

TAKEAWAYS FROM A SEMINAR HELD AT THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF DEFENCE STUDIES ON 11TH JUNE 2026

A seminar was held at the National College of Defence Studies on 11th June 2026, to discuss the topic: “*National Cohesion and Security for Sustainable Development*”. Discussants were drawn from the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, National Security Secretariat and the Peace Council. The takeaways from the seminar are discussed in this write-up.

National cohesion is the degree of unity, trust, and shared identity among citizens within a state. It reflects the willingness of diverse groups to coexist peacefully, collaborate, and pursue common national aspirations. In a pluralistic society such as Ghana, characterised by more than seventy ethnic groups and diverse religious and political affiliations, national cohesion is not merely a social ideal but a strategic necessity. Sustainable development, by contrast, requires a stable environment in which economic growth, social progress, and environmental stewardship can thrive. Security, therefore, serves as the bridge between national cohesion and sustainable development. Without cohesion, security becomes fragile; without security, development efforts are undermined. Consequently, fostering national cohesion is fundamental to achieving sustainable and inclusive national development.

Firstly, national cohesion provides the foundation for security. That it enhances security by fostering trust, tolerance, and a sense of belonging among citizens is beyond dispute. When people identify with a common national purpose rather than narrow ethnic, religious, or political interests, the likelihood of conflict, violence, and social unrest is significantly reduced. Ghana’s reputation as one of Africa’s most peaceful democracies has largely been sustained by the ability of its diverse populations to coexist and resolve differences through dialogue and constitutional processes. However, rising political polarisation, misinformation, and declining public trust in institutions pose significant threats to this cohesion. Deep divisions create an “us versus them” mentality that weakens social bonds and undermines collective national security efforts. Therefore, strengthening national identity, promoting mutual respect, and reinforcing social trust are essential to maintaining peace and stability.

Furthermore, security enables sustainable development. Security and development are arguably mutually reinforcing. Sustainable development cannot flourish in an environment marked by insecurity, conflict, crime, or social instability. A secure nation attracts investment, promotes economic activity, protects critical infrastructure, and ensures the uninterrupted delivery of social services. Ghana’s national and local governance frameworks recognise this relationship by

integrating urban safety, climate resilience, infrastructure development, and effective resource management into national development planning. Security enables governments to focus resources on education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic transformation rather than on conflict management and crisis response. Moreover, communities that enjoy peace and security are better placed to engage in productive economic activities and contribute meaningfully to national growth.

Moreover, inclusive governance strengthens national resilience. National cohesion and security are strengthened when governance systems are inclusive, accountable, and responsive to citizens' needs. Effective decentralisation, participatory development planning, equitable resource allocation, and local economic development help reduce exclusion and marginalisation. Institutions such as the judiciary, the legislature, civil society organisations, traditional authorities, and the National Peace Council play critical roles in promoting dialogue, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, harnessing Ghana's diversity through inclusive policies, civic education, and intercultural engagement can turn differences into sources of innovation and national strength. National resilience is built when citizens trust state institutions, feel represented in decision-making, and share a common commitment to national progress. Such resilience enables societies to withstand political, economic, environmental, and security shocks while maintaining stability and development momentum.

In conclusion, national cohesion, security, and sustainable development are inseparable components of national progress. Cohesion builds the trust and unity needed for peace; security provides the stability required for development; and sustainable development strengthens social inclusion and national resilience. For Ghana to realise its long-term development aspirations, efforts must focus on reducing polarisation, strengthening institutions, promoting inclusive governance, and fostering a strong sense of national identity. A cohesive society is more secure, and a secure society is better placed to achieve sustainable development and shared prosperity.

Key Points

In light of the foregoing, the following key points were identified:

- ***Strengthen Civic and Peace Education:*** Integrate national cohesion, citizenship, and peacebuilding education into school curricula and public awareness programmes.
- ***Promote Inclusive Governance:*** Ensure equitable participation of all social, ethnic, religious, gender, and political groups in decision-making processes at national and local levels.
- ***Address Political Polarisation:*** Encourage issue-based politics, strengthen inter-party dialogue mechanisms, and discourage winner-takes-all governance practices.
- ***Enhance Intercultural Engagement:*** Institutionalise national cultural festivals, sporting events, and exchange programmes that promote interaction among diverse communities.

- ***Strengthen Local Governance and Decentralisation:*** Accelerate the implementation of decentralisation policies to improve service delivery, accountability, and citizen participation.
- ***Combat Misinformation and Disinformation:*** Promote media literacy, responsible journalism, and fact-checking initiatives to prevent the spread of divisive narratives.
- ***Invest in Community-Based Peace Infrastructure:*** Strengthen local peace committees, traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, and early warning systems to prevent conflicts before they escalate.
- ***Build Trust in Public Institutions:*** Enhance transparency, accountability, and impartiality within state institutions, particularly the judiciary, legislature, and public service, to foster confidence and national unity.