



Research on Conflict Dynamics and Conflict Management Capacities in Western Côte d'Ivoire

(The case of the Cavally and Guémon regions)

Executive Summary

As part of the *Research on Conflict Dynamics and Conflict Management Capacities in Western Côte d'Ivoire*, supported by the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, Interpeace¹ initiated a participatory research process from August through December 2012, engaging the inhabitants of the western regions in the analysis of factors of recurring violence and in the identification of possible solutions.

Methodological approach

The approach chosen for the implementation of the programme is based on **Participatory Action Research (PAR)**.² This method stems from the idea that it is the societies affected by violent conflict themselves that should develop, decide on and take ownership of the solutions to the challenges they face, thus ensuring that they are effective and sustainable.

The **objectives** of the research were:

- i) *Understanding the population's assessment of recurring violence in the region;*
- ii) *Collecting the findings of past initiatives to address violence;*
- iii) *Identifying lines of inquiry for the search for lasting solutions;*
- iv) *Providing participants with the experience of engaging with different groups, of hearing different points of view, and of inclusive, participative, potentially contentious and in-depth dialogue.*

This participatory research was divided into **three distinct sequential phases. This was essential in order to generate a climate for dialogue that is not only peaceful and safe, but also neutral and open, allowing participants to feel confident and willing to sit down and hold a constructive discussion.** The consultations directly involved representatives of the different sectors, communities and groups that make up the Ivorian society,³ namely non-natives, natives and allochthonous,

¹ Interpeace was created by the United Nations in 1994 and became independent in 2000. Interpeace currently operates in more than 16 countries and regions across the world.

² Participatory Action Research is a methodological approach used by Interpeace and its partners, which places dialogue at the center of participatory research aiming to bring about positive change. The dialogue sessions are led by the concerned populations rather than by analysts.

³ The number of locations visited during the course of the research was deliberately kept low in order to engage communities in a more intensive and effective manner, as Interpeace's experience revealed that trust is at the heart of peacebuilding and requires time to restore once it has broken down. Consequently, three localities were targeted: Duékoué (which crystalizes the most endemic and criminal forms of violence in western Côte d'Ivoire), Bloléquin (situated at the Liberian border, it introduces the cross-border dimension in addition to

women and youth, religious and traditional leaders, the local media, members of the local elite and administration that relocated to Abidjan, NGOs and a number of economic stakeholders. The research team consulted **more than 300 people** through **discussion groups, one-on-one interviews and restitution sessions**⁴ organized in the west as well as in Abidjan and Bingerville.

The research was supported by the Technical Committee of the Peacebuilding Priority Plan and its findings and recommendations were presented for validation to its Joint Steering Committee, which is co-chaired by the Minister of State, Planning and Development and the United Nations Resident Coordinator.

Assessing the causes of recurring violence in western Côte d'Ivoire

This report is built around the broad issues that emerged from the participatory and inclusive dialogue process involving representatives and key stakeholders from western Côte d'Ivoire who came together for the Regional Dialogue Group.⁵ These main issues are: **land tenure, ethnicity and its political instrumentalization, the state's weakness and the 2002 and 2011 post-electoral crises.**

The consultations conducted during this research were regularly marked by antagonistic interventions, facts, standpoints and truths expressed in a relatively tense and distrustful atmosphere, between representatives of the different communities and the local elite and officials. However, based on Interpeace's experience with its Participatory Action Research methodology, this period of open dialogue and discussion is encouraged and necessary in order to engage participants in a dialogue process based on trust, in a safe and neutral space. Thus, eventually people opened up, spirits lightened and the climate of suspicion and distrust was alleviated, and the participants were able to hold a constructive debate on the causes of violence in the west of the country.

On the dynamics of conflict identified by consulted stakeholders

The table presented in Appendix 1 of the report summarizes the **dynamics of conflict** in the Cavally and Guémon regions of western Côte d'Ivoire as perceived, experienced and articulated by people from all levels of society.

The first observation is that **land tenure**, often mentioned as the main cause of violence in the west of the country, **is not the sole source of violence in the eyes of the participants, but rather the visible and easily recognizable tip of the iceberg** that needs to be addressed in priority. It is a complex tangle of socio-economic resentment, cultural practices and values, inter-community and inter-generational history, as well as socio-political manipulation. It then follows that, in order to grasp the problem of violence in the west, it is essential to take all aspects of this context into account and to seek solutions on multiple levels. However, all issues can evidently not be dealt with simultaneously, which raises the challenge of choosing priority issues. According to the participatory research framework, this choice belongs to the actors most affected by the violence. This is why representatives of the concerned communities were invited to identify the most prominent and

local violence, along with the issue of sustained psychological violence in the context of important agricultural migration) and Guiglo (which at first glance seems to present lower levels of endemic violence despite the presence of all the factors of conflict).

⁴ Once the draft report presenting the assessment of recurring violence in the western regions had been prepared, a debriefing session was organized involving around 30 representatives of all concerned groups in each of the three localities covered by the research. Finally, a Regional Dialogue Group gathering representatives from the three localities was held in Bingerville.

⁵ A Regional Dialogue Group bringing together over 50 representatives of all stakeholders in the western region (including leaders and members of the elite from the west living in Abidjan) was held in Bingerville on 12 and 13 December 2012. The purpose of this meeting was to validate the assessment of recurring violence that came out of the initial consultations, and to reach an agreement on possible follow-ups.

appropriate issues to be dealt with, so that the crucial substantive work to overcome the underlying causes of violence and to restore the social fabric can commence.

Consequently, the factors of division and conflict are **organized according to their scope, their importance and the urgency of their effective and sustainable resolution, according to the views of the participants of the consultations.** This prioritization was carried out at each one of the restitution sessions (one in each regional capital) and confirmed by secret ballot at the Regional Dialogue Group in Bingerville.

On support areas identified by consulted stakeholders

Each factor of division and conflict which has been identified comprises multiple issues which would require particular attention in order to develop approaches that are grounded in local realities, expectations and needs to address the issues raised.⁶ The table therefore also highlights the support areas suggested by the participants to overcome the identified factors of division and conflict. As the participants were discussing the causes of violence in their region, a number of thoughts on possible solutions emerged. However, it should be made clear that at this stage, these are only possible paths to solutions, which require further refining in cooperation with the stakeholders – an essential condition to ensure local ownership of these potential solutions and therefore, their sustainability. To be sure, it must be noted, as Interpeace’s experience has shown, that peacebuilding is a process that involves profound changes in the long-run. Since violence and coercion are rooted in prolonged historical dynamics that permeate the political and social life of the region, it is important to bear in mind that **the processes aiming to overcome the current challenges will take time and cannot be completed using ‘miracle’ or ‘fast-track’ solutions.** In an effort to guide and advise the various initiatives led by external actors in the area, the participants of the Regional Dialogue Group⁷ consequently decided by consensus on the order of priority that, in their view, ought to be taken into consideration in actions and initiatives aiming to overcome the factors of division and violence. This prioritization is presented in the list of support areas below.

Auto-victimization and the issue of land tenure as central obstacles to lasting peace

The participatory and inclusive consultations that were conducted brought to light a major issue, namely **the auto-victimization of all stakeholders in the region.**

It appeared that in all matters that were identified as sources of violence, everyone perceives themselves as the victim. This therefore becomes the central factor of tension and would justify to certain extent a violent response. During the consultations, in the presence of particularly sensitive situations and contexts, the safe dialogue space provided enabled certain participants to make **a first step towards the other**, simply by sitting together, effectively initiating a potential process of rebuilding trust. Furthermore, the debriefing sessions organized in the west, and even more so the one in Bingerville (Regional Dialogue Group), enabled the participants to gradually become aware of

“The reason why reconciliation is blocked is simple. Everyone considers themselves a victim of the war and everyone is holding their ground. Who then will reach out to their friend to ask for forgiveness?”

Participant from Guiglo,
Regional Dialogue Group, Bingerville,
12-13 December 2012

⁶ See the consolidated tables at the end of each chapter.

⁷ 12 and 13 December 2012 in Bingerville.

this crucial element of collective auto-victimization which is preventing all initiatives that aim to solve the issues of land tenure, of identity, etc. from achieving real positive and lasting change. All communities present at the meetings did indeed agree that **the main challenge for rebuilding lasting peace and trust in the region is awareness of this ‘auto-victimization’ as fundamental condition for constructive dialogue directed at developing concrete solutions and initiatives to deal with the problems.**

“Why is it lasting? Because everyone is full of resentment, everyone considers having suffered more than the others and everyone wants to win. But if everyone wants to win, who will lose? Who will admit to being wrong? Who will ask their friend, their brother for forgiveness? That is the real problem.”

Participant from Duékoué, Regional Dialogue Group, Bingerville, 12-13 December 2012

To the people of western Côte d’Ivoire who were consulted, **this victimary rhetoric should be addressed alongside any initiative** aiming to sustainably solve the issues of land tenure, ethnicity and its political instrumentalization, the state’s weakness, or the impact of the 2002 and 2011 crises.

It is therefore recommended, taking into account the demands and priorities expressed consensually by the stakeholders, to rapidly engage all levels of society in a process of change that is as inclusive as possible. **This process will seek not only to encourage a culture of constructive and participatory dialogue to rebuild trust and overcome divisions within communities, but also to instigate a participatory research on sustainable concrete technical solutions to the issue of land tenure.**

General recommendations

As mentioned in the National Plan for Development 2012-2015 prepared by the government of Côte d’Ivoire, “social cohesion, national reconciliation and the stabilization of political life are fundamental determinants for the consolidation of a sustainable peaceful climate that is favourable to the implementation of development options.”⁸ Côte d’Ivoire is a beneficiary of a 10.5 million US\$ support from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund dedicated to peacebuilding activities in the west and south (Abidjan) of the country.

In light of the consultations conducted during the course of this research, a number of recommendations can be addressed to the government of Côte d’Ivoire and to its national and international partners (donors, United Nations bodies, NGOs, development agencies, private sector, etc.):

- **Involve the affected communities in a sustainable manner and engage in work to deconstruct the sentiment of auto-victimization** that inhabits them in order to ensure the success of community outreach actions and of more general sustainable development initiatives.
- Encourage **a participatory, inclusive and forward-looking dialogue process** facilitated within a neutral and safe space, so as to effectively and sustainably deconstruct the sentiment of victimization and re-establish trust between communities.

⁸ Plan National de Développement, Tome 1, p.52.

- Take into account that based on the order of priorities established by the communities during the research, **the starting point for the task of rebuilding trust and peace should be dispelling the sentiments of inequality and injustice caused by the issue of land tenure.**
- The following courses of action for the resolution of the land tenure issue have been put forward and prioritized by representatives of the communities that were consulted:
 - **Safeguard the property rights** of individual and collective actors sharing land resources:
 - *By engaging in a participatory and inclusive process that can provide an adequate framework to ensure the legitimacy and ownership of the law on rural land ownership and its enforcement;*
 - *By initiating a truly participatory programme to demarcate territories;*
 - *By creating, through dialogue, a consensus around a collective conception of these territories that validates the diversity of their occupants.*
 - **Mitigate feelings of inequality and injustice** by:
 - *Clarifying the status of scheduled forests and of their current inhabitants;*
 - *Creating alternative economic opportunities for neighbouring communities.*
 - **Create economic alternatives** for the most vulnerable sections of the local populations:
 - *By developing a participatory regional development plan to ensure the most disadvantaged sections of the population and those least empowered to take part in the rural plantation economy are provided with an alternative in terms of employment;*
 - *By reviving international and local NGO projects for income-generating activities, ensuring their sustainability and local ownership.*
- **Raise awareness about the risks incurred by simplistic categorization of the key actors** of violence in western Côte d'Ivoire insofar as their roles, responsibilities and ties remain controversial and thorough work is required to restore trust.
- **Work to re-legitimize local/traditional conflict resolution mechanisms** such as peace committees, crisis committees, *alliances à plaisanteries*⁹, etc. and **accompany the communities to enable them to better gain ownership of these tools.**
- Make certain that **the population is systematically involved in defining priorities for intervention** so as to ensure greater ownership and sustainability of projects.

⁹ *Alliances à plaisanteries*, also known as *parenté à plaisanterie*, are non-aggression pacts which authorize certain communities to insult each other or make fun of one another, without this conduct leading to a physical confrontation. In African tradition, this pact was called upon to ease tensions or resolve disputes when members of allied communities threatened to clash, as they were not permitted to 'spill each other's blood.'