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Creating a More Inclusive Peace in Côte d'Ivoire

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On June 19-20, 2006, the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), in partnership with the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), hosted a workshop entitled "Challenges to Peace and Reconstruction in Côte d'Ivoire" in Accra, Ghana. Fourteen representatives of diverse Ivoirian civil society organizations (CSOs) attended the conference, as well as representatives from the United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and other nongovernmental organizations.

The goals of the workshop were threefold: to assess the peace process to date in Côte d'Ivoire; to increase awareness of the process and the issues at stake among donor countries; and to identify how Ivoirian civil society and the international community could collaborate to promote peace in Côte d'Ivoire. To these ends, the workshop sessions addressed the following issues: challenges facing civil society; the relationship between peacebuilding and economic development; the role of regional and external actors in the peace process; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR); and identity, citizenship, and elections. This USIPeace Briefing summarizes the major themes of each session and the recommendations offered by the participants.

Appraisal of the Peace Process

Status of the peace process

Although parties to the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire have signed five [peace agreements](#) and a government of [national reconciliation](#) has been formed, many of the major issues dividing them remain unresolved. One such issue, identification and citizenship, has its roots in policies enacted during the rule of former President Felix Houphouët-Boigny, which allowed foreigners from Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana, and Guinea (who are culturally close to groups in northern Côte d'Ivoire, have similar names, and have often lived



in Côte d'Ivoire for decades) to work easily and vote in Côte d'Ivoire. A backlash against these foreigners began in the 1980s and was exacerbated by the death of Houphouët-Boigny in 1993. New political actors exploited such divisions, labeling those in the north as foreigners and passing more stringent citizenship laws.¹



Participants Al Hadj Ibrahima Kone, left, and Marguerite Yoli-Bi at the workshop.

While an independent electoral commission has been created, it faces several challenges as it begins preparing a voter registry. The May 2006 pilot program to issue identity cards was deemed successful overall, but it encountered several logistical problems, and observers were uncertain whether expanding the program throughout the country would resolve the problem of identity and citizenship. Progress on a second major issue in the peace process, DDR, has been even less encouraging. Cooperation with disarmament deadlines by government and rebel forces has been inconsistent. The security of the population remains perilous, especially in the north and west, where the government continues trying to extend its control. Finally, the peace process has not adequately addressed justice for human rights abuses and mechanisms for reconciliation processes, according to meeting participants.

Some participants pinned the political problems in Côte d'Ivoire on the poor management of the transition from a one-party state to democracy during the 1990s. Participants also cited the lack of democratic consolidation; a lack of respect for the rule of law, institutions, and authority; a lack of justice, civility, and solidarity; and, most of all, the lack of Ivoirians' trust in each other and confidence in their ability to solve their problems internally. A few participants noted that since 2002, people within Côte d'Ivoire have largely overlooked internal conflict resolution mechanisms used in the past.

Recommendations for improving the peace process

To address these problems, participants suggested the following actions:

- Explore internal, traditional methods for resolving conflict that utilize local and religious leaders and CSOs.
- Organize a national dialogue to solve smaller issues at the grassroots level.
- Focus on political and economic reconciliation, which external actors can initiate and facilitate, but which internal actors must carry through.
- Urge the international community to assist with DDR implementation and bringing to justice perpetrators of violence, perhaps through the use of UN sanctions or the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Civil Society in Peacemaking

The Role of Civil Society in Côte d'Ivoire

Although CSOs have existed in Côte d'Ivoire since the first decade of independence in the 1960s, under the rule of Houphouët-Boigny they were neither united nor powerful. With the legalization of opposition political parties in 1990 came a wave of new CSOs.

Since the outbreak of conflict in 2002, some political parties have co-opted CSOs, while other CSOs have tried to serve as a counterforce to political actors. The violence and instability in the country since 2002 has complicated civil society's efforts to determine its role in Côte d'Ivoire.



Yet the meeting participants agreed that civil society should be a uniting force within the country and should work toward making a positive, long-term impact on the country's development. They emphasized that civil society should reflect and represent the population as a whole, serving as a critical link between society and the state. Some participants thought civil society should also play an educating and supervisory role and facilitate community outreach and capacity-building measures.

Fourteen representatives of diverse Ivoirian civil society organizations attended the conference, as well as representatives from the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire, and other nongovernmental organizations.

Civil society has also struggled to define its relationship with the state. Some CSO representatives said the government fears that civil society will usurp state responsibilities, and supports CSOs only if the government thinks it can assert control over them. Although some CSOs have closely aligned themselves with political parties, many organizations desire autonomy from the state and neutrality in the political sphere. Civil society representatives believe they can play a role that complements state efforts to rebuild society and enhance development, working in locations and using methods that the government cannot. Meeting participants expressed frustration that the state often excludes civil society from the decision-making processes, especially from peace negotiations.

Challenges faced by civil society

CSOs within Côte d'Ivoire face several structural, logistical, and political obstacles. Structurally, civil society continues to lack unity and clarification of purpose. Many disparate CSOs represent small groups focused on specific issues, rather than on the interests of society in general. Defining civil society remains challenging because no legal framework distinguishes CSOs from other associations, such as trade unions. Presently, many CSOs link themselves with political parties, which the participants agreed harms civil society's reputation. This weak operating environment contributes to civil society's lack of recognition by society, the state, and the international community, and hinders its ability to participate in national dialogues.

The absence of recognition manifests itself in civil society's significant lack of financial, personnel, and other resources, which impairs its ability to engage the population and serve as a link between it and the state. Resource constraints weaken civil society and make CSOs more susceptible to influence by political parties or entities that can provide such resources. CSOs have also, thus far, failed to utilize the media to promote their accomplishments or highlight civil society proposals and platforms. As a result, some participants worried that the Ivoirian population has a negative perception of civil society and misunderstands its purpose.

Finally, civil society faces political challenges. Representatives at the meeting seemed most frustrated by their exclusion from the peace process. Most CSOs do not have observer status at forums sponsored by the UN, ECOWAS, or the national government, and thus are not privy to much of the information discussed at major negotiations. This impairs the ability of CSOs to educate the population about events at the state level and highlights the problem of civil society recognition.

Recommendations for strengthening civil society

Participants proposed three major recommendations to help CSOs overcome some of these challenges:

- The international community and the state should provide enhanced financial and logistical support to Ivoirian CSOs. CSOs desire broad support to diverse groups rather than targeted international support, which they said is currently the most common. Support could include assistance in professionalizing CSOs or technical advice from civil society experts, and should focus on the educational role civil society can play within the state.
- Develop a legal framework to better define civil society and its function within the state.

- Civil society should develop plans for synergizing the efforts of various CSOs to propel the reconciliation process in Côte d'Ivoire forward, and initiate contact with state and external actors to enhance civil society's participation in the peace process. Representatives from the UN and ECOWAS agreed with other participants that CSOs should be involved in peace and reconciliation negotiations, but emphasized that CSOs must take the initiative and create a plan of action to engage in Côte d'Ivoire's peace and reconciliation process.

Peacebuilding and Economic Development

Peace as a precondition for development

The relationship between peacebuilding and economic development is mutually reinforcing: in order for economic development to succeed in Côte d'Ivoire, the country must remain peaceful; for peace to continue, progress must be made on economic development and job creation. Instability has hampered development and strained the economy, with particularly harsh consequences in the northern and western regions. According to the meeting participants, preconditions for successful sustainable development include: respecting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law; holding free and fair elections; governmental commitment to equitable national development and economic transparency; fighting against the prevailing culture of impunity and corruption; and reforming the armed services. They noted that progress on these issues would improve human security and enable more Ivoirians to work, trade, farm, and invest, allowing them to capitalize on economic opportunities. They suggested revamping industrial enterprises, implementing crop diversification measures and subsidies for farmers, and providing assistance to northern farmers to engender sustainable development. One participant emphasized that Ivoirians themselves are the primary means, ends, and agents of development. In order for them to succeed and propel development forward, however, progress toward peace and stability must continue.

Peacebuilding through Justice, the Media, and Women

Peacebuilding in Côte d'Ivoire also revolves around justice and reconciliation for victims of the conflict, harnessing the influence of the media, and addressing the particular needs of women. The conflict in Côte d'Ivoire has generated an estimated 700,000 internally displaced since 2002.² Despite its promises, the government has enacted no laws to provide compensation for such victims. Some participants feared neglecting the victims could reignite violence. They generally agreed that the state bears responsibility for assisting and compensating victims and noted that while the state has promised compensation, thus far it has not materialized. They suggested creating a legal framework to address the rights of the displaced and encouraged financial support for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other international organizations working with internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The media has great influence in Côte d'Ivoire and a clear role in promoting peace and national reconciliation. As part of its responsibilities, the media was advised to educate the public, promote support for peace among Ivoirians, and strive for accurate reporting. Furthermore, journalists are expected to be educated about the law, behave ethically and responsibly, maintain their independence, and stand up for the rights of the public.

In recounting the role of women and the toll the conflict has taken on them, one participant highlighted the mounting economic difficulties, unemployment, discrimination, and physical and psychological abuse they endure. Women in rural areas in particular experience greater suffering than urban women. The same participant suggested empowering women by promoting community and economic organizations; implementing credit systems to grant them financial flexibility; and encouraging them to receive education and enter into industry.

Recommendations for Peacebuilding and Economic Development

Participants recommended the following actions to promote peacebuilding and economic development:

- Civil society must unite and establish firm positions on the issues of peacebuilding, economic development, justice, the role of the media, and the empowerment of women.
- Civil society should become more cohesive, especially through the inclusion of traditional rulers and religious leaders. One participant said that after civil society is recognized as a united entity, a process of consultation among CSOs must begin in earnest to establish a common agenda on the most important issues facing Côte d'Ivoire.
- Civil society should participate in the National Dialogue Forum meetings organized by the prime minister. In this regard, civil society was advised to develop a "road map" for its involvement in the peace process and present its plans to the UN and ECOWAS.

The Role of Regional and External Actors

Contributions of Regional and External Actors



The purpose of the workshop was to assess the peace process in Côte d'Ivoire and to increase awareness of the process and the issues at stake among donor countries, among other purposes.

According to one expert, the timely intervention of the international community in Côte d'Ivoire distinguished it from other crises in West Africa.

External actors, including the UN, ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and regional powers like Nigeria and South Africa, have helped advance the peace process in Côte d'Ivoire.

These positive interventions stemmed from the moral authority of the UN; the ability of ECOWAS to secure the authorization and deployment of UNOCI; and the mediation efforts of the AU, which helped to resolve differences among various faction leaders and assisted in the reconstitution of the Independent Electoral Commission. UNOCI and Licorne, the French force, also secured compliance with the ceasefire agreements between the factions. Regional actors were able to mobilize political, financial, and logistical support from the international community to assist in the implementation of the roadmap. Finally, external actors helped to build confidence between

Ivoirian officials and regional leaders.

Controversies surrounding outside intervention

The involvement of the international community has also received criticism, as elaborated by some participants. Various external actors often acted with little cohesion due to divergent political and economic interests, creating divisions that Ivoirian political actors exploited. The involvement of certain entities also generated distrust among one or more Ivoirian factions. This applies particularly to France, although President Gbagbo's expression of gratitude to South African President Thabo Mbeki for serving as an AU mediator led opposition leaders to challenge President Mbeki's impartiality as well.

Criticism has also extended to the UN and ECOWAS. It was noted that ECOWAS suffered from a lack of self-confidence, an inability to fully implement agreements, resource deficiencies, and a slow decision-making process. Participants agreed that the capacity of ECOWAS must improve in order for it to perform its role effectively, and criticized the UN for getting involved in Côte d'Ivoire without enough planning and consultation with the Ivoirian people. They expressed frustration that human rights abuses and insecurity persist throughout the country despite the presence of UNOCI.

Recommendations for continued external involvement

To ensure a more positive and effective intervention by the international community, the participants offered the following recommendations:

- Ivoirian parties must assume primary responsibility for restoring peace and stability—even though regional and external actors are expected to play an important role in advancing the peace process.
- External entities were urged to harmonize their policies in order to secure the trust of national actors, ensure adequate planning and the mobilization of resources, and avert the risk of national actors exploiting divisions within the international community.

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)

Challenges and concerns surrounding DDR in Côte d'Ivoire

Demobilization was scheduled to begin in October 2005, but it has encountered several delays. Pre-cantonment of forces began in May 2006 and approximately 100 militia group members began to disarm in Guiglo in July 2006.³ In addition to lengthy delays, the DDR program in Côte d'Ivoire faces a number of logistical and political challenges. In particular, identifying the number of combatants to disarm remains difficult. Current estimates place the number of combatants at 50,000, of whom 42,000 belong to militias. However, these figures cannot be verified. Participants also expressed skepticism that providing each combatant with \$900 for handing over weapons would truly remove the incentive to pick up arms. They suggested that a more effective use of resources would be to promote economic development to create employment opportunities for former combatants. Meeting participants also worried that ex-combatants, repeating patterns in Sierra Leone and Liberia, may join militia forces in neighboring countries (a key reason conflicts spill across borders) if sufficient incentives for DDR do not exist. Finally, participants voiced concerns about the political viability of pairing DDR with the identification process, as called for by the international community and the prime minister, and the likelihood that DDR could take place before the elections scheduled for October.

Recommendations for successful DDR and the role of civil society

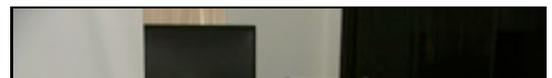
Participants offered the following recommendations for the success of DDR:

- Ensure the availability of funds, the provision of employment opportunities for the youth, sustained political will and commitment by international actors, and the inclusion of civil society in the DDR process.
- Provide security for vulnerable groups like women, children and former child soldiers.
- UNOCI, in particular, must play a guiding role, guaranteeing the security of its personnel and Ivoirian citizens and ensuring that sufficient funds exist for all phases of DDR.
- The UN should consider using the threat of sanctions against factions that fail to comply with DDR responsibilities stipulated in peace agreements.
- Civil society must be an integral part of the DDR process. Some participants criticized the lack of a clear role for civil society to play in the DDR process, while others noted that civil society is not yet ready to participate. To amend this, they suggested that civil society members educate themselves and get involved in reintegrating former combatants and war victims. CSOs could serve as implementing agencies for donors seeking to conduct reintegration programs.

Identity, Citizenship, and Elections

Identity, citizenship, and elections

Civil society members viewed the resolution of the identification and citizenship issues affecting nearly 3 million Ivoirians,⁴ which



divide the north and south of the country, as critical to the electoral process. The rise of anti-foreign sentiment, along with the inability to distinguish those of Ivoirian descent, the absence of identity cards, and unclear rules of citizenship, have generated distrust and discrimination against those from northern Côte d'Ivoire. Until these issues are resolved, participants feared, militias will not disarm. Many participants criticized the May 2006 trial registration program as disorganized, noting that many Ivoirians who participated faced logistical problems.

Recommendations to resolve identity and citizenship questions

Participants identified the following institutional and organizational tools to effectively address issues of identity and citizenship:

- Use the existing Ivoirian constitution as a guide for the identification process, since Côte d'Ivoire's constitution conforms to international standards for civil and political rights.
- The identification process should aim to resolve citizenship issues in the long-term, rather than seeking only to satisfy the election process timetable by distributing identification papers.
- Reduce the time needed to process registration by increasing the numbers of registration sites and people staffing them and providing the necessary equipment, even though this would also require additional funding.
- Ensure that civil society plays a role in facilitating these measures, and in reassuring the public and encouraging them to participate in the peace process.

The Way Forward

The workshop participants enumerated the following recommendations to increase the influence of civil society:

- Civil society in Côte d'Ivoire needs to develop a common platform in order to participate in the peace process. Once they are united, CSOs can more easily gain access to political leaders in Côte d'Ivoire, representatives of regional and international organizations, and the international working group on Côte d'Ivoire.
- Civil society must establish a stronger dialogue with the state.
- The peace process should include more actors and address a broader set of issues by forming a cohesive entity to devise comprehensive strategies for achieving peace. In particular, civil society must reach out to war victims, such as IDPs and child soldiers; traditional chiefs; and religious leaders.
- CSOs must participate in DDR and identification efforts, as well as preparations for elections. In particular, civil society must develop a more precise vision about what DDR entails, how it will be completed successfully, and how it can become more involved in the process.
- Place a greater focus on economic development, which lies at the root of DDR and identity issues.
- Most importantly, civil society should place itself at the forefront of national reconciliation efforts, which must begin immediately.

Postscript

Since the meeting in Accra, the participating CSOs have formed a civil society bloc called the Peace Process Monitoring Group in Côte d'Ivoire. They have held several follow-up meetings, expanded their



Senior Research Associate [Dorina Bekoe](#), left, facilitates the discussion with participants Emmanuel Bombande, the executive director of WANEP, USIP's partner organization, center, and Ouattara Tehua, right.

membership, and initiated contacts with national and international leaders involved in the peace process.

Notes

1. For a more detailed discussion of identification and citizenship issues in Côte d'Ivoire, see Daniel Chirot, "The Debacle in Côte d'Ivoire," *Journal of Democracy* 17:2, April 2006, 63-77.

2. Norwegian Refugee Council, "Côte d'Ivoire: Protection Needs of IDPs Remain Acute, Despite Modest Political Progress," June 9 2006 (<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/fromthefield/nrc/114985590956.htm> July 10 2006).

3. United Nations Operations in Côte d'Ivoire, "Retranscription du point de presse hebdomadaire," Abidjan, June 1, 2006 (electronic version); James Copnall, "Ivoirian militias begin to disband," BBCNews July 27, 2006, (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5219684.stm> July 27, 2006).

"[Côte d'Ivoire: Militias fail to show for disarmament](#)," IRINnews.org, June 16 2006.

4. "[COTE D IVOIRE: Hundreds given Ivoirian ID in scheme's trial run](#)," Irinnews.org May 30 2006.

Of Related Interest

- [Conflict and Democracy in Africa](#)
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