



# OBSTACLES TO SOCIAL COHESION AND DYNAMICS OF YOUTH VIOLENCE IN URBAN SPACES

*Voices of residents of Abobo, Treichville and Yopougon,  
neighbourhoods in the district of Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)*

Executive summary of the participatory research report



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# Obstacles to social cohesion and dynamics of youth violence in urban spaces

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# | Executive Summary



The city of Abidjan, along with the forest area of the west, is the site of much of the socio-political tensions and violence that have affected Côte d'Ivoire for over a decade. With the country on the eve of another election period, Indigo, in partnership with Interpeace, conducted participatory research on the obstacles to social cohesion and the dynamics of violence involving youth in urban spaces. Co-funded and commissioned by UNICEF and UNDP and carried out over a six-month period, the inclusive process centred on dialogue, enabling youth to analyze their experiences and perceptions of past cycles of violence and to better understand the challenges they face, and also to outline possible solutions to curb violence.

This research was conducted following three distinct sequential phases aimed at creating a climate of safe and open dialogue, thus ensuring the participation of legitimate representatives of the community. These included: (i) facilitating dialogue spaces informed by academic research, and conducting individual interviews with resource persons from Abobo, Treichville and Yopougon neighbourhoods; (ii) organizing restitution sessions of the results of the first phase with each of the three municipalities to ensure that the collected data collected accurately reflects the discussions, and collecting additional elements to strengthen the analysis; (iii) organizing an Urban Group meeting that gathered 70 participants in a space for dialogue for the communal representatives from the different neighbourhoods who had not yet had the opportunity to meet, due to political or ethnic reasons, or because of age, gender or social differences.

The process enabled over 750 participants from different sectors of society and from all social groups—two thirds of whom were youth aged from 10 to 34 years—to engage in collective exercise of critical thinking on their context.

Four main factors that contribute to the constant disintegration of social cohesion and feed violence involving youth in the municipalities of Abobo, Treichville and Yopougon were identified. These include: (i) the limits of the political economy of urban social diversity; (ii) the disintegration of the education system; (iii) the transformation of family structures and the emergence of new models of social success; and (iv) the struggle for control of economic spaces such as bus stations.

With regards to the first factor, the representatives from the municipalities of Abobo, Treichville and Yopougon highlighted the fact that since the French colonization, their neighbourhoods have been an important social melting pot due to two main factors: (i) High migration due to the economic attractiveness of the city; and (ii) an urban architecture that promotes the mixing of populations based on their socioeconomic characteristics. For several decades however, this social diversity seems to have been affected by divisionist trends fuelled by socio-political practices and rhetoric around population identities. In fact, access to economic opportunities in Abidjan has been increasingly marked by a competition in which some native Ivoirians have felt wronged. Social relations have been tainted by issues regarding "Ivoirité", i.e. who has the right to benefit from the Ivoirian nationality and who should be excluded. The issue has been accompanied by discourse and practices that have generated significant frustration in the general population. The return to multiparty elections in 1993 and the competition that ensued also revived tensions between cohabiting communities. During elections, political actors often stoke the frustrations linked with social identity thus driving people, and particularly youth, into political violence.

«Do not believe that only Ivoirians are xenophobic, racist or prone to tribalism. There's also the foreign communities that have these characters. We live in communities; those who come from the same community, speak the same language. Those [of] the same locality are a tribe; they do not want anyone to approach or will not want to open up to other people. They shut themselves up, they live in a closed circle. «KI, 34, ECOWAS community, 17/01/2015, Yopougon.

With regards to education, schooling used to be considered the main driver of social mobility in Côte d'Ivoire, allowing all children, regardless of their social origin, to benefit from technical training and to have access to diplomas leading to employment opportunities. Yet faced with a structural crisis that has lasted for over three decades, schools have seen their educational function lose legitimacy. As explained by the young people consulted, schools have become a territory over which some youths fight for control, often to demonstrate their potential for violence which they

then transfer to other areas such as politics. In the three municipalities consulted, the research has shown that student groups have formed to confront each other and prove their "territorial control". Schools have also challenged each other so as to build up their violent reputations. In such a context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the fractures that divide society have been transposed into the school environment. The political struggles proceeding from the backdrop of inherent frustration and resentment have also been introduced via labour movements or student unions. On the other hand, many examples of acts violence have been given by the older participants (teachers) who clash with the younger ones (students), money and women generally being at the core of such confrontations. Thus, a whole ecology of violence appears which is rooted around and within schools, and is fuelled by drug abuse. With such a situation, both the role of the State and of parents are called into question.



"When you go to school instead of encouraging you to study they tell you that you have a right to claim. And in this right to claim, when you break, when you burn, the society cannot stop you to tell you or ask why you broke or burned. (...). Nowadays we teach a man to fight with machetes in schools. (...). The school no longer is the basis of education for our children. Our children are learning to become violent in schools. "KJ, 60, Akan Community, 10/01/2015, Treichville.

Regarding the transformation of family structures, the consultations have shown that the difficult economic conditions of the 1970-1980s have weighed heavily on households in the urban area of Abidjan. As a result, a number of heads of families have not only lost their capacity to meet the needs of their families, but also seen their authority diminished. The family model based on a division of labour according to which the father works to support his family, while the mother stays at home to raise the children, seems to have lost its worth in the eyes of many Ivoirians. Forced to fend for themselves and find themselves new roles in society, women and children have become the main sources of income for families in many cases. Because of this, many children have had to interrupt their studies. Once on the streets, some find the opportunity to pull themselves out of such a precarious situation, and to have money "chap chap" (quick quick) to strive in a society that condemns them to an often irreversible invisibility. Two options are then available to these young people: common crime practiced alone or as a group, such as petty theft, or rallying in an open space such as the bus station for self-promotion by brute strength.

"When the child is in the womb, he/she belongs to women. But when he/she comes out, he/she is no longer for women alone. He/she belongs first to the family, then to the community, then to Cote d'Ivoire. [...] Nowadays we have resigned, we have resigned from what we found with our parents, our families ... "YSO, 43, Akan Community, 14/02/2015, Abobo.

It has become apparent that some segments of the transport sector in Côte d'Ivoire offer significant opportunities to social outcasts and young people failing at school. Both groups find a guaranteed daily income thanks to the broad range of activities that the transport sector offers (drivers, apprentice drivers, loaders, billing officials, etc.). Moreover, among the many activities that can be performed, it is possible to move hierarchically from the status of simple bus boy to that of vehicle owner. However, at the end of the consultations it became clear

that the engine of social mobility at the same time retains the ability to be a perpetrator of violence or a defence against it, particularly the transport sector, which remains a "jungle" with its own codes and rules. Transgressions can sometimes lead to banishment or even death. As such, given the economic boon that it represents, the station is a highly disputed place. On the one hand, for many transport auxiliaries that operate there, the division of labour must be obtained through intimidation or violence. On the other hand, the management of levies from each activity promotes competition among the many union groups, which are usually supported by politicians, through "generals" or "warlords".

«Trade unionism is not vagrancy... Today, if we speak of 150 members it's because for the last 10 years children who were five years old ... now they have turned 15; 20 years. These are the ones you find at the bus station. And when those come to the station, they are like our little brothers and the old ones are still there, and they don't know where else to go. The same union site can no longer hold us all. So that's why there is chaos everywhere. «CK, 39, Dignitaires, 15/02/2015, Abobo.

At the end of this research on the obstacles to social cohesion and dynamics of youth violence in urban spaces, four main factors emerged from the perspective of the participants. These are factors around which cohabitation challenges between communities are structured and in which youth violence in Abobo, Yopougon and Treichville is rooted. They relate to: (i) the limits of the political economy of urban social diversity; (ii) the disintegration of the education system; (iii) the transformation of family structures and the emergence of new models of social success; and (iv) the struggle for control of economic spaces such as bus stations. These are the major elements strongly emphasized by the consulted populations and considered to be priorities for finding practical and sustainable solutions.



# Beyond research, a work of rapprochement and imaginary deconstruction



To carry out this research, Indigo, endeavored to put the people who were consulted at the heart of the process, inviting them to diagnose their situation. This method is a challenge in itself, given the groups and individuals targeted by these consultations and the level of mistrust that tends to characterize their relations as well as their suspicions about such initiatives. These consultations provided participants with an unprecedented opportunity to discuss their concerns and to meet in a safe and neutral environment.

Particular attention has been paid to facilitating interactions among these stakeholders, by promoting respect and open dialogue, which participants embraced unconditionally. Eventually, the process showed a new created trust between categories of people involved at different levels: (i) between adolescents and parents around the issue of family recomposition; (ii) between entrepreneurs of violence and the ordinary users in the transport sector, with the participation, far from being obvious initially, of «generals» and «dignitaries» of unions in the focus groups; and (iii) between residents of different municipalities, especially those presented as antagonists, specifically in Abobo and Yopougon.

The Participatory Action Research methodology which inspired the approach promoted by Indigo and Interpeace, feeds off of elements drawn from the diagnosis made by these populations. It must continue with an equally inclusive and participatory process for identifying and implementing solutions keeping the people at the heart of the action.



# Beyond the diagnosis, actions for change



As the participants in the municipalities of Abobo, Yopougon and Treichville reflected on the dynamics of violence in their communities, they were encouraged to outline solutions rooted in their realities, expectations and local needs. Actions to be taken that are structured around a number of themes were identified: (i) regulating peaceful agreement on the regulation of access to the benefits generated by transport activities and the engagement of “entrepreneurs of violence” operating in and around bus stations to become agents of change; (ii) citizen engagement and the promotion of inclusive and constructive dialogue in the existing spaces, all centered on the active participation of youth from political parties and community groups; (iii) transforming the school into a pacified area and promotion of education for non-violence; (iv) engagement of mothers, and women in general, to play a more positive role in mitigating violence involving young people and in promoting positive models built around success through employment; and (v) support for families in mitigating the potential for violence among youth, etc.

On this basis, and in order to better inform, guide and advise the various initiatives being undertaken by the communities themselves, local and national authorities or the international community, participants in the Urban Group conducted a reflection process on the recommendations and options for possible solutions. These should, to be efficiently implemented according to participants, conform to the following conditions (among others): a transparent beneficiary targeting process based on a strong mapping of stakeholders; an inclusive governance of the process of implementation with the participation of public authorities; identification of initiatives backed by an initial participatory and inclusive diagnostic; and the preference for integrated solutions, a preventative rather than repressive approach. More details on the latter can be found in the research report.

The implementation process of the recommendations and identified solutions require temporalities which will vary according to the nature of the solution, the context and resources to convene, whether human, financial or technical. That is why in the pre-electoral context in which Cote d'Ivoire is today, it is necessary and urgent to think ahead about mitigation strategies of violent acts that could emerge in a climate of political tension.

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*<sup>1</sup>On 13-14 May, the Urban Group brought together 70 people to validate the diagnosis of the obstacles to social cohesion and dynamics of violence and to reflect on possible solutions.*



# The challenge ahead: A rapprochement between the authorities and the people

This participatory research revealed a transversal structural element which, in the eyes of the people consulted, must be considered in any initiative aiming to address division and violence factors: the need to build bridges between the different levels of society in order to ensure active participation, increased trust, and genuine inclusiveness in the process of defining public policies to address the latter.

In short, the establishment of a dialogue mechanism to reconcile and bridge vertical distances between people, civil society, government and the political elite is, in the view of all participants, a fundamental element in the search for peace and socio-political cohesion. According to them, the social fabric can only be restored if society as a whole is engaged in a collective process to overcome the latent division factors as well as the identity related reflexes in order to prevent these outbreaks of violence. Peace requires a real commitment that will eventually result in a social contract between the different stakeholders and which will set the conditions whereby each can aspire to pursue one's ambitions without resorting to violence.



# The electoral context and programmatic urgency

In less than six months, Cote d'Ivoire will revive a major appointment of the national socio-political life: the presidential elections scheduled for October 2015, and those of local officials who will certainly be held early 2016. This election period, like the previous ones of 1995, 2000 or 2010, deserves special attention in terms of monitoring and anticipation of risks that could accompany the entire voting process. At the same time, one should recognize that the country, after the 2010-2011 violence, has begun a significant process of normalization. The security index has positively evolved from a macroeconomic perspective, and development indicators presented by the Government are largely positive.

Only in the field of socio-political cohesion is there a potential risk of violence. Indeed, the DDR (the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration), although conducted in a structured and proactive manner, seems to have failed to attract and convert all of the young civilians factions who, after almost a decade of crisis, are fluent in handling guns. Despite the extensive efforts of the ComNat-ALPC, large quantities of weapons remain in circulation. Confrontations between trade unions in the transport sector enabled the national and international community to realize this fact and the danger that it poses to national security.

At the political level, the electoral process recently started by the update of the electoral roll, does not seem to have consensus within the political class. The political dialogue initiated by the Government, with the mediation of the international community, does not seem to necessarily guarantee peaceful popular participation. Some political parties have already committed themselves to launching street demonstrations to denounce what, in their perspective, is a regimented election process with little freedom of expression. In the same vein of political defiance, the memory of violence which marred the 2013 municipal and regional elections in some constituencies in Abidjan, if revived, might spark violent acts in communities. This research, without giving in to scaremongering, highlights important risk factors which deserves some attention at the programmatic level. The

potential of youth enrollment in violent confrontations exists. The propensity of certain violent population categories (e.g. microbes) to orchestrate the disorder or to benefit from the systematic looting and attacks exists. Therefore, a context of sociopolitical unrest before, during and after the elections can only serve as a pretext for this potential for violence. It is thus important that anticipatory actions around monitoring, alerting, education and community engagement be committed well in advance in order to mitigate this risk. Legitimate actors to carry these actions exist. Indeed, throughout this process, Indigo consistently and insistently received requests from potentially violent actors to continue the process of engaging them around positive actions. Whether with entrepreneurs of violence operating in the transport sector or with young people whose mobilization potential is real (in connection with the political youth groups, young offenders whose violence potential kicks in during situations of political disorder or ordinary citizens aspiring not to relive the trauma of years of past crises, etc.), the will to seize any opportunity to play a catalytic role and avoid the risk of implosion during elections is evident.

In continuation of the efforts invested in this process, Indigo, in partnership with Interpeace will capitalize on the opportunity that was offered to them by their financial partners UNICEF and UNDP to bring together all wills, voices and perspectives of the people, in order to implement the solutions they themselves proposed, building on their expertise and experience.

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<sup>2</sup>Désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion

# Recommendations and avenues for reflection



# | Recommendations and avenues for reflection



The implementation of the following recommendations will require the contribution of all stakeholders, the communities themselves, civil society, authorities at the local and national level, as well as international actors.

## The bus station and the actors operating within and around it



This participatory research highlighted the violent dynamics that surround the transport sector in the three targeted communities. A series of recommendations has emerged from this analysis regarding the two types of major players operating in this area, namely the «Dignitaries» or «Generals» on the one hand and young people on the other hand.

### *Regarding the relationships among the “Dignitaries”*

The consultations have revealed that the struggle for control of this area and the financial dividend generated by the transport sector is a root cause for the high levels of violence in the bus station area. This violence between

trade unions, headed by the «Dignitaries», has become endemic and directly affects the population in the surroundings. During discussions with officials of the municipalities of Abobo, Yopougon and Treichville, the need to reduce the tensions in the relationships between these actors was made evident. Mitigation of tensions could be done through two types of initiatives: (i) Stimulate a thorough reflection on the transport sector to raise awareness among the actors involved and empower them, (ii) Deconstruct the logic of violence within the bus station by encouraging non-violent conflict regulation.

To reach these changes, the following actions could be implemented:

- *Conduct a dialogue process / raise awareness / sensitization* in order to help pacify the relationships between “Dignitaries”, discuss their roles and responsibilities as well as the modalities of the regulation of the transport sector in Abidjan. This process should include all stakeholders, from the grassroots to the government level, in order to create the possibility of offering consensual and non-violent mechanism to manage the income generated and reassure the users.

- *Offer socio-economical alternatives* aiming at the empowering some of the “Dignitaries” and their followers to pursue other areas of economic activity for which the profile is suitable (security, etc). Some of the “Dignitaries” have reached the limits in their ability to impose their legitimacy vis-à-vis youth in order to retain and mobilize them for the operations in the field. Nevertheless, they continue to exert influence which could be used to direct some of their followers towards other activities, thus getting out of the increasingly saturated transport sector which is riddled with often violent internal struggles for its control.

## Regarding the youth operating in the bus station area

Among the young people working in the bus station sector, some are graduates, others have professional qualifications, others have no formal education, but both groups have found opportunities in this area, for lack of better alternatives. Some wish to start their studies again or to find a job that is aligned with their qualifications. Others, on the contrary, want to stay in the sector, but in a more peaceful environment. An appropriate answer must be given to both categories of actors, taking into account their specific profiles and the needs they have expressed. To address these issues the following actions could be undertaken:

- *Put in place participatory and safe dialogue sessions* to allow making the right diagnosis and implement appropriate initiatives to address the culture of violence among some of the young people working in the area of the bus station – including more specifically youth commonly called «Microbes». The representatives of the consulted communities and in particular some of these young people have expressed the wish to see these types of dialogue and safe meetings spaces implemented. These activities would have to be adapted to the diversity of profiles of these youth and would enable them to understand the risks linked to their violent behavior, to pacify their relation and open up possibilities for a more positive and peaceful engagement. In this respect, the importance to take into account the psychosocial dimension of these deviant behaviors has been emphasized and would lead some of the proposed dialogue sessions to take the form of support groups or group therapies benefiting from the availability and presence of social workers to ensure greater efficiency. Knowing the liabilities of some of these teenagers who served as auxiliaries to the fighting forces during the recent post-electoral crisis, including those occupying the community of Abobo, called “invisible commando”, a majority of the population remains convinced that if nothing is done, many will in times of crisis, be tempted to repeat this violent participation in the conflict. Engaging these youth in a preventive dialogue process could also be beneficial for the preservation of the sociopolitical cohesion of the community.

- *Mapping the different profiles of these youth prone to violence*

to allow for the identification of the different profiles, better understand the trajectory of these youth, better inform the targeting of beneficiaries and processes to provide answers combining individual and group support that is more in line with their profiles,

expectations and environment. Some of the young people consulted have emphasized the importance of establishing a real mapping, deploring the tendency for simplification and quick categorization of youth operating in the area of the bus station, which tends to not only increase the fears and divisions but also make the initiatives intended to help them precarious.

- *Encourage a more positive engagement of this youth in their community*

The experience in Ivory Coast and other contexts has shown that the dismantling of such youth networks and a repressive approach are not adequate responses, because they have tremendous capacities of reforming and of adaptation as well as significant mobility.

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*<sup>1</sup>In Ivory Coast, for the last two years the government has engaged a body of the country's Security Forces (the CCDO, Operations Command Centre) to track young offenders acting under the name of microbes. Smokehouses were dismantled, youth groups have been arrested and brought to justice, some died. Nevertheless, the phenomenon, far from fading, started again. The operating procedure of these children has changed, many of their violent actions take place at dawn in concessions, preventing any intervention from taking place. Located initially in Abobo, the phenomenon has spread to other cities and even within the country to expand its spectrum of influence. In El Salvador, a similar process of participatory research conducted by Interpeace revealed that the gang eradication efforts have so far had little impact because they concentrate around the dismantling and youth extraction of these groups, depriving them of what had attracted them in the first place: a sense of belonging, identification and pride of contributing to a movement. Collaborative actions with local councils to reorient the capacity of young people in non-criminal group activities, continuous consultation with them, have so far started to show positive signs of change.*

Beyond the simple formation of groups which are sometimes criminal and violent, the consultations within the framework of this research revealed a strong desire for social recognition and valorization of the identity of the youth operating in the bus station area. An engagement would therefore be about enabling them to play a positive role, through targeted actions encouraging them to change their perspective. In line with the profiles of the youth, such actions could take the forms of:

- o Offers of Apprenticeship, entrepreneurship, training with the support of the private sector. However these young people have no other means of subsistence and often carry the financial responsibility for a family. These offers have to be accompanied by financial and/or material compensation to meet their daily needs and convince them not to resort to criminal means for subsistence.

- o Recognition of their knowledge by establishing a light and accessible mechanism for young people to valorize their skills and experience without going through complicated or expensive procedures that might discourage them (e.g. driving license). Such actions are intended to formalize qualification and experiences acquired while at the same time giving value to the young people concerned and paving the way for alternatives to violence.

- o Literacy, oriented towards the acquisition of specific skills and qualifications.

- o Community activities in fields such as clean-up of the environment and other community services, sustainable and rewarding as contribution to the community. The goal here is to make them play a role more rewarding for them and beneficial for the community and society as a whole while meeting the financial needs, which attracted them to the restricted transportation sector.

- o Reconnect minors with families. For many of these young people, violent trajectories start with a desire for emancipation from a family framework deemed oppressive or difficult to live in. In other cases, it is at the behest of the parents themselves that the children leave the home environment because they are not controllable anymore and are considered as a burden the family no longer wants to care for. An activity of re-establishing connections will allow parents and children to get to know each other again and accept each other as members of the same social unit. Trust could be rebuilt through home visits or «go and see visits» that are supervised and may lead to a family-children dialogue.

- o Financial Empowerment of families notably through income-generating activities (AGR). Promoting AGR helps reconstruct social links by giving parents the means to support their children and therefore reducing the pressure on the latter. In the case of many young people their violent behavior is indeed directly linked to the financial demands from their families. The rationale of these activities is to offer an opportunity for parents to stop demanding of their children to be the providers of the household and for the mother, father or both to assume this role. To take into account a recommendation of the participant, the promotion of income generating activities should involve the two pillars of the family, namely the father and the mother. In those cases where the couple is together.

- o Psychosocial and educational assistance individually and in group as appropriate for many of these young people who are victims of a major trauma caused by the violence that surrounds them in their daily lives. Since their birth in the early 2000s, some of these young people have only known violence as a mean of expression. Therefore these youth tend to trivialize the violence, which points to a need to support them at this level.





# Around the “Espaces de Discussion de Rue” (EDR) (street discussion spaces)

As shown by the study, EDRs come in various forms: youth groups of political parties, ethnic or religious groups called ‘grins’, ‘agora’ or ‘parliaments’ depending on their affiliation. The latter were very active during the consultation and formulated expectations and recommendations for engagement and support tailored to their realities and context.

## • Update of a mapping of these spaces

The members of the EDR have expressed a desire for an accompaniment, adapted to the needs and specificities of each type of these spaces. This needs to happen as fast as possible in light of the pre-electoral context and the role these spaces play in the political mobilization. To make this possible, members recognize the need to establish a comprehensive census of the EDR, allowing for both an update of the spaces and a better understanding of their composition and modus operandi.

Based on this mapping, the following actions could be taken:

- *Establishment of open and inclusive dialogue frameworks* for the promotion of citizenship and non-violence at different levels. Originally, EDRs were social spaces oriented towards information-sharing, access to diverse view points and perspectives. Now they have become places of violent political indoctrination and play a less positive role. To reverse this trend, a framework for dialogue needs to be put in place with the objectives to:

- o Contribute to making EDR, open dialogue spaces and avenues for democratic engagement rather than political mobilization.

- o Promote a culture of dialogue inside the EDR as an alternative to violent conflict.

- o Raise the awareness of the EDR members and engage them for peaceful elections.

- o Engage members of EDR in a reflection on their role and place in society, particularly around the question of identity.

Different complementary levels of engagement have been identified in order to have an impact on this particular environment:

- o Work with actors within EDRs as well as with members of different EDRs through an inclusive and participatory approach to reinforce trust and ensure a more reasoned and peaceful engagement.

- o Promoting, through these spaces, meetings between the government and the population to reduce the gap that exists between them. The participants in the consultations made the general observation that the distance between elites, government representatives and the population is wide. There are insufficient exchanges between these two levels of society to the point where communication seems to be unidirectional and/or limited to rallies where crowds are lectured rather than listened to. Such meeting spaces will allow the voice of the people and the elites to be heard, their views to be taken into account and enable consensus to emerge.

- o Create an online platform for exchanges involving to transfer discussion spaces to the Internet. Building on the success of social networks in Abidjan and in particular the intention to give greater resonance to dialogue among youth, the proposal for the creation, administration and moderation of a discussion forum using social media was expressed. The idea is to dematerialize exchanges in order to have a higher participation by involving other stakeholders who are not part of EDRs.

- o Organize socializing activities in order to reinforce the cohesion between the EDRs, serving as

a «pretext» for the rapprochement of different groups. These could take the shape of sports tournaments, cultural events, etc. combined with moments of reflection and dialogue.

o Increase the frequency of dialogue sessions during the election period. Before, during and after elections, political mobilization for violence has been particularly intense in the last decades. Even in the EDRs violence has been deep-rooted since the last decade of crises as they have been used as levers for political and ideological indoctrination of some of the youth used by political entrepreneurs. Given the central role of EDRs in this dynamic of mobilization, it is important to allow members to interact in order to understand and mitigate the risk of violence.



# Around school, its transformation and the dynamics of violence



**B**ecause of the challenges the school faces today, representatives of the communities of Abobo, Yopougon and Treichville call for targeted actions.

- **Mapping of all the schools that are at risk and at the same time do a typology of the violence at school**

In the same line as recommendations on issues related the bus station and the EDRs, participants emphasized the need to better understand and locate the dynamics at work within and around schools to not only identify and understand areas at risk but also better target interventions.

- **Initiate an in-depth reflection around the education sector and vocational training at the municipal level**

Alors que des réflexions sur l'éducation obligatoire While discussion on the mandatory nature of education are ongoing at the government level, a discussion involving all stakeholders will allow to draw concrete recommendations that can contribute to these discussions thus ensuring more engagement and shared responsibility of all involved actors: government, local authorities, teachers, families and students.

- **Establish / reinforce exchange frameworks for schools**

People are less and less involved in school life and school governance. Associations of parents exist, but, apart from financial contribution, there are not many which are capable of collective action and

make their voices heard in the governance of these institutions. Even within the institutions, outside of class representatives, the opinion of students is not taken into account. Therefore it is important to engage stakeholders in dialogue to anticipate and mitigate violent dynamics.

The idea is to create formal spaces for dialogue and exchange that are inclusive and fair to all the stakeholders involved in and around the school. These spaces will engage the following stakeholders:

- o Students and administration
- o Administration and parents
- o Schools and the wider community (e.g. the issue of the "smoking rooms")

- **Launch a more general reflection on the function of teachers**

While the role of teachers was often discussed during the consultations, a more general reflection involving all stakeholders in the education sector to discuss the function of the teachers and their responsibilities in passing on moral and ethical values is recommended. This work highlights the factors involved in the production/promotion of violence and its prevention/mitigation in school and even University. Moreover, opportunities to mitigate the recurrent tensions around the teaching practice in line with the needs will be identified.

- **Conduct specific consultations in universities**

University is often considered a carrier of violence even beyond its immediate context (violence often originates from the secondary or even the primary school), it is essential to engage in a reflection, on the one hand, between students and on the other hand between students and teaching personnel in higher education. The objective of this initiative is to engage the concerned actors in dialogue, so that they themselves identify the factors conducive to violence but also cohesion and the means to mitigate them. Particular attention should be paid to this environment in the context of the upcoming election in view of the role students have played in the dynamics of violence during the past decade.



# The family and its recent mutations



Given the recent alterations to the family structure, appropriate measures should be taken to address the consequences and effects on children. For this purpose, participants to the process identified individual and collective responses based on the different challenges.

- **Create income generating activities that are more integrated** in order to promote greater empowerment of families. While the need to encourage the creation of activities for marginalized groups in contexts where the role of women in particular is changing rapidly is undeniable, it is necessary to work more deliberately to include all the pillars of the nuclear family, both parents and the children. Such an approach has the potential to ensure greater empowerment and counter certain changes in family dynamics which are considered harmful by the population.

- **Develop a system of community support for the management of conflicts within families.** Increasingly, families are left alone in the settlement of internal conflicts. While the model of a more traditional extended family allowed problems of couples to be addressed in a larger family setting, in the past. The disintegration of family structures and increasing individualization does not always make this possible anymore. Through this activity it will be possible to engage the key community referrals (religious leaders, community dean, etc.) to play a positive and more structured role in the management of family conflicts.

- **Reassess educational and social assistance for families with children at risk.** As families are facing major challenges, the human, financial and technical resources currently available are not adequate to provide them with the required professional support. It is therefore necessary to strengthen existing capacities and create new ones.

- **Reflection around the family and its role in passing on societal and cultural values** heated discussions took place during the consultations on the societal model and the ways and means of passing on values to youth that are still effective. The family, the basic social unit is clearly the place to discuss and provide these elements. There is a need to engage families in an reflection on themselves and to define ways of transmitting ways of life that are based on certain moral values on which future initiatives could build on.



# Sociopolitical diversity and issues around identity

Initiatives must be undertaken to address the issues related to the fracturing of identity which is one of the factors at the heart of the difficult cohabitation of different groups in the urban space. These challenges are marked by an inter-generational transmission of resentments, which was pointed out repeatedly in the three municipalities. Participants recommended the following:

- **Engage every level of society in a reflection around the questions linked to sociopolitical diversity and identity.** The intension of such a reflection is to address one of the challenges identified, by both youth and elders, with regards to the alleviation of the generational transmission of resentments linked to narratives and practices around identity. For the majority of participants, Côte d'Ivoire has not yet dealt with the identity issue. It remains significant and continues to be invoked in political fights. Only a clear will by all components to discuss the issue and find consensual solution that are acceptable to all can prevent the problem from intensifying.

- **Encourage political practice geared more towards democratic debate and respect for socio-political diversity .** A big challenge raised in connection with the issue of identity and socio-political diversity is the fact that the identity issue is constantly invoked in the political game. Control and monitoring on the nature and quality of the political discourse is required to avoid speeches that contain prejudices. For this, it is important that political practice is framed and qualitatively enriched, to avoid excesses, through the promotion of a culture of democratic debate, public participation and respect for socio-political diversity. To enable citizens to develop an effective response to

this phenomenon, it is particularly important for them to understand the mechanisms through which the identity discourses of politicians can lead to violent actions. Regular dialogue before, during and after the presidential elections would provide an opportunity for participants to develop such a deep understanding.

- **Reinforce the trust in legal measures to access nationality.** The Ivorian government, with the support of various donors, is working to improve its legal instruments for identifying its populations, including through a modernization of its civil registration process. In parallel to this technical work, another initiative needs to be conducted in parallel addressing the loss of trust of users and even some state officials in the reliability of the instruments to access and verify the identity of the populations living on the Ivorian territory. It would be worth carrying out this work to bring the administration closer to its citizens, not only physically but through more inclusive and participatory governance of the access to nationality.





# Conditions of feasibility and success



# | Conditions of feasibility and success



## 1. A transparent targeting process of beneficiaries based on a good actor mapping:

During the consultations, people have underlined that many projects fail because they do not always reach the right and deserving beneficiaries. Targeting is sometimes weak or too fast and often misses those who would have to be involved in order to achieve the expected changes. It is therefore necessary to focus on participatory, inclusive and transparent processes to better map the stakeholders, identify the right beneficiaries and engage them in projects.

## 2. An inclusive governance of the process with the participation of public authorities

The governance of projects remains the Achilles' heel in the implementation of projects. According to the population, a project that is monopolized by an individual or a group of individuals who do not feel accountable to the community is doomed to fail. To avoid this, the participants highlighted the importance of establishing an inclusive governance mechanism in all projects.

## 3. Solutions based on a participatory and inclusive diagnosis

Participants to the consultations consider that many solutions implemented are not rooted in their realities and seem to emanate from expertise often out of context.

Issues to be addressed are, every so often, caused by a range of factors which must be taken into consideration. To address one without considering the others constitutes a risk for the success of the project. A good practice would therefore be for people to propose integrated solutions that take into account a maximum of factors to be addressed simultaneously

or focus on those whose resolution could have a ripple effect on others.

## 4. Solutions based on a real involvement of stakeholders in their formulation and implementation.

When populations are involved in project implementation, it is most often simply to benefit from the financial opportunities the project presents. To generate meaningful change, it is important to pay more attention to the ownership of such initiatives. It is therefore necessary to engage stakeholders in a deeper reflection that is informed on the content and the exact conditions of the implementation of solutions - to ensure ownership, effectiveness and sustainability. This will prevent transferring blueprint solutions to areas where their success is uncertain.

## 5. A better consideration of timing

The long-term historic process of deeply rooted divisions and violence has eventually also influenced the political and social life in Côte d'Ivoire. Consequently, it is important not to rush to processes that are essential to the transformation of the functioning of society. Therefore, efforts and initiatives to strengthen social cohesion and peace require medium and long-term strategies aimed at achieving a cumulative and gradual impact.

## 6. A preventive and positive rather than repressive approach

Building from all listed one can conclude that the factors highlighted call for a distinction between root causes requiring an inclusive national response and immediate preventive from immediate mitigating actions that have to be resourced.

## 7. A focus on the integration and coordination of efforts with all stakeholders

The non-exhaustive list of the above mentioned activities covers a wide range of possibilities that should be addressed by promoting integrated and coordinated initiatives. This requires that (i) the state plays a coordinating role and defines a general vision, (ii) the populations are integral to the definition of this vision and its implementation, and (iii) the state approaches actors which have relevant experience and expertise (NGOs, private sector, etc.).





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