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Ethnic Conflicts in Ghana: Colonial Legacy and Elite Mobilisation

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
	This research paper examines the relationship between ethnic conflicts in Africa and their roots in the colonial legacy and elite mobilisation, focusing on the case study of Ghana by taking into account the regions of Dagbon and Bawku as examples. It examines how the dynamics of ethnic tensions in the post-colonial age have been influenced by the colonial past of Africa, which was marked by arbitrary borders, dividing policies, and preferential treatment of particular ethnic groups. The paper also looks into how Ghana's political elites use ethnic tensions for personal advantage, escalating disputes and impeding national unity. This study intends to provide a thorough knowledge of the complex interaction between colonial legacies, elite mobilisation, and ethnic conflicts in Ghana and Africa by analysing historical documents, academic writings, and empirical data.

Introduction

A social group's ethnicity is defined as its shared customs, cultures, languages, and ancestors' histories (Cambridge Dictionary, no date). African ethnic conflicts have been a recurring and complicated problem, frequently stemming from historical reasons like the colonial legacy and elite mobilisation. The colonial past of the continent, which was marked by arbitrary borders and divisive policies, set the stage for ethnic tensions that still exist today. Further exacerbating these problems is the political elites' manipulation of ethnic differences, which impedes national progress and cohesion.

European powers divided the continent during the "Scramble for Africa" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, frequently without regard for pre-existing ethnic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. As a result, multiple ethnic groups coexisted within the same borders to form multiethnic nations. Artificial borders disturbed established systems of social structure and resource allocation, laying the groundwork for upcoming interethnic wars. Additionally, colonial governments established policies that gave preference to some ethnic groups over others, which caused marginalisation, inequality, and discontent among oppressed populations.

For their own political advantage, post-colonial political elites in Africa have contributed significantly to the escalation of ethnic hostilities. Elite mobilisation describes how political leaders manipulate ethnic identities and divisions to cling to power and exercise control. To rally support, foment ethnic conflicts, and maintain a divide-and-rule approach, these elites frequently prey on ethnic grievances, historical grievances, and a sense of marginalisation. They can maintain their hold

on power, gain access to resources, and obtain electoral support by playing on ethnic affiliations, further dividing the country and obstructing efforts to bring it together.

Moreover, the ethnic conflicts in Africa have a wide range of repercussions. They frequently result in bloodshed, population displacement, fatalities, infrastructure devastation, and economic upheaval. Conflicts like this damage social cohesion, obstruct growth and prolong poverty cycles. Conflicts and instability in the region might also result from ethnic tensions spreading to nearby nations (Deng, 1997).

Understanding the linkages between the colonial legacy, elite mobilisation, and ethnic conflicts is essential for formulating effective policies and interventions. Research in this field includes suggestions for fostering peace, harmony, and sustainable development in Africa, as well as insights into the underlying causes of ethnic conflicts. Scholars and decision-makers can develop a sophisticated grasp of the complexity involved and strive towards constructing inclusive societies that transcend ethnic barriers by analysing particular case studies within the larger African context.

Research questions

- How did colonialism impact the ethnic conflicts in Africa by taking into account the case studies of Ghana?
- What role do elites play in the ethnic conflicts of Africa by taking case studies of Ghana?

Research Methodology

This paper comprises qualitative research that utilises secondary sources of data. This approach allows the researcher to explore the role of elites and colonialism in the ethnic conflicts of Ghana by drawing on relevant data and literature from secondary sources such as books, articles, reports, or online databases. By incorporating qualitative methods, the researcher gains a deeper understanding of the legacy of colonialism and elite mobilisation in the aggravation of ethnic conflicts, while secondary sources provide a broader context and existing knowledge base for analysis. Moreover, this approach enables the researcher to triangulate data, corroborate findings, and uncover new insights by synthesising primary qualitative data with existing information from secondary sources, enhancing the validity and robustness of the research.

Colonial history of Ghana

Ghana is a country in western Africa that is located on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. Although relatively small in area and population, Ghana is one of the prime states of Africa. This is in part due to its abundant natural resources and also because it was the first black African state south of the Sahara to declare independence from colonial rule (Boateng et al., no date). The colonial history of Ghana is intricately entwined with the history of European colonisation in general in Africa. Due to its rich gold reserves, the area that is now Ghana was once a significant trading hub known as the Gold Coast. A period of colonial dominance began in the 15th century with the arrival of European powers, primarily the Portuguese (Brent-Turner, 2021). Other European nations, including the Dutch, British, and Danish, built forts and commercial posts along the coast after the Portuguese. These European nations wanted to make use of the resources in the area, primarily gold and, later, palm oil and other commodities. Millions of African people were captured and sent to the Americas as slave labourers as part of their participation in the transatlantic slave trade. Following their eventual conquest of the Gold Coast, the British steadily increased their sphere of influence inland through treaties, armed conflict, and diplomatic manoeuvres. The British officially recognised the Gold Coast as a crown colony in 1874, establishing direct British control over the region. The duration of this direct colonial rule ended with Ghana's independence in 1957 (Jones, 2022).

In the Gold Coast during colonial times, the British instituted a system of indirect rule that involved ruling via existing traditional institutions and indigenous authorities. This strategy reduced administrative expenses while allowing the British to keep control. Additionally, it helped to preserve stability and co-opt the local aristocracy. Ghana's socio-political landscape was affected by a number of policies that the British colonial administration implemented. They started growing cash crops like cocoa and palm oil, which revolutionised the economy and had a long-lasting impact on farming methods. They also constructed a revenue structure, brought in Western education, and put British common law-based judicial systems into place. The British colonial period also witnessed the emergence of nationalism and anti-colonial movements in Ghana. Leading nationalist figures like J.B. Danquah and Kwame Nkrumah came into prominence and pushed for independence and self-rule (Brent-Turner, 2021). Following World War II, the independence movement gathered steam, and Ghana became the first nation in sub-Saharan Africa to win its freedom from colonial domination in 1957.

The ethnic dynamics of Ghana have been significantly influenced by its colonial past. Multiethnic states were created as a result of the artificial borders that European powers drew, disregarding pre-existing ethnic, cultural, and linguistic barriers. In addition, the British government established policies favouring the Akan over other ethnic groups, which created a feeling of marginalisation and inequity among other ethnic groups (Decker, 2018). The colonial experience and independence struggle of Ghana have defined its national identity and continue to have an impact on its socio-political environment. To understand the intricacies of Ghanaian culture and tackle current difficulties, including ethnic conflicts, it is crucial to acknowledge and recognise this colonial heritage.

Colonial legacy of arbitrary borders and divisive policies

The colonial legacy, notably the arbitrary borders and division policies enforced by European colonial powers, frequently has an impact on ethnic conflicts in Africa as the African territory was split among European powers throughout the time of European colonisation without regard for pre-existing language, cultural, or ethnic barriers. Borders were frequently drawn without regard for the complexity of African communities, instead basing them on colonial goals, geopolitical factors, and talks among European powers. This led to the coexistence of multiethnic states with a range of ethnicities inside the same borders, which helped to create the conditions for subsequent ethnic tensions and conflicts. The imposition of arbitrary borders disrupted traditional patterns of social organisation, resource distribution, and political systems that had evolved over centuries. Communities that had previously coexisted peacefully and were tied by historical borders were abruptly divided by colonial borders, while diverse ethnic groups were compelled to coexist within the same geographical bounds (Gashaw, 2017). Communities often experienced tensions and conflicts as a result of these abrupt changes in social and political systems as they tried to adjust to new situations and negotiate new connections.

Divide-and-rule strategies were regularly used by European colonial rulers to keep their African colonies under control. They exacerbated tensions between various groups by taking advantage of already-existing ethnic rivalries, rivalries, and animosities. Colonial authorities frequently gave particular ethnic groups advantages over others, giving them access to resources, positions of authority, and privileges (Hyde, 2016). This unfair treatment increased racial animosities and increased the marginalisation of certain groups. Moreover, Certain ethnic groups were occasionally given preference by colonial powers, frequently due to their perceived usefulness or devotion to the colonial rulers. As a result, various ethnic groups received unequal distributions of wealth, territory, and political power. These differences stoked resentment and promoted a sense of injustice and marginalisation among the populations that these policies were excluded or disadvantaged.

African communities were frequently subjected to the social stratification and hierarchies imposed by colonial powers. They divided up ethnic groupings according to what they believed to be their shared traits, such as language, culture, or degrees of "civilisation." This led to artificial ethnic divisions and inequality, with certain ethnic groups being favoured and others being marginalised or subjected to discrimination. Social inequality that resulted has been a cause of contention and strife (Amadife and Warhola, 1993). Therefore, colonial rule left a legacy of ethnic animosities and rivalries, as certain ethnic groups were pitted against one another for the benefit of colonial powers. Long after independence, conflicts and resentment that were planted during the colonial era frequently still existed, feeding violent cycles and ethnic tensions.

Elite mobilisation and ethnic conflicts

Ethnic conflicts in Africa are significantly influenced by elite mobilisation. Elites frequently take advantage of ethnic identities and grievances for their own political, economic, or social gain, including powerful people, influential people, and power brokers. Here are some significant elements of elite mobilisation in African ethnic conflicts. By exploiting ethnic identities and employing them as a foundation for political organisation and mobilisation, elites mobilise along ethnic lines. To mobilise support and forge political ties, they use ethnic passions, cultural icons, and historical tales. Elites can increase their control and win the support of their ethnic group by framing problems in terms of ethnicity, frequently at the expense of other groups. Intense political rivalry between elites over money, authority, and control over state institutions frequently fuels ethnic conflicts (Tseer, Sulemana and Marfo, 2022). Elites may exploit ethnic animosities and divisions for political gain, mobilising their ethnic base to win over supporters or delegitimise rivals. This rivalry has the potential to turn violent, fuelling racial tensions and conflicts.

The management and distribution of resources are also related to elite mobilisation in ethnic wars. Political elites might exploit ethnicity as a means of gaining access to and exercising control over valuable resources like land, minerals, or business prospects. Elites can take advantage of resource imbalances and enlist the support of their ethnic constituency by presenting themselves as the protectors of their race. Furthermore, within an ethnic community, elites frequently create patronage networks where they provide their supporters with financial and social advantages in exchange for political allegiance. As people depend on their ethnic network for access to resources and opportunities, this strengthens their ethnic identities and allegiances. Such patronage structures, however, have the potential to widen ethnic gaps and fuel rivalry and conflict over scarce resources (Vermeersch, 2011).

Elites may use stories of historical wrongdoing and grievances to rally support for their ethnic group and fight off imagined foes. They frequently present conflicts as a battle for ethnic self-determination or as a continuation of historical injustices. This exploitation of past wrongs can stoke interethnic tensions and prolong violent and violent conflict cycles.

Media sources are also influenced by elites, who use incendiary rhetoric and misinformation to rally support and sway public opinion (Tseer, Sulemana and Marfo, 2022). This may heighten racial tensions, confirm negative perceptions, and cause disputes to escalate. Elites use the media to further divide societies and prevent the peaceful settlement of ethnic disputes.

Major ethnic groups in Ghana

Ghana is a West African nation renowned for its extensive ethnic variety. There are many different ethnic groups in Ghana, and each one has its own unique culture, language, and historical background. The principal ethnic groups in Ghana are:

1. Akan: Comprising various subgroups, including the Ashanti, Fante, Akyem, and Kwahu, the Akan are the largest ethnic group in Ghana. They primarily live in the southern and central regions of the nation. The Akan are well-known for their bright arts and crafts, traditional beliefs, and festivals. They also have a rich cultural legacy (Ndetei and Wangare, 2023).

2. Ewe: The home of the Ewe people is primarily in Ghana's Volta Region, close to the country's eastern border with Togo. Additionally, they can be found in regions of southwest Benin and southern Togo. The Ewe are well known for their fishing, farming, and lively musical traditions (Ndetei and Wangare, 2023).

3. Ga-Adangbe: The Greater Accra Region, which includes the nation's capital, Accra, is home to the Ga-Adangbe people. They are separated into the subgroups Ga and Adangbe. The Ga-Adangbe have a rich cultural legacy and are well-known for their artistic handicraft, drumming, and annual festivals (Ndetei and Wangare, 2023).

4. Mole-Dagbani: The Northern Region of Ghana, namely, is where the Mole-Dagbani ethnic group is most prevalent. Its subgroups include the Dagomba, Mamprusi, Gonja, Kusasi, and Nanumba. The Mole-Dagbani people primarily work in agriculture, particularly cattle rearing and subsistence farming (Ndetei and Wangare, 2023).

5. Gurma*:* The Upper East Region of Ghana, which borders Burkina Faso, is home to the majority of the Gurma population. They are renowned for their vivid traditional festivals, distinct cultural customs, and agricultural practices, such as millet and sorghum production.

Along with these significant ethnic groups, Ghana is also home to numerous smaller ethnic groups, including the Nzema, Sisala, Konkomba, Ahanta, and many others. With varying languages, customs, and social systems, each group adds to the nation's cultural tapestry (Ndetei and Wangare, 2023).

Historical context of ethnic conflicts in Ghana

Ghana's ethnic conflicts have a complicated historical background that spans the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. The brief historical background of ethnic conflicts in Ghana is as follows:

Pre-colonial era

 Ghana, once known as the Gold Coast, was home to a variety of ethnic groups that each had its own distinct cultures, dialects, and territories during the pre-colonial era. These groups interacted, traded, and engaged in wars with one another to varied degrees. Often, kinship, shared lineage, and territorial dominance were associated with ethnic identities. Although conflicts between various ethnic groups were widespread, they were usually small-scale and motivated by things like rivalry for resources, trading routes, or governmental influence (Keese, 2016).

Colonial era

 In the late 19th century, Ghana came under the rule of European colonial powers, mainly the British. Divide-and-rule strategies were used by the colonial government to favour some ethnic groups over others. They altered conventional systems of government and land ownership by establishing administrative entities and boundaries that frequently crossed those of already-existing ethnic areas. The colonial rulers' arbitrary boundary and division practices worsened interethnic tensions and planted the seeds for future wars. Additionally, the colonial government instituted regulations that gave some ethnic groups preference over others, giving them access to jobs in administration,

employment, and education. Due to this unequal treatment, marginalised groups developed resentment and a perception of favouritism, which sparked tensions between different ethnic groups.

Post-colonial era

Ghana attained independence from British colonial rule in 1957, beginning the post-colonial era. The patterns of ethnic conflicts, however, were still shaped by colonialism in the post-colonial era. Because of the unequal distribution of resources, political sway, and opportunities left over from the colonial era, some ethnic groups continue to experience chronic socioeconomic imbalances and feel marginalised. Ghana experienced periods of political unrest, military takeovers, and governmental upheavals after gaining independence. Since political elites frequently mobilised support along ethnic lines, widening gaps and escalating confrontations for their own political advantage, ethnic connections frequently played a part in these political upheavals (Jinadu, 2007).

Inter-ethnic relations were further strained by increased urbanisation, economic difficulties, and rivalry for limited resources. Conflicts have occasionally erupted over property disputes, ethnic representation in government, or discrimination on the basis of race. Cultural disparities, resentments from the past, and rivalry for political power all contributed to the escalation of ethnic tensions and violence.

Case studies of ethnic conflicts in Ghana

There have been several notable ethnic conflicts in Ghana that can serve as case studies to understand the dynamics and complexities of such conflicts. Here are a few case studies:

The Dagbon war (1994–2002)

The Abudus and Andanis, two significant ethnic groups living in the Dagbon Kingdom in northern Ghana, were parties to the dispute. A disagreement about the Dagbon chieftaincy's succession gave rise to the conflict. The Abudu and Andani tribes engaged in a bloody brawl that left many people dead and displaced. The battle brought to light the long-standing rivalries and struggles for dominance between the two groups, as well as the role those traditional institutions played in sustaining and escalating the tensions. There have been ongoing efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation, including mediation by traditional leaders and governmental authorities (Hirsch, 2012). The Dagbon conflict in Ghana provides insights into the interplay between the colonial legacy and the role of elites in ethnic conflicts.

Colonial legacy

The Dagbon ethnic conflict in Ghana was significantly influenced by colonialism. The British colonial bureaucracy severely damaged the sociopolitical institutions and power relationships that already existed in Dagbon. The British imposed indirect rule, instituted new administrative structures, and gave preference to some leaders and factions over others. These interventions rooted the seeds of upcoming wars by creating power inequalities. Additionally, Dagbon's ancient chieftaincy structure was disturbed by British colonial officials, who chose chiefs among those more receptive to their control. Due to this intervention, many factions vying for the chieftaincy developed tensions and questioned the validity of traditional authority. The Abudu-Andani dispute was sparked by colonial officials' manipulation of the chieftaincy. Colonial borders in Africa were drawn arbitrarily, disregarding pre-existing linguistic, cultural, and ethnic affiliations. Colonial borders were imposed in the case of Dagbon, combining various ethnic groups into a single administrative division. As a result, there were tensions and struggles for control over resources and authority between different tribes, which fuelled interethnic conflicts like the Abudu-Andani fight. To maintain control and

thwart a cohesive revolt against colonial rule, the British took advantage of the divides between the Abudu and Andani tribes. Besides, traditional Dagbon methods of resolving disputes were hampered by the colonial authorities' implementation of Western administrative procedures (Ahorsu, 2014). Indigenous dispute resolution techniques that were based on cultural customs and norms were compromised. The absence of these conventional methods left an empty slot and reduced the options for peaceful conflict settlement, which facilitated the escalation of the Abudu-Andani conflict.

Role of elites

The Dagbon ethnic conflict in Ghana involved various elites from the Abudu and Andani factions, as well as other individuals who played influential roles. Ya-Na Mahamadu Abdulai, also known as Mahamadu Abdulai IV, was the Ya-Na (paramount chief) during the Dagbon dispute and a well-known member of the Andani group. While his specific role in escalating the conflict may be subject to different interpretations and perspectives, it is worth considering that he was an important representative of the Andani faction and claimed the Dagbon chieftaincy, which was the main factor igniting the conflict between the Abudu and Andani tribes. Mahamadu Abdulai IV, the head of the Andani group, made a substantial contribution to the polarisation and friction between the factions by emphasising the legitimacy of the Andani claim. As a leading member of the Andani side, Mahamadu Abdulai IV had the power to organise supporters and bring them together to support the Andani cause. His power and leadership inside the group undoubtedly contributed to the energising of Andani supporters and their involvement in the battle. The environment of the confrontation, as well as the dynamics of provocation and retribution, must be taken into account (Ahorsu, 2014). Over a lengthy period, numerous occurrences, complaints, and retaliatory measures contributed to the strife between the factions. Tensions and violence may have increased as a result of Mahamadu Abdulai IV's reactions to the Abudu faction's provocations or actions.

Moreover, traditional leaders also played a role in escalating the conflict. Kampakuya Na Abdulai Yakubu Andani was a prominent figure within the Andani faction who served as the regent of Dagbon during certain periods of the conflict, and Bolin Lana Abdulai Mahamadu was a key figure within the Abudu faction and a contender for the Dagbon chieftaincy. Their actions, speeches, and decisions affected the tactics of their faction, led to the division of the groups, and increased hostilities. The intensity and level of their followers' involvement in the struggle escalated if they had been able to organise their groups around their claims to the chieftaincy and further their own interests.

The Bawku conflict (since 1994)

The Kusasi and Mamprusi ethnic groups are still at odds with one another in the Bawku region of northern Ghana, which is known as the Bawku War. Cycles of violent encounters involving attacks, retaliations, and tensions within communities have defined the conflict. Competition over land, political representation, and historical grievances are some of the conflict's underlying reasons. Due to the region's severe ethnic differences, widespread small arms proliferation, and constrained economic possibilities, the war has been difficult to end. Many peacebuilding projects have been made to lessen the conflict, some of which involve community and religious leaders (Longi, 2014).

Colonial legacy

New land tenure protocols were imposed during colonial authority, upsetting established patterns of land ownership and use. Conflicts over land rights and resource access resulted from the emergence of private land ownership and the commercialisation of land. Tensions and ethnic violence in the Bawku region have been greatly exacerbated by land disputes between the Kusasi and Mamprusi populations. Certain ethnic factions or groups were given additional political clout and

representation by the colonial government. As a result, other groups, such as the Kusasi or Mamprusi communities, were marginalised, which sparked anger and sentiments of exclusion. The Bawku dispute has been exacerbated by the uneven allocation of governmental power and wealth. In a study cited by Taylor and Francis Online, ninety per cent of the participants attributed the dispute to the actions taken by British colonists while J.G. Syme served as the district commissioner for Bawku. They said that the decision-making procedures that resulted in the selection of the initial Bawkunaba created the conditions for the strife that Bawku has been going through since its independence. One response cited colonialism as the cause, asking how the colonialists merged two different ethnic groups and expected to have a positive interaction between them (Tseer, Sulemana and Marfo, 2022). Another response outlined how the colonial rulers' choice to elevate the Bawkunaba over all other divisional chiefs in Bawkuland was the catalyst for this dispute. Placing them under the authority of a Mamprusi chief was not feasible because most of the chiefs were Kussasis.

Role of elites

Influential individuals from both ethnic groups have encouraged their followers during intra-group encounters whenever the Kusasi-Mamprusi dispute erupted. Awani Akuguri, who championed the cause of the group and sparked the installation of a Kusasi, Bawkunaba Abugragu Azoka, even before the Nayiri arrived on Yerimiah Mahamah, led the first Kusasi agitation towards the "emancipation" of Kusasis from the Mamprusis. Additionally, John Ndebugri was credited for being important in this, particularly during the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) period. He was the one who filed a petition with the PNDC administration challenging the legality of Yerimah Mahama's re-enskinment (Tseer, Sulemana and Marfo, 2022). The Mamprusi side also provided reports on the actions of ethnic elites. When the Nkrumah government was deposed, it was said that Adam Amande and Salifu Imoro had led the protests calling for Abugragu Azoka's ouster. They urged that both the 1957 decision and the Bawkunaba's title as a paramount chief be overturned. The Mamprusi elites who provided strong motives through rigorous outbidding efforts that fuelled and prolonged the Kusasi-Mamprusi war in the Bawku traditional territory were Salifu Mahami and Rahaman Gumah, whose names also prominently appeared in the interviews. It's interesting to note that they all received prestigious government posts later on (Yobi, 2015).

These case studies demonstrate the diverse factors contributing to ethnic conflicts in Ghana, including issues of land, traditional governance, historical grievances, and political representation, but all of these factors have a linkage to colonialist practices and were exacerbated by elite mobilization.

Conclusion

A multifaceted approach is required to effectively address ethnic conflicts in Africa. It requires acknowledging and respecting the historical legacies of colonialism as well as its consequences on ethnic dynamics. Initiatives for reconciliation, including truth-and-reconciliation commissions, can help to end past grievances and promote healing. Inclusive politics and governance that offer fair representation and balanced economic distribution are crucial for reducing ethnic conflicts. Making investments in infrastructure, education, and socioeconomic development in underprivileged areas can also help tackle underlying problems and reduce the allure of identity-based activism. The root causes of ethnic conflicts in Africa must be addressed in order to eliminate the effects of colonial-era prejudice. Promoting inclusive government, equitable resource allocation, and opportunity for all ethnic groups are components of this.

Promoting inclusive government, equitable resource allocation, and opportunity for all ethnic groups are components of this. To develop trust and promote social cohesion, efforts must be made to reconcile, communicate, and comprehend diverse populations. Additionally, reducing the effect of

colonial-era bias on post-colonial ethnic conflicts may be accomplished through resolving historical grievances, advancing justice, and guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for all individuals. In order to address elite mobilisation in ethnic conflicts, efforts must be made to advance inclusive government, bolster institutions, and encourage interethnic collaboration. Building institutions that reflect the interests of all ethnic groups, promoting equitable resource allocation, and challenging polarising myths are all vital. Additionally, initiatives to advance accountability and openness can aid in reducing the extent to which elites use ethnic identities for their own ends.

While ethnic identification is very important in Ghanaian society, it is also necessary to recognise that there are common national identities and initiatives to promote national cohesion among numerous ethnic communities. The multiethnic composition of the state presents chances and problems for social integration, nation-building, and governance. In Ghana, efforts need to be undertaken to address ethnic tensions through peacebuilding, reconciliation, and inclusive governance. Important stages in controlling and reducing ethnic tensions include the creation of democratic institutions, decentralisation of authority, and the encouragement of interethnic cooperation and discourse. Ethnic conflicts in Ghana have a long history, which emphasises the continued importance of resolving underlying issues, fostering social cohesion, and ensuring equal development for all ethnic groups.

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