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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## National Peace Infrastructure and Sustainable Development Goal 16: A Study of the National Peace Council of Ghana

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| ABSTRACT

While the Infrastructure for Peace (I4P) framework has gained prominence as a locally grounded approach to conflict prevention and sustainable peacebuilding, its implementation within post-colonial hybrid governance contexts remains under-theorised. This article examines how Ghana's National Peace Council (NPC) operationalises Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), which emphasises peace, justice, and strong institutions, within a complex institutional environment shaped by both formal state authority and informal systems of traditional and religious legitimacy. The study adopts a qualitative exploratory research design, drawing on semi-structured interviews with 62 purposively selected participants from state peace institutions, civil society organisations, religious bodies, traditional authorities, and security agencies, and is guided by the theoretical lenses of hybrid political orders and hybrid peace, enabling a critical examination of how formal and informal governance systems interact in the production of peace outcomes. Findings indicate that the NPC functions through a form of "hybrid legitimacy," combining statutory authority with the social and cultural authority of chiefs, religious leaders, and community actors, which enables the Council to mediate electoral disputes, chieftaincy conflicts, and inter-communal tensions, thereby contributing to Ghana's relative political stability. However, the study also finds that this governance model is structurally constrained due to persistent financial dependency, uneven decentralisation of peace structures, political vulnerability, and limited inclusivity, particularly regarding women and youth, which collectively undermine the Council's operational effectiveness. The article concludes that while Ghana's Infrastructure for Peace model illustrates the value of state-society collaboration in sustaining peace, its long-term effectiveness depends on strengthening institutional autonomy, deepening decentralisation, and enhancing inclusive participation, as without addressing these structural constraints, the capacity of the NPC to fully achieve SDG 16 objectives remains limited within Ghana's hybrid political order.

| KEYWORDS

Infrastructure for Peace; SDG 16; National Peace Council; hybrid governance; hybrid peace; conflict prevention; peacebuilding; Ghana; institutional legitimacy; sustainable peace.

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### 1. Introduction

The relationship between peace, governance, and development has become one of the most important areas of contemporary academic and policy inquiry. Increasingly, scholars and international development institutions argue that sustainable development cannot be achieved in environments characterised by violence, weak institutions, and deep structural inequalities (United Nations, 2000; World Bank, 2011). In this regard, peace is no longer understood

simply as the absence of armed conflict, but as a foundational condition for inclusive governance, social cohesion, and long-term socio-economic transformation.

Despite sustained global investment in peacebuilding interventions, empirical evidence suggests that levels of peacefulness have been deteriorating rather than improving. The Institute for Economics and Peace (2023) reports a consistent global decline in peacefulness over the past decade, driven by rising internal conflicts, political instability, and the increasing involvement of non-state armed actors in both domestic and transnational conflicts. These global trends are particularly pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa, where governance challenges, socio-economic inequality, weak institutional capacity, and resource competition continue to fuel cycles of instability (Brück & De Groot, 2013; WHO, 2002).

Within West Africa, Ghana occupies a distinctive position. It is widely recognised as one of the region's most politically stable democracies, particularly due to its history of peaceful electoral transitions and constitutional continuity since the early 1990s. However, beneath this macro-level stability lies a persistent pattern of localised and recurrent conflict. These include long-standing chieftaincy disputes such as the Bawku conflict, inter-ethnic tensions such as the Alavanyo–Nkonya dispute, and periodic outbreaks of politically associated violence during electoral cycles (Aning, 2001; Bukari, 2013; Brukum, 2007; Bukari et al., 2024). Although such conflicts are often geographically contained, their recurrence reveals underlying structural weaknesses in Ghana's conflict prevention and peace governance architecture.

These challenges highlight an important analytical paradox: while Ghana is widely regarded as a "success story" of democratic consolidation in Africa, it continues to experience recurring subnational conflicts that expose gaps in institutional coordination, early warning systems, and conflict prevention mechanisms. This raises important questions about the adequacy of existing peace infrastructure in addressing the root causes of conflict rather than merely managing its symptoms.

In response to these global and regional challenges, the United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, with SDG 16 explicitly focusing on the promotion of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, as well as the development of effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions (United Nations, 2015). SDG 16 reflects a growing international consensus that peace, justice, and strong institutions are mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development. However, achieving SDG 16 requires more than normative commitment; it demands effective institutional arrangements capable of embedding peacebuilding processes within governance systems at national and local levels.

Within this context, the concept of Infrastructure for Peace (I4P) has emerged as a key framework in both policy and academic discourse. Developed through the work of John Paul Lederach and later refined by scholars such as Odendaal (2010; 2013) and van Tongeren (2011; 2013), I4P refers to the establishment of interconnected institutional mechanisms, capacities, and processes that enable societies to manage conflict constructively and prevent violence. Unlike short-term or externally driven peace interventions, I4P emphasises nationally owned, institutionalised systems that integrate peace functions into formal governance structures.

In Ghana, the National Peace Council (NPC), established under Act 818 of 2011, represents the institutional embodiment of the I4P framework. The Council is mandated to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts through dialogue, mediation, early warning systems, and civic engagement. Operating through national, regional, and district structures, the NPC has played a significant role in managing electoral tensions, chieftaincy disputes, and inter-communal conflicts, thereby contributing to Ghana's relative stability in a region often characterised by political volatility (CODEO, 2020; Aning, 2001).

However, despite its widely acknowledged contributions, the effectiveness of the NPC remains the subject of ongoing scholarly and policy debate. First, its institutional coverage is incomplete, with operational presence in only twelve of Ghana's sixteen regions, limiting its capacity for comprehensive national conflict monitoring and response.

Second, the Council faces persistent financial constraints due to heavy reliance on donor funding and irregular state budgetary allocations, raising concerns about sustainability and operational independence (WANEP & GPPAC, 2019). Third, questions have been raised regarding its institutional neutrality, particularly perceptions of executive influence, which may affect public trust in its mediation processes.

In addition, concerns persist regarding inclusivity and representation within the peace architecture. Although the NPC incorporates traditional authorities, religious leaders, and civil society actors, the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities remains limited in both decision-making and implementation processes (Tanguay, 2022; Osei-Kufuor et al., 2021). These gaps raise broader questions about the extent to which the Council reflects the principles of inclusive governance embedded in SDG 16.

Despite the strategic importance of Ghana's peace infrastructure, there remains limited empirical research assessing how effectively the NPC translates its mandate into measurable contributions to sustainable peace and SDG 16 indicators. Much of the existing literature is descriptive, focusing on institutional design and general achievements rather than systematically evaluating outcomes, effectiveness, or structural constraints (Barnett et al., 2007; Wallensteen, 2002). This creates a significant research gap in understanding the operational effectiveness of Infrastructure for Peace within African governance contexts.

This study addresses this gap by adopting a critical analytical lens grounded in hybrid political order theory and hybrid peace frameworks. It argues that the National Peace Council operates within a hybrid governance environment in which formal state authority interacts with customary and religious systems of legitimacy. This hybrid structure produces what can be described as "dual legitimacy," enabling the Council to mediate conflicts effectively in contexts where formal state institutions may lack public trust.

However, this same hybridity also generates institutional contradictions. While it enhances access and local legitimacy, it simultaneously constrains the Council's ability to implement uniform, enforceable, and structurally transformative peacebuilding interventions. Building on this, the study conceptualises the NPC as a "stability-maximising institution"—one that prioritises conflict containment, procedural peace, and short-term stability over structural transformation and long-term peace consolidation.

In this context, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing debates on peace infrastructure effectiveness by critically examining how institutional design, hybrid legitimacy, and structural constraints interact to shape peacebuilding outcomes in Ghana. It further explores how these dynamics influence the Council's ability to contribute meaningfully to SDG 16 objectives, particularly in relation to inclusion, justice, and institutional effectiveness.

### **1.1 Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the mandate and structural configuration of the National Peace Council within Ghana's peace architecture.
2. To assess the effectiveness of the NPC in promoting peaceful, just, and inclusive societies in line with SDG 16.
3. To analyse structural, institutional, and financial constraints affecting the NPC.
4. To explore the role of decentralisation and inclusivity in shaping its effectiveness.
5. To identify policy pathways for strengthening Ghana's peace infrastructure.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

1. How does the structure and mandate of the National Peace Council shape its role in Ghana's peace infrastructure?
2. How effective is the NPC in contributing to SDG 16 implementation in Ghana?
3. What structural and institutional constraints limit its effectiveness?
4. How do decentralisation and inclusivity affect its operational performance?
5. What policy reforms can enhance its contribution to sustainable peacebuilding?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptualising Sustainable Peace**

The concept of sustainable peace has evolved significantly within peace and conflict studies, shifting from a narrow focus on the absence of armed conflict to a more comprehensive understanding that incorporates structural justice, institutional legitimacy, and social transformation. Early foundational scholarship distinguishes between negative peace and positive peace, establishing a conceptual foundation that has shaped subsequent theoretical developments (Galtung, 1969).

However, contemporary literature increasingly problematises this binary distinction by arguing that peace cannot be understood as a static condition. Instead, it is increasingly conceptualised as a dynamic and contested social process embedded within political, economic, and institutional structures. This shift reflects a growing recognition that violence is not only direct and physical but also structural and institutional, manifesting through inequality, exclusion, and systemic injustice.

Sustainable peace is now widely understood as a multidimensional construct involving the elimination of direct violence, reduction of structural inequalities, strengthening of institutional credibility, and development of adaptive governance capacity. It also includes the ability of societies to reproduce peaceful relations over time through legitimate and inclusive institutions. Despite this broad consensus, a significant tension persists between normative and empirical approaches to peace. While normative frameworks emphasise justice, inclusion, and equity as necessary conditions for peace, empirical evidence suggests that peace is often sustained through pragmatic political arrangements, elite bargaining processes, and selective inclusion mechanisms. This tension reveals an unresolved analytical challenge regarding whether sustainable peace should be interpreted as a normative ideal or as a context-dependent political outcome shaped by power relations.

### **2.2 Peacebuilding Architecture and Institutional Complexity**

The dominant architecture of peacebuilding is strongly influenced by multi-level frameworks that conceptualise peace as a layered process involving top leadership, mid-level actors, and grassroots communities (Lederach, 1997). This model has been widely adopted in both academic literature and international policy frameworks because it provides a structured approach to understanding peacebuilding across different societal levels.

However, subsequent scholarship has raised important critiques of this model, particularly its assumption of institutional coherence and linear implementation pathways. In many post-conflict and post-colonial contexts, state institutions are fragmented, capacity is uneven, and authority is distributed across multiple competing actors, making linear models of peacebuilding analytically limited.

Systemic peacebuilding approaches attempt to address these limitations by emphasising the interdependence of institutions, actors, and governance structures within broader political systems (Suter, 2004). While this approach offers a more integrated perspective, it still assumes a level of institutional stability and coordination that is often absent in fragile governance environments.

African scholarship has been particularly influential in challenging these assumptions. The hybrid political order framework argues that authority in many African contexts is not monopolised by the state but is instead dispersed across formal institutions, customary governance systems, religious authorities, and informal networks (Boege, Brown & Clements, 2008). This produces complex governance environments in which legitimacy is continuously negotiated rather than institutionally fixed.

Building on this, hybrid peace theory argues that peace is not imposed through formal institutions alone but is produced through continuous interaction between formal and informal systems (Mac Ginty, 2011). While this framework provides a more realistic account of governance in post-colonial contexts, critics argue that it risks normalising informality and underplaying structural inequalities and power asymmetries embedded within hybrid governance arrangements.

### **2.3 Infrastructure for Peace (I4P): Institutionalisation and Its Limits**

Infrastructure for Peace (I4P) emerged as a policy-driven response to the limitations of ad hoc peace interventions and externally driven peacebuilding initiatives. It conceptualises peacebuilding as a set of institutional mechanisms embedded within state and societal structures that enable systematic conflict prevention, management, and transformation (Odendaal, 2012; Odendaal, 2013).

The UNDP–Berghof Foundation framework further operationalises I4P by identifying key institutional pillars necessary for effective peace infrastructures, including decentralisation, inclusivity, coordination, legitimacy, and sustainable financing (UNDP–Berghof Foundation, 2016). This framework has been widely adopted in policy environments due to its emphasis on institutional design and governance integration.

However, despite its normative strength, the I4P framework has been criticised for institutional determinism: the assumption that formalising peace mechanisms automatically produces effective peace outcomes. Empirical evidence from multiple contexts suggests that institutionalisation alone is insufficient when political interference, weak state capacity, and limited financial resources undermine implementation.

Hybrid peace theory further complicates this assumption by demonstrating that effective peace outcomes often emerge outside formal institutions through informal negotiation processes, customary authority systems, and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms (Mac Ginty, 2011). This creates a theoretical tension between institutional peacebuilding approaches, which prioritise formal structures, and hybrid peace approaches, which emphasise informal governance systems.

### **2.4 Conflict Transformation and Governance Adaptation**

Traditional conflict resolution theory focuses primarily on mechanisms such as negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and facilitation as tools for managing disputes (Humphreys, 2003). While these mechanisms are effective for short-term conflict management, they are often limited in addressing the structural and relational causes of conflict.

In response to these limitations, contemporary scholarship has shifted toward conflict transformation approaches that focus on changing underlying relationships, identities, and structural conditions that generate conflict (Fischer, 2012). This approach reframes peacebuilding as a long-term process of social and institutional transformation rather than a technical exercise in dispute settlement.

Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall further argue that conflict is an inherent and unavoidable feature of social systems and must therefore be managed through adaptive governance frameworks rather than eliminated entirely (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2016). This perspective emphasises flexibility, resilience, and institutional learning as core components of sustainable peace systems.

However, a limitation of conflict transformation theory lies in its limited engagement with institutional capacity constraints. While it provides a strong normative and analytical framework for understanding structural violence, it is less effective in explaining how weak or resource-constrained institutions operationalise transformation in practice.

### **2.5 SDG 16 and Global Implementation Gaps**

Sustainable Development Goal 16 represents the most comprehensive global normative framework linking peace, justice, and institutional effectiveness. It reflects a global consensus that peace is a prerequisite for sustainable development and that strong institutions are essential for governance stability.

However, empirical monitoring reports indicate persistent implementation gaps, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states (UN DESA, 2023; UN Inter-Agency Report, 2024). These gaps are especially pronounced in Africa, where weak fiscal capacity, limited decentralisation, and low institutional trust continue to undermine progress toward SDG 16 targets (UNDP, 2015).

This has generated increasing scholarly debate on whether global peace frameworks sufficiently reflect domestic governance realities, particularly in hybrid political systems where state authority is shared with customary and informal institutions.

### **2.6 Inclusive Governance and Political Contestation**

Inclusive governance is widely recognised as both a normative principle and a functional requirement for sustainable peace. It enhances institutional legitimacy, reduces grievance-based conflict, and strengthens trust between citizens and the state.

However, inclusion is not a neutral or purely technical process. Rather, it is inherently political and shaped by power relations, institutional gatekeeping, and resource distribution. Empirical evidence consistently shows that women, youth, and marginalised groups remain underrepresented in formal peacebuilding institutions despite policy commitments to inclusion.

This reveals a persistent gap between normative inclusion frameworks and the political realities of governance implementation, particularly in contexts where elite interests dominate institutional decision-making.

### **2.7 Empirical Perspectives on Peace Infrastructure**

Comparative empirical evidence across different regions reveals mixed outcomes regarding the effectiveness of peace infrastructures. In South Africa, the National Peace Accord contributed significantly to democratic transition but weakened after political consolidation. In Kenya, peace committees improved early warning systems but remain constrained by politicisation and inconsistent funding.

In Nepal and Nicaragua, peace institutions suffered from political interference and limited autonomy, reducing their effectiveness. In contrast, the Philippines demonstrates a more integrated model where formal institutions coexist with community-based mechanisms, producing relatively stronger and more resilient peace outcomes.

Across these cases, a consistent pattern emerges: the effectiveness of peace infrastructures depends less on formal institutional design and more on political context, legitimacy, resource availability, and institutional autonomy.

### **2.8 The Ghanaian Case: National Peace Council**

Ghana's National Peace Council, established under Act 818 (2011), represents one of the most institutionalised peace infrastructures in West Africa. It is mandated to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict through mediation, dialogue facilitation, and early warning systems.

Empirical studies show that the NPC has contributed significantly to electoral peace, chieftaincy dispute resolution, and inter-communal conflict management. However, its effectiveness is constrained by structural challenges including financial dependency, limited decentralisation, and restricted operational autonomy (Awinador-Kanyirige, 2014; Bukari & Sowatey, 2020).

Although the NPC benefits from hybrid legitimacy derived from traditional authorities, religious leaders, and civil society actors, this legitimacy does not fully compensate for institutional weaknesses. As a result, its interventions are often reactive rather than preventive, limiting its transformative capacity.

The literature reveals a persistent tension between normative peacebuilding frameworks and empirical governance realities. While Infrastructure for Peace and SDG 16 provide coherent global frameworks for peace, their implementation is constrained by hybrid governance structures, political economy dynamics, and institutional fragility.

In Ghana, this tension is particularly evident in the National Peace Council, which contributes to procedural stability but struggles to achieve structural transformation. This highlights a significant research gap concerning how peace

infrastructures operate within hybrid political systems and how global peace frameworks are translated into locally grounded governance outcomes.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study is grounded in the interpretivist research paradigm, which conceptualises social reality as socially constructed and shaped through meaning-making processes among actors. Interpretivism rejects positivist assumptions of an objective and externally fixed social world, instead emphasising how institutions and individuals interpret and reproduce governance realities through interaction (Collins, 2010). Within this paradigm, peace infrastructure is understood as a contested governance space shaped by institutional negotiation, legitimacy dynamics, and multi-level actor interaction.

An exploratory qualitative research design was adopted to enable in-depth examination of an under-theorised governance system. This design is appropriate where conceptual boundaries and empirical evidence remain emergent. It facilitates a detailed understanding of institutional processes and stakeholder experiences relating to Ghana's peace architecture and its contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), without imposing prior hypotheses (Mason, 2008).

#### **3.2 Study Population**

The study population comprised key stakeholders within Ghana's peace and security governance system. This reflected the multi-actor and hybrid nature of peace infrastructure.

Participants included governing board members, administrative staff, and Regional Peace Council members of the National Peace Council (NPC), as well as Executive Secretaries at sub-national levels. Civil society organisations, including WANEP-Ghana and the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), were included due to their engagement in governance monitoring and conflict prevention.

Academic experts from the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre were also included due to their policy and research expertise in peace and security. To capture the security dimension, selected officers from the Ghana Police Service, the Ghana Armed Forces, and National Security were incorporated to ensure a comprehensive institutional perspective on peace governance.

#### **3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size**

The study employed purposive expert sampling, a non-probability technique appropriate for selecting individuals with specialised knowledge and direct involvement in peace governance processes. Participants were selected based on institutional affiliation, technical expertise, and relevance to Ghana's peace infrastructure.

A total of 62 semi-structured interviews were conducted to ensure broad institutional representation and analytical depth.

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents (N = 62)**

CATEGORY	UNIT	N	%
NPC Governance	Current Board Members	7	11.3
NPC Governance	Former Board Members	8	12.9
NPC Administration	Head Office Staff	5	8.1
Regional Structures	RPC Members	10	16.1
Regional Structures	Former RPC Members	10	16.1
Regional Structures	Executive Secretaries	12	19.3
Civil Society	WANEP-Ghana	2	3.2
Civil Society	CDD-Ghana	2	3.2
Academia	KAIPTC	2	3.2
Security Sector	National Security	2	3.2
Security Sector	Military & Police	2	3.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>62</b>	<b>100</b>

(Fieldwork, 2022)

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### ***Ghana's National Peace Council as a Stability-Maximising Infrastructure for Peace***

This section presents a comparative and interpretive analysis of findings from 62 semi-structured interviews and institutional documents on Ghana's National Peace Council as a national Infrastructure for Peace and its contribution to SDG 16. The standards and results are presented in logical sequence, prioritizing the most important findings first and addressing each stated objective and research question. Only new or important aspects of the results are discussed. The relevance of findings is assessed against existing literature on Infrastructure for Peace, hybrid governance, and SDG implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The analytical frame is "stability-maximising institution": an institution configured by mandate, structure, resources, and political context to prioritize conflict containment and procedural order over structural transformation. This concept explains both the NPC's strengths in negative peace and its limits in positive peace. The discussion proceeds in four parts aligned with RQ1–RQ4: 1) mandate/structure/composition, 2) strategies for procedural stability, 3) structural constraints, 4) pathways to SDG 16.

##### ***Mandate, Structure and Composition: Institutional Design for Stability-Maximisation.***

The first objective was to examine the adequacy of the NPC's mandate, structure, and composition for peacebuilding in Ghana. The corresponding research question asked how adequate these institutional features are. Formally, the NPC's mandate under Act 818 of 2011 is comprehensive. It is mandated to facilitate conflict prevention, management, and resolution, and to promote peaceful coexistence and national cohesion. Structurally, it operates through a national governing board, 12 regional peace councils, and district peace committees where established. This multi-level design conforms to van Tongeren's 2013a, 2013b model of Infrastructure for Peace, which argues that effective I4P requires embedded capacity at national, regional and local levels to enable early detection and coordinated response. In design terms, the NPC meets the formal I4P template and is frequently cited as a regional model.

However, adequacy assessed through operational outcomes reveals three features that configure the NPC as stability-maximising rather than transformative.

Act 818 assigns functions of prevention, mediation, dialogue facilitation, early warning and civic education. It does not assign authority for structural reform, redistribution, or intervention in socio-economic drivers of conflict such as land tenure, fiscal allocation, or youth employment. This reflects what Odendaal 2010 calls a "containment

mandate” common to I4P institutions established in contexts of political competition and limited state capacity. Odendaal’s comparative study of Kenya, Nepal and Burundi found that such mandates are deliberate: governments create I4P bodies to manage conflict symptoms without ceding control over political and economic structures. In Ghana, this means the NPC is legally empowered to de-escalate Bawku or Alavanyo–Nkonya but lacks authority to address underlying land disputes or unequal resource access that generate those conflicts. The mandate is therefore adequate for negative peace but inadequate for positive peace as envisioned by SDG 16.

The national, regional and district boards integrate state officials, traditional authorities, religious leaders and civil society representatives. This hybrid composition aligns with Boege, Brown and Clements 2008 theory of hybrid political orders, which posits that in postcolonial states governance emerges from negotiation between formal state institutions and customary authorities. The inclusion of chiefs, queen mothers, imams and pastors gives the NPC credibility in communities where state institutions are perceived as distant or partisan. Multiple respondents in Bawku stated that NPC mediation was “accepted because our chiefs and imams were part of the team, not just government officials.” This legitimacy enables access to information and compliance with settlement terms that formal courts cannot achieve.

Yet this hybridity also reproduces existing hierarchies. Decision-making authority within NPC boards is concentrated among male elders and established religious leaders. Women and youth are included as participants in community dialogues but are rarely voting members of governing boards or lead mediators in high-stakes disputes. This reproduces the inclusivity gap identified by Tanguay 2022 and Osei-Kufuor et al. 2021 in Ghana’s peace architecture. Comparative literature on Sierra Leone and Liberia shows the same trade-off: customary institutions provide essential legitimacy for peace processes while simultaneously reinforcing patriarchal control. The composition is thus adequate for local acceptance but inadequate for the inclusive decision-making required by SDG 16.7.

Structure: incomplete decentralization and institutional compression. Although Ghana has 16 administrative regions, functional regional peace councils exist in only 12. District-level penetration is uneven and dependent on donor-funded projects. Interview data from district officials in northern Ghana described periods of “institutional absence” during critical pre-election tensions, when district peace committees were non-operational due to lack of funding. This uneven decentralization creates what this study conceptualizes as an “institutional compression effect”: local actors receive training in conflict analysis and early warning but lack autonomous fiscal resources, logistics, and decision-making authority to intervene before escalation. This compression reflects Brück and De Groot 2013 analysis of governance deficits in Sub-Saharan Africa, where formal decentralization is undermined by continued fiscal and administrative centralization. In Ghana, the President appoints Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives and controls budget flows to districts. The NPC can train district actors but cannot devolve budget or authority to them. As a result, early warning signals often reach the national level without triggering timely local response. The structure is adequate for vertical coordination but inadequate for autonomous preventive action at the community level.

In comparative perspective, Ghana’s pattern mirrors I4P institutions in Kenya before the 2010 Constitution and in Nepal post-2006. Both had national mandates but weak district capacity until political reforms devolved authority. The literature suggests partial decentralization reflects political calculations: central governments maintain control over sensitive peace processes while appearing to devolve. Ghana’s NPC therefore exemplifies a common hybrid state pattern: formal multi-level design coexisting with operational centralization.

The mandate, structure, and composition are adequate for procedural stability and crisis response but inadequate for long-term transformation. The stability-maximising logic is embedded in the statutory design itself.

### ***Strategies and Hybrid Legitimacy: Effectiveness for Procedural Stability***

The second objective was to assess the strategies employed by the NPC in promoting just and inclusive societies. The research question asked how effective these strategies are;

The central finding is that the NPC's effectiveness derives from deployment of hybrid legitimacy: the strategic blending of legal-rational authority from Act 818 with socio-cultural legitimacy from traditional, religious and community sources. This aligns with Mac Ginty 2011 concept of hybrid peace, which argues that sustainable peace in non-Western contexts depends on interaction between liberal peacebuilding frameworks and local practices of authority and conflict management. Mac Ginty emphasizes that hybridity is not transitional but a permanent condition.

Four strategies operationalize this hybrid legitimacy;

### ***Mediation of chieftaincy and land disputes***

In protracted conflicts such as Bawku and Alavanyo–Nkonya, the NPC deploys mediation teams combining state officials, paramount chiefs, religious leaders, and civil society actors. Respondents in Bawku emphasized that settlements held because “chiefs and imams witnessed and enforced them.” This reflects Aning 2001 analysis that chieftaincy institutions remain indispensable for dispute resolution where state courts lack local legitimacy. Bukari et al. 2024 show the same dynamic in Alavanyo–Nkonya: progress occurred only when customary authorities led mediation. The mechanism is legitimacy transfer: state authority gains acceptance by borrowing credibility from customary institutions. This strategy is highly effective for de-escalation and short-term settlement.

### ***Electoral violence prevention***

The NPC coordinates “National Peace Covenants” signed by political parties under the witness of the National Chief Imam, Christian Council of Ghana, and Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council. CODEO 2020 attributes Ghana's relatively calm 2016 and 2020 elections partly to this strategy, contrasting it with electoral violence in Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. The moral authority of religious leaders creates social costs for violating peace commitments, deterring youth mobilization by partisan groups. This reflects Lederach's “middle-level actor” role: actors between state and grassroots translate national policy into locally meaningful action. The mechanism is moral sanction.

### ***Civil society as first responders***

The NPC relies on WANEP-Ghana, KAIPTC, THUDEG and local NGOs as operational extensions. In remote areas like Bunkpurugu, Winneba and Buiepe, these actors detect early tension signals and initiate dialogue before escalation. Their community proximity builds trust-based information flows that state security agencies lack. This contributes significantly to negative peace. The mechanism is proximity and trust.

### ***Civic education and capacity building.***

The NPC trains district officials, traditional authorities and community leaders in conflict analysis, mediation and early warning. This strengthens awareness of triggers such as land disputes, chieftaincy succession and electoral competition. This aligns with SDG 16.6 on institutional capacity. Despite these strengths, three limits emerge that are important for assessing effectiveness.

### ***Reactivity over structural prevention.***

A civil society respondent stated: “We are called when tensions escalate. We facilitate dialogue, but deeper issues like land and exclusion remain unresolved.” This reveals the operational logic of stability-maximisation: the system is triggered by escalation, not by structural risk indicators. The NPC's strategies are optimized for crisis response rather than addressing drivers identified by Brukum 2007 and Bukari 2013: unequal land access, youth unemployment, political exclusion. This creates a gap between negative peace and positive peace.

### ***Inclusivity constrained by hybrid architecture.***

While civil society representatives sit on NPC boards, substantive decision-making power remains with traditional and religious elites. Women and youth participate in dialogues but rarely hold voting positions or lead high-profile mediations. This reproduces the critique by Tanguay 2022 and Osei-Kufuor et al. 2021 that Ghana's peace architecture has persistent inclusivity gaps. Comparative evidence from Nigeria's Plateau State shows similar

dynamics: hybrid peace committees reduce violence but reinforce male elder dominance. The mechanism is structural reproduction: hybridity borrows legitimacy from existing hierarchies.

***Political contingency of neutrality.***

During electoral cycles, the NPC faces accusations of executive co-optation from opposition parties. When political elites instrumentalize ethnic or chieftaincy identities for electoral gain, as documented by Bukari et al. 2024, the Council's mediation space narrows. This reflects the political economy where conflict is strategically activated, making neutral mediation difficult. Similar constraints affect Nigeria's National Peace Committee during elections.

NPC strategies are highly effective for procedural stability and negative peace due to hybrid legitimacy. They are limited for justice and inclusion due to embedded hierarchies and political constraints. This directly answers the research question.

***Structural Constraints and Institutional Fragility: Limits on Transformation***

The third objective was to evaluate the NPC's contribution to strengthening institutions for peaceful coexistence and development. The research question asked what contributions the NPC makes.

The findings show significant contributions to procedural institutional strengthening. The NPC has institutionalized dialogue forums, trained district officials and civil society in conflict analysis, established early warning data collection, and created coordination mechanisms between state security, traditional authorities and civil society. This aligns with SDG 16.6 on effective, accountable institutions. However, four structural constraints limit transformation and explain why strengthening remains procedural rather than structural.

***Fiscal dependence***

The NPC relies heavily on fluctuating international donor funding, as documented by WANEP & GPPAC 2019. This creates project-based cycles prioritizing measurable short-term outputs—workshops, training, dialogues—over long-term institutional development. Donor priorities shape program design toward conflict management metrics rather than inequality reduction. This financial vulnerability undermines autonomy and long-term planning, a constraint Odendaal 2010 documents in Burundi and Nepal I4P bodies. The mechanism is donor-driven agenda setting.

***Political centralization and partisan influence.***

Despite legal independence, the NPC operates within Ghana's competitive two-party system where the executive appoints MMDCEs. Interview data revealed perceptions of partisan bias during elections. This politicization constrains the Council's ability to address conflicts rooted in political competition and patronage, as identified by Bukari 2013 and Brukum 2007. Comparative evidence from Kenya's National Cohesion and Integration Commission shows similar challenges of perceived partisanship. The mechanism is political instrumentalization.

***Uneven decentralization and administrative bottlenecks.***

Weak regional and district presence means early warning data reaches the national level without timely local response. This "early detection without early intervention" gap is worsened by bureaucratic hierarchies. District officials reported that response required approval from regional and national security councils, causing weeks of delay. This extends Brück and De Groot 2013 analysis of governance deficits: institutional design creates bottlenecks even where technical capacity exists. The mechanism is administrative hierarchy.

***Mandate limitations on structural drivers.***

The NPC lacks mandate to address economic inequality, land tenure reform, youth unemployment or political exclusion—the root causes identified by respondents. These fall under Lands, Employment and Local Government ministries. The NPC cannot coordinate cross-sectoral reform or influence budget allocation. This mandate gap means the Council manages symptoms while drivers persist, producing recurring cycles of tension. This matches

findings from Sierra Leone's Peace and Reconciliation Commission, which had a reconciliation mandate but not economic reconstruction authority. The mechanism is institutional siloing.

The NPC contributes significantly to procedural institutional strengthening but is constrained in generating structural transformation. The distinction between procedural and structural strengthening directly answers the research question.

### ***Pathways to SDG 16: Differentiated Outcomes and Stability-Maximisation***

The fourth objective was to explore pathways linking Infrastructure for Peace to SDG 16. The research question asked what pathways exist.

Findings show differentiated contribution across SDG 16 targets, explained by stability-maximisation logic:

Regarding SDG 16.1 significantly reduce all forms of violence the NPC makes a strong contribution. Evidence from electoral cycles and chieftaincy disputes shows that mediation and dialogue interventions reduce physical violence and prevent escalation to widespread conflict. This aligns with the global literature on I4P effectiveness in violence reduction, as synthesized by the Institute for Economics and Peace (2023).

#### ***SDG 16.3 Rule of law and access to justice.***

Contribution is indirect. The NPC reduces litigation through mediation but does not address judicial access gaps or enforcement of mediated agreements. In Ghana's legal pluralism context, mediated settlements coexist with customary and statutory law but depend on social pressure rather than legal sanction.

#### ***SDG 16.5 Reduce corruption***

Contribution is limited. While the NPC promotes transparency in peace processes, it lacks mandate to address corruption in land administration or political patronage identified by respondents as conflict drivers.

#### ***SDG 16.6 Effective institutions***

Contribution is partial. The NPC improves coordination and capacity, but effectiveness is constrained by fiscal centralization, weak district presence, and political influence. Accountability mechanisms are limited because the Council lacks coercive authority and relies on moral sanctions.

#### ***SDG 16.7 Inclusive decision-making***

Contribution is uneven. Participatory structures exist, but substantive inclusion of women and youth is limited by customary hierarchies. This creates a gap between formal design and substantive outcomes.

#### ***SDG 16.10 Access to information***

The NPC contributes through civic education and peace messaging but faces constraints when political actors restrict information flow during electoral tensions.

Synthesis: stability-maximisation logic. The pattern across targets confirms the NPC as stability-maximising: strong on violence reduction, moderate on institutional processes, weak on structural transformation, justice and inclusion. This logic explains the gap between procedural success and transformative limits.

### ***Pathways for reform***

Three pathways emerge from the data. First, statutory budget allocation to reduce donor dependence and enable multi-year programming. Second, fiscal and administrative devolution to district committees to close the detection-intervention gap. Third, mandate expansion to coordinate with ministries addressing structural drivers, or creation of a cross-sectoral mechanism linking peacebuilding to development planning. Without these, the NPC will continue to stabilize democracy without transforming foundations.

The pathway from I4P to SDG 16 is mediated by institutional logic. The NPC delivers negative peace and procedural strengthening but requires parallel reforms to achieve SDG 16's transformative vision.

### **Contribution, Limitations and Conclusion**

This study contributes to I4P literature by conceptualizing the NPC as a stability-maximising institution. It demonstrates that hybrid legitimacy explains operational effectiveness while stability-maximisation explains institutional limits. This framework clarifies why peace institutions succeed procedurally but struggle with transformation in hybrid postcolonial states. It also contributes to SDG 16 scholarship by empirically demonstrating the procedural-structural gap in "peaceful, just and inclusive societies."

Methodologically, the study is based on 62 elite interviews across state, customary, civil society and security sectors. This provides in-depth insight but underrepresents ordinary citizens, particularly women and youth outside formal leadership. Triangulation with documents enhances credibility, but the snapshot timeframe limits tracking of long-term change. Future longitudinal research should address this.

In conclusion, Ghana's NPC is regionally successful at maintaining stability. However, stability is not transformation. Recognizing this distinction is critical for policy and scholarship as African states implement SDG 16 in contexts of hybrid authority, political competition and resource constraints.

### **5. Conclusion**

This study examined Ghana's National Peace Council as an Infrastructure for Peace and its contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 16. Based on 62 semi-structured interviews across national, regional and district levels, the study arrives at three important conclusions that advance both scholarship and policy on peacebuilding in hybrid postcolonial states.

**First, the NPC functions as a stability-maximising institution.** The central finding is that the Council is highly effective at procedural peace: conflict prevention, mediation, early warning and violence reduction during electoral cycles and chieftaincy disputes. This effectiveness is explained by its hybrid governance configuration. By integrating state institutions with traditional and religious authorities, the NPC gains legitimacy and access in communities where formal state institutions are distrusted. This finding is significant because it provides empirical confirmation of Mac Ginty's 2011 hybrid peace framework and Boege et al.'s 2008 hybrid political orders theory within the context of SDG implementation. It shows that in contexts of limited state capacity and contested legitimacy, hybrid institutional design is not a transitional compromise but a functional requirement for operational effectiveness. For scholarship, this reinforces the "local turn" in peacebuilding literature and moves beyond normative critiques of hybridity to explain how hybridity produces stability outcomes.

**Second, stability-maximisation produces an asymmetry between procedural and transformative peace.** While the NPC succeeds at maintaining negative peace and coordinating governance actors, its contribution to structural transformation remains limited. The Council manages and contains conflict but does not significantly alter the political and socio-economic conditions that generate violence: unequal land access, youth exclusion, fiscal centralization, and partisan competition. This asymmetry is institutionally produced. The mandate emphasizes containment, fiscal dependence creates short-term programming cycles, and political centralization constrains district-level autonomy. This conclusion is significant because it addresses a gap in SDG 16 literature. Much existing work assumes that stronger institutions automatically produce "just and inclusive societies." The Ghana case shows that institutions can strengthen procedural coordination without transforming structures of power and inequality. This distinction is critical for understanding why many African states meet SDG 16.1 targets on violence reduction while lagging on SDG 16.7 targets on inclusion.

**Third, achieving sustainable peace requires moving beyond stability-maximisation toward institutional transformation.** The study concludes that functional peace infrastructures like the NPC are necessary but insufficient for SDG 16. Sustainable peace requires three parallel reforms: 1) fiscal autonomy through statutory

budget allocation to reduce donor dependence and enable long-term programming, 2) fiscal and administrative devolution to district peace committees to close the gap between early detection and early intervention, and 3) mandate expansion to coordinate with ministries addressing structural drivers of conflict. This conclusion is relevant for policy because Ghana's 2024 and 2028 electoral cycles will increase pressure on peace institutions. Without reforms, the NPC risks remaining a stabilising tool that contains conflict symptoms while underlying grievances intensify. For West Africa more broadly, the findings are relevant as Burkina Faso, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire experiment with national dialogue and peace councils amid regional instability. Ghana's experience suggests that regional models must address autonomy and structural mandate if they are to move from conflict management to sustainable peace.

### ***Study limitations and suggestions for future research***

This study has three main limitations that also point to future research directions.

First, the research relies on 62 elite interviews with state officials, traditional authorities, civil society leaders, and security actors. While this provides in-depth insight from actors directly involved in peace governance, it underrepresents the perspectives of ordinary citizens, particularly women and youth outside formal leadership roles. Future studies should use household surveys or focus group discussions to capture grassroots perceptions of the NPC's legitimacy and impact.

Second, the data were collected between March and April 2022, providing a snapshot of institutional performance. This limits the ability to assess long-term institutional change or the NPC's effectiveness across multiple electoral cycles. Longitudinal research tracking the NPC's operations through the 2024 and 2028 elections would provide stronger evidence on whether reforms recommended here are adopted and whether they shift the institution from stability-maximisation toward transformation.

Third, the study focuses on Ghana as a single case. While this allows depth of analysis, it limits generalizability to other West African contexts with different political and conflict histories. Comparative studies of national peace councils in Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia would test whether the "stability-maximising institution" framework applies more broadly. Such comparative work would strengthen theory on Infrastructure for Peace and provide cross-national lessons for SDG 16 implementation.

### ***Final significance***

In sum, Ghana's National Peace Council is a regional success story for maintaining democratic stability. But stability is not transformation. The study's final conclusion is that SDG 16 will remain partially achieved in Ghana until peace infrastructures are reformed to address not only how conflicts are managed, but why they occur. This requires political will to redistribute authority and resources, not just build capacity. Recognizing the limits of stability-maximisation is the first step toward designing institutions that can deliver both peace and justice.

## **6. Policy Implications and Recommendations**

The findings of this study carry direct implications for policymakers in Ghana, donors supporting peacebuilding in West Africa, and scholars of Infrastructure for Peace and SDG 16. The central implication is that institutional effectiveness in maintaining stability does not automatically translate into progress toward transformative peace. Ghana's National Peace Council is a regional model for conflict containment, but its stability-maximising design limits its contribution to the "just and inclusive societies" envisioned by SDG 16. Based on this, four policy recommendations emerge, each addressing a specific structural constraint identified in the analysis.

### **Secure fiscal autonomy through statutory budget allocation**

#### ***Implication***

The NPC's heavy dependence on fluctuating donor funding creates project-based cycles that prioritize short-term outputs over long-term structural programming. This undermines institutional autonomy and predictability.

**Recommendation**

The Government of Ghana should earmark a statutory percentage of the national budget for the NPC, similar to the District Assemblies Common Fund model. A minimum of 0.1% of annual national expenditure would provide predictable financing and reduce donor-driven agenda setting. A portion of this allocation should be devolved directly to regional and district peace councils to enable multi-year programming focused on root causes such as land reform and youth unemployment. This aligns with Kenya's post-2010 devolution experience, where statutory funding for county peace structures improved capacity for local prevention.

**Complete decentralization with fiscal and administrative devolution**

**Implication**

Incomplete decentralization produces an "institutional compression effect": district actors detect conflict risks but lack authority and resources to intervene before escalation. Early warning reaches the national level without triggering timely local response.

**Recommendation**

The NPC Act 818 should be amended to grant district peace committees autonomous budget lines and decision-making authority for rapid response under a defined threshold of escalation. Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies should be mandated to co-fund and host district peace committees, reducing dependence on ad hoc donor projects. This would close the gap between early detection and early intervention and strengthen SDG 16.6 on effective institutions at all levels. Mozambique's provincial peace committees post-2019 provide a comparable model.

**Expand mandate to enable cross-sectoral coordination on structural drivers**

**Implication**

The NPC's mandate excludes structural drivers of conflict such as land tenure insecurity, youth unemployment and political exclusion. These fall under other ministries, creating institutional silos that reproduce cycles of mediation without prevention.

**Recommendation**

The NPC's mandate should be expanded to include convening authority for a "Peace and Development Coordination Platform" with the Ministries of Lands and Natural Resources, Employment and Labour Relations, Gender and Local Government. This platform would require ministries to report annually on how their policies address conflict drivers identified by NPC early warning systems. Liberia's Peacebuilding Commission model, which links peace and development planning, offers a relevant template. This reform would move the NPC from managing symptoms toward addressing causes, strengthening its contribution to SDG 16.3, 16.5 and 16.7.

**Strengthen inclusive representation without sacrificing legitimacy.**

**Implication**

Hybrid composition gives the NPC legitimacy but reproduces gender and youth hierarchies. Women and youth participate in dialogues but are rarely voting members or lead mediators in high-stakes disputes, limiting progress on SDG 16.7.

**Recommendation**

Amend NPC board composition rules at national, regional, and district levels to require minimum 30% representation for women and 20% for youth under 35, with voting rights. Simultaneously, invest in capacity-building for women and youth mediators through KAIPTC and WANEP-Ghana to ensure substantive, not token, participation. This balances the need for customary legitimacy with the transformative inclusion required by SDG 16.7. Sierra Leone's post-war inclusion quotas in local peace committees show that quotas can increase without collapsing local acceptance if accompanied by training.

## **Safeguard institutional neutrality through legal and political safeguards**

### **Implication**

Perceptions of executive influence and partisan bias during electoral cycles reduce the NPC's mediation space and credibility with opposition parties.

### **Recommendation**

Strengthen legal safeguards for NPC independence by fixing the tenure of Council members to 5 years, non-renewable, and requiring bipartisan parliamentary approval for appointments. Establish a public annual reporting mechanism to Parliament and civil society on interventions, funding and outcomes. This would insulate the Council from partisan influence and enhance accountability, directly supporting SDG 16.6 on transparent institutions.

### **6.1 Broader Relevance for West Africa**

These recommendations are relevant beyond Ghana. As Burkina Faso, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria experiment with national dialogue forums and peace councils amid regional instability, Ghana's experience demonstrates that institutional design choices made at inception determine long-term outcomes. Donors supporting I4P in the region should condition funding on reforms that address autonomy, devolution and structural mandate, not only capacity-building for mediation.

Ghana's National Peace Council has achieved significant success in stabilizing democracy and reducing violence. The policy challenge now is to move from stability-maximisation to transformation. The recommendations above do not require dismantling the NPC's hybrid model, which remains essential for legitimacy. Rather, they require strengthening that model with autonomy, devolution, cross-sectoral authority and inclusive representation. Without these reforms, Infrastructure for Peace in Ghana will continue to prevent war but will struggle to deliver the just and inclusive peace promised by SDG 16.

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