some of the conflicts have been resolved by the GPS even though the Fulani have some misgivings about the police. On the one hand, the Fulani claim that the police have not protected them as they should, while on the other hand, the police remain their only place of refuge and protection when faced with difficulties. Sometimes local grievances have led to major conflicts, such as in January 2019 when Fulani homesteads in Kpatinga near Gusheigu were burnt by their Dagomba hosts. In many of these violent instances, human deaths, as well as loss of cattle, farmlands/crops and other properties occur.

There have been many occasions when Cow Leg targeted the nomadic herdsmen. At no point during the operation have settled community members been asked questions or even informed about what is happening. Many communities were of the view that such operations could have been more effective and achieved their desired results if they were consultative and accommodative of local-level, non-state actors such as the traditional and religious authorities, farmer and herder associations, women and youth associations, and butchers and cattle dealers.

Local agricultural extension officers: The case of Donkorkrom

In Donkorkrom, local agricultural extension officers – who provide cropping and animal husbandry services to local farmers – take part in the process of assessing the damage to crops and the compensation to be paid. A planning officer of the Kwahu Afram Plains North District indicated in an interview that due to problems associated with settlement of compensations when crops are destroyed by cattle, agricultural officers play a vital role in the costing of losses and the amount of compensation given to victims (Interview, Donkorkrom, 8 March 2019). Their involvement – which is unique in our case studies of community conflict management – is often endorsed by community members who perceive them as being neutral in the ongoing conflicts. Consequently, once the agricultural officers undertake costing of crops destroyed, the litigants (both Fulani herdsmen and community farmers) are bound to abide by the outcomes and payments are made.

The involvement of agricultural officers was popular among the Fulani pastoralists because they believe that the police and military officers deployed under Cow Leg are mostly on the side of the local population, that is the crop farmers. According to interviewees, there have been many instances where Cow Leg security personnel participate in the slaughter of cattle and share the meat amongst themselves (FGDs, Donkorkrom, 8 March 2019). Despite these concerns, the Fulani herdsmen said that they still report crimes committed against them to the Donkorkrom police, partly because it is the state-sanctioned institution when it comes to maintaining peace and order, and also because they have no other options when their safety is under threat. Although much is made of the increasing professionalisation of the police, it is clear that currently neither GPS nor GAF personnel consult local actors in Donkorkrom, and therefore are not seen to take local concerns into consideration as they plan operations.

Local committees in farmer–herder conflict management: The case of Dawadawa No. 2

The discussion thus far indicates some workable solutions to conflicts at various communities in the study area. These processes are composed of assemblages of diverse actors most relevant for resolving community challenges (see Albrecht, 2022b). The combination of formal and informal actors is central to dealing with local conflicts. Our study found that in Dawadawa No. 2, a committee made up of various community stakeholders was established to address the problem of destruction of crops by cattle (FGD, adult men, Dawadawa No. 2, 6 March 2019). Any time this committee fails to address a particular issue brought before it, claimants can resort to other institutions and bodies such as the chief's palace, CHRAJ, the Department of Social Welfare, or the courts. As an example, group discussants mentioned the escalation of conflicts in 2009 between crop farmers and nomadic herdsmen which led to five fatalities: two on the side of the Dawadawa No. 2 farming community, and three on the side of the Fulani herders (FGD, unit committee members, Dawadawa No. 2, 6 March 2019).

Following the violence, many local farmers were arrested and detained by the police for more than four months. Many attempts were made to resolve the conflict, but the role played by the CHRAJ and National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) was eventually heralded as leading to a complete resolution of hostilities among the conflicting parties (ibid). These institutions worked hard to organise various meetings for different groups, as well as undertaking backdoor discussions and other sensitisation meetings where appeals for calm were preached and the benefits of peace and security laid bare before the community.

These institutions are crucial in dispensing justice and avoiding conflicts at the local level as a result of the inadequacy or absence of the police due to staffing constraints. Also, some community members think the police are more corrupt and so would rather appeal to CHRAJ and NCCE who they see as being more just and fair (FGD, adult women, Gusheigu, 6 March 2019). Members of CHRAJ and NCCE at the local level are known by community members and offer close interaction and discussions or negotiations among conflicting parties. They consider local factors by having regular consultations that build trust and confidence between conflicting parties, in addition to using simple, convenient and easy to follow conflict resolution processes which are more transparent and easily understood by locals. Many respondents also explained that these institutions often deal with disputes much earlier in the conflict cycle than the police, and therefore tend to resolve conflicts before they escalate beyond manageable levels (FGD, unit committee members, Dawadawa No. 2, 6 March 2019). The informants were satisfied with the activities of conflict resolution organisations, especially the unit committee, which is the lowest (or grassroots) local formal institution under the local government administration. The community generally perceives the settled Fulani as Ghanaians, although they admit the Fulani have great difficulty participating in politics in the constituency and asserting themselves as Ghanaians.

The interview of a representative from a women's group, however, explained that the unit committee in most cases failed to resolve many farmer–herder compensation cases (Interview, women's group leader, Dawadawa No. 2, 6 March 2019). She was dissatisfied with the determination of compensation and the long period of waiting before compensation is made. Additionally, her experience suggests that male farmers are more likely to be compensated than female farmers (for more on women in resource conflicts, see Atobrah et al, 2022). Because the Dawadawa No. 2 area is sparsely populated, there is some presence of the itinerant Fulani who are creating new settlement patterns, forcing men in the community to spend most of the time (including night–time) on their farms to keep watch over their crops. This is because most of the crop destruction occurs under the cover of the dark. Notwithstanding the problems encountered by the community of Dawadawa No. 2, the use of local mechanisms for resolving conflicts have resulted in some gains and need to be encouraged (FGD, adult women, Dawadawa No. 2, 6 March 2019).

Conclusion

This study has examined Operation Vanguard and Operation Cow Leg in the management of resource conflicts involving mining and grazing rights. Drawing on insights from the peacekeeping literature, it was anticipated that the professionalism that the military and police in Ghana have gained as a result of long–term engagement in peacekeeping abroad would impact on internal security, including the reduction of levels and effects of resource–use conflicts. In doing so, the operations would contribute to sound and sustainable resource management for improved livelihoods.

The creation of Vanguard and Cow Leg was necessitated by the persistence and complexity of resource–use conflicts and the inability of the normal security apparatus to effectively deal with these insecurities. The two joint police–military operations have to an extent been able to protect grazing areas, forests, water bodies and mineral resources. Some community perceptions and experiences of Cow Leg, which has been in operation since 1989, were positive. Indeed, nobody can tell what the scale of Fulani herder incursions in Ghana would have been without it, especially considering news reports from Nigeria and Burkina Faso where such confrontations result in many fatalities. Similarly, in the case of Vanguard, which has existed for a shorter period of time, some gains have been made, but perhaps not as dramatically as expected when the operation was conceived. Certainly the quality of water in some rivers and streams in mining areas in the Eastern and Western regions has improved significantly during Vanguard.

However, despite these gains, the overwhelming evidence from the field indicates that the two operations resulted in more negative than positive outcomes. The most readily cited examples include the extortion of local people by Vanguard officials, brutalities meted out to suspects, and other illegalities including the misappropriation of seized mining equipment. Worse yet, both Vanguard and Cow Leg employed a top–down approach to decision–making without adequately exploring how to use local knowledge and/or collaborate with local actors and stakeholders.

Moving forward, a process that seeks effective conflict resolution among various resource users should be more oriented towards stakeholder participation. This is where the formal peacekeeping operations for conflict resolution are blended with time-tested, traditional and communal conflict resolution processes for effective outcomes. Indeed, President Akufo-Addo is proposing more stakeholder dialogue on small-scale mining (GhanaWeb, 2021a) with a view to crafting a more representative blueprint for sustainable mining in Ghana. This follows national discussions and discontent about Operation Vanguard which eventually led to the disbanding of this special security operation deemed to have been unable to meet its objectives in the three years that it was in operation.

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