



Report

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'Capacities for Peace': lessons from the Ivorian-Liberian border region



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Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

Between September 2013 and February 2016, Conciliation Resources and Saferworld implemented the 'Capacities for Peace' project in 32 conflict-affected contexts around the world. The project involved working with local actors to enhance the effectiveness of local analysis, early warning and early action. This report seeks to reflect on the experiences and achievements of the 'Capacities for Peace' work that was implemented in the Ivorian-Liberian border regions.

The project sought to strengthen local ownership of peace initiatives in the Ivorian-Liberian border region by supporting the empowerment and capacity building of community-based peacebuilding actors. These actors were mobilised into District Platforms for Dialogue (DPDs) working to promote dialogue as an effective and non-violent means of redress. In total, four new DPDs were formed; Danané and Toulépléu in Côte d'Ivoire and Loguatom and Toetown in Liberia.

The project provided the space and linkages for the DPDs and the wider border population to engage more effectively with local and national authorities. The DPDs were supported to undertake participatory research into the drivers of insecurities in their communities, which they used to sensitise duty bearers. The collaborative and non-accusatory engagement approach that they used ensured that duty bearers were largely receptive and responsive to the findings.

These engagements created an appetite amongst government officials from both countries to participate in a bilateral dialogue process. In March 2015, an event was facilitated with government and civil society representatives to find common solutions to the insecurities in the Ivorian-Liberian border regions. The event enabled the parties to come out with joint and country specific policy commitments in a document termed the 'Accra Declaration,' which was officially signed by representatives of both governments in October 2015.

The report shares the lessons learnt from implementing the 'Capacities for Peace' project along the Ivorian-Liberian border and offers some suggestions on supporting local ownership of peace initiatives:

Reflections

- Strengthening local peacebuilding capacity supports legitimacy and enables constructive engagement.
- Local ownership supports community Early Response mechanisms.
- Dialogue as an effective Early Warning and conflict prevention mechanism.
- Consensus building approaches facilitated by DPDs between community and local government supports reconciliation.
- Participatory processes improve policy.
- Support for improved local governance builds peace.
- Foster links between local actors and national actors.
- Show flexibility in working with government officials.



Péhékan Barrage-Loguato border crossing on the Ivorian-Liberian border. © Conciliation Resources/ Daniel Tucker

Introduction

Cross-border violent attacks have long been a phenomenon of the four Mano River Region countries - Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Security threats and political tensions from one country regularly spill over the porous borders into their neighbouring countries, thus threatening regional stability. Border regions, suffering from under-development, poor governance and refugee flows, often become a battleground between armed groups and state security forces. Local communities, preyed upon by both sides, bear the brunt of the violence. One way to mitigate the tensions and violent conflict is to help build the capacity of people at all levels of society so that they have the ability, opportunity and motivation to be positive agents for change.

In the wake of the 2010-11 Ivorian political crisis, the Ivorian-Liberian border region has been particularly vulnerable and Western Côte d'Ivoire has experienced periodic cross-border attacks. Since 2012, there have been at least 22 cross-border attacks in Western Côte d'Ivoire. These

devastating attacks have killed at least 145 civilians, displaced tens of thousands, shattered livelihoods and contributed to the breakdown of community norms and values¹. In addition to vulnerability caused by the cross-border attacks, local border communities are also on the receiving end of pressure and abusive actions from the national military and other security apparatus. Close socio-cultural ties, including shared ethnic identities, have resulted in cross-border communities being accused by security apparatus of accommodating mercenaries and militant actors who have crossed the border from Liberia to fight on behalf of Ivorian political factions. This has further exacerbated the pressure and tension experienced by communities, this has been particularly prevalent for communities in Tabou Department where the majority of attacks have occurred since 2014.

¹ See 'Annex 1' for a list of attacks and an accompanying map of the Ivorian-Liberian border region.

Liberian refugees flowed into Côte d'Ivoire during the Liberian civil wars, whilst hundreds of thousands of Ivorian refugees crossed the other way during the Ivorian political crises of 2002 and 2010.

The presence of these armed groups in the Ivorian-Liberian border regions and their persistent attacks in communities in Western Côte d'Ivoire is seen as a threat to national security and more generally the stability of the Mano River Region. In response to these attacks the Liberian government closed the border between the two countries in June 2012 and only fully reopened the border in April 2013. The border only remained open for a year, as the Ivorian government opted to close its border with Liberia in response to the Ebola outbreak. The border has remained closed ever since though there are

tentative plans from the Ivorian government to fully reopen the border in March 2016.

Local border communities remain fearful, even during periods of calm, since violence can happen at any time, as the underlying drivers of insecurity remain unaddressed. Border region communities continue to lack sustainable livelihood opportunities, whilst justice and security mechanisms remain largely ineffective and insufficient. Over the past five years, there have been some slow improvements but fears in the border regions continue to be expressed by local people as well as national governments. This emphasises the need to strengthen the 'Capacities for Peace' of local actors in the Ivorian-Liberian border region.

'Capacities for Peace' in the Mano River Region

It is in the above-described environment that Conciliation Resources carried out the Mano River Region element of the EU-funded '**Capacities for Peace**' project. This work represents just a constituent part of a wider 'Capacities for Peace' project, which is being collaboratively implemented by Saferworld and Conciliation Resources, in 32 contexts around the world. The Mano River Region aspect of the 'Capacities for Peace' project was undertaken in partnership with two national NGOs - the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding in Côte d'Ivoire (WANEP-CI) and the Institute for Research and Democratic Development in Liberia (IREDD).

By supporting existing early warning networks with awareness creation, empowerment and peacebuilding skills, this project hoped to strengthen local ownership of peace initiatives in the Ivorian-Liberian border regions. It also sought to provide the space and opportunity for local peace actors to engage more effectively with authorities at both the local and national level.

Activities implemented under the 'Capacities for Peace' project in this region can be divided into distinct streams of work:

- a. Identification, mobilisation and capacity building of local peacebuilding actors who later formed networks known as District Platforms for Dialogue (DPDs), with two based in Côte d'Ivoire (Danané and Toulépléu) and two in Liberia (Loguatom and Toetown).
- b. Participatory research in the border communities to develop a common understanding of the sources of insecurity.
- c. Use of the participatory research by the DPDs, Conciliation Resources, WANEP-CI and IREDD

to engage policy and security actors at the local and national level on the realities and root causes of the insecurities faced by communities in the border regions.

- d. Facilitate bilateral policy dialogue on the cross-border tensions and support each country to develop commitments for change in their respective policy actions.

This report aims to share the project's experiences on the role that local actors can play in conflict transformation processes, the key lessons learnt and recommendations for supporting local ownership of peace initiatives.

A. Capacity building and local ownership

There is a common tendency to equate capacity building with training. However, this project understood capacity building as an empowering process aimed at supporting an organisation or individual's ability to: raise awareness, develop skills, build relationships, share relevant information, mediate dialogue for consensus building, and influence policymakers to achieve change.

This empowering process enabled the parties to develop joint commitments to improving border community security. The project aimed to foster local ownership of conflict transformation conversations, whether in the border communities themselves or at the national and bilateral levels. The process enabled the community actors and local authorities, such as security and border officials, to openly raise and share their concerns about cross-border insecurities. In both countries, local peacebuilding actors, such as the DPDs, have



Toulépléu DPD members conducting participatory research gauging the perspectives of border community actors. © Conciliation Resources/Janet Adama Mohammed

demonstrated their effectiveness and potential to contribute to the transformation of insecurities in border communities.

In designing this project, we reflected on the various opportunities offered by the 'Capacities for Peace' terminology and endeavoured to:

- Develop the skills of peacebuilding actors at local and national levels to analyse and deepen their understanding of the conflict drivers in their context, engage with different perspectives and identify available opportunities for solutions.
- Empower local actors - including youth, women and bike riders - by recognising their agency and creating spaces for them to proactively engage with duty bearers. This enables local populations and government officials to develop together share solutions to improve security. Empowering local actors and creating opportunities for a negotiated change demonstrates that there are alternatives to violence as a means of redress.
- Build relationships and trust between the local community, government actors and the DPDs so that they are able to work together, collaboratively resolve tensions and jointly make demands for improved community security in the border regions.

- Support consultations between the DPDs across the dividing border, so they are able to verify information, demystify rumours and examine the causes of tension with their counterparts, understand alternative perspectives and collaboratively agree on the next steps. Each DPD collaborates with their counterpart on the other side of the border, such as Danané DPD with Loguatomu DPD and Toulépléu DPD with Toetown DPD.

B. Participatory research and policy making

In December 2013, Conciliation Resources organised a stakeholder meeting to bring together security and border officials and NGOs from both Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire to discuss the underlying drivers of the persistent cross-border tensions and to work towards a common solution. At this meeting it was clear that there was a lot of uncertainty about the current conflict and tensions in the border regions and, as such, it was agreed that there was a need for in-depth research and analysis of the situation.

Conciliation Resources and partners committed to conducting two research reports into the Ivorian-Liberian border region. The first project, undertaken in collaboration with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at Sussex University, UK, examined the

policy responses to the cross-border insecurities.² The findings were put into a report published in June 2014 entitled 'Cross-border Violence as an External Stress: Policy Responses to Cross-border Dynamics on the Border between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.'³

In addition to this, in June and July 2014 the four DPDs undertook community-based participatory research for the 'Capacities for Peace' project examining what the local community and local authorities perceived as the greatest sources of insecurity. The participatory nature of this research meant that the findings were rooted in the lived experience of the cross-border communities. The research from the four DPDs was collated into a report, called 'Peace and Security along the Ivorian-Liberian border: The local perspective.'⁴

These research reports provided the DPDs and our national NGO partners with in-depth information on the realities and root causes of insecurities for communities in the border region.

The research process not only provided an open space for community members and civil society to share their perspectives and express their concerns but also encouraged state duty bearers to do the same. State duty bearers – whether they are civil servants, security and judicial sector actors or local government officials - must not be considered as separate and distinct from the community.

DPD insight

'The Early Warning research we conducted had a considerably positive impact on the safety of people in Toulépléu. The research revealed the abuse and racketeering of security forces on local populations in Toulépléu. When this research was presented to the government they immediately condemned these acts and took significant measures to improve the situation.'

Boye Nasser, Chairperson of the Toulépléu DPD

2 This research project was funded by DFID and was conducted in collaboration with IDS. Whilst not a 'Capacities for Peace' activity, Conciliation Resources involvement in the research project was motivated by the gap in up to date research on the Ivorian-Liberian border that the 'Capacities for Peace' stakeholder meeting in December 2013 had highlighted.

3 www.ids.ac.uk/publication/cross-border-violence-as-an-external-stress-policy-responses-to-cross-border-dynamics-on-the-border-between-cote-d-ivoire-and-liberia

4 <http://www.c-r.org/resources/peace-and-security-along-ivorian-liberian-border-local-perspective>



DPD members and the border community meet with local government and security officials. © Conciliation Resources/Janet Adama Mohammed

They are a key component of the Ivorian-Liberian border population and equally deserve the right to express themselves and be heard. Given this, the participatory research report 'Peace and security along the Ivorian-Liberian border: the local perspective' explicitly garnered the perspectives of both the border population and local state officials, recognising they too are members of the border population.

The participatory nature of the research meant the identified problems were rooted in the lived experience of the cross border communities (including state officials). Therefore the developed policy solutions addressed actual insecurities versus presumed threats. We believe that when the policy recommendations are implemented they are more likely to resolve the root causes of cross border insecurities.

This process of mutual exchange and flow of information between local communities, CSOs and duty bearers led to a shift from adversarial and accusatory engagement towards a more cooperative and consensus building approach where common solutions could be found through dialogue. It served to erode the mistrust and suspicion that tends to characterise these relationships. The shift in community-authority relations and the credibility of the participatory research contributed to duty bearers responsiveness to the research findings. This is well demonstrated by Harold Aidoo, the Executive Director of IREDD:

'Capacities for Peace was a revealing and empowering project. The methodology of the project has created more trust between us and policy actors and the previously adversarial lenses that government officials perceived our engagement has significantly improved.'

'Continued dialogue promotes trust, and trust enhances relationships, and with enhanced relationships people can always find a solution to their conflict situations.'

C. Ivorian-Liberian cross-border bilateral dialogue

The outcomes of the participatory research and policymaking activities generated an appetite for bilateral level conversations between the government officials and civil society from the two countries. In March 2015, Conciliation Resources and our civil society partners - WANEP-CI and IREDD - organised a bilateral dialogue meeting at the Paloma Hotel in Accra, Ghana. Its purpose was to not only discuss the security situation in the Ivorian-Liberian border region but to make progress towards finding common solutions to some of the most prevalent drivers of the cross border insecurities. Importantly the event was not only attended by political figureheads who have the authority to make political commitments but also by those responsible for implementing policy. By gaining the support of these policy implementers at this stage, it was our belief that any commitments made during the process are more likely to be put into practice on the ground.

Each country delegation engaged in open discussions to collate their concerns and make demands for change. At the end of the session, both countries jointly agreed on a number of commitments to address border insecurity, including collaborative efforts on information sharing, more regular meetings, and joint patrols among many others. Each country delegation came out with additional commitments for their own countries to improve their response to the situation.

Partner insight – WANEP-Côte d'Ivoire

'While recognising and commending the work that has already been done, this project has highlighted gaps in the responses of civil society, international organisations and state institutions to the insecurities in the Ivorian-Liberian border region.'

'This project has not only provided the space to raise these issues to various stakeholders but to also make important suggestions that have enabled them to implement desirable responses to the local populations' concerns.'

Coulibaly Tiohozon Ibrahima, former National Coordinator of WANEP-Côte d'Ivoire.



Government and civil society representatives from Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia meet in Accra, Ghana to find common solutions to insecurities in the border region. Left: Minister Varney Sirleaf, Liberian Deputy Minister for Internal Affairs addressing the delegation. Right: Ivorian participants in discussions. © Conciliation Resources/Daniel Tucker

In July 2015, these commitments were presented to a wider audience, reviewed and amended. In late October 2015, representatives of the Government of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire officially signed the 'Accra Declaration', which fully outlined all of the commitments made.⁵

The process described above represents what must be a continuous process. These commitments and recommendations must now be put into effect in the border regions. This will include a rigorous process that will monitor the implementation of the commitments, determine if the commitments are having the presumed effect and, if not, how the solutions can be adapted. The central role that the DPDs and the wider local community will play in this monitoring process will promote a cycle of active citizen engagement.

Reflections

- Strengthening local peacebuilding capacity supports legitimacy and enables constructive engagement:

Recognising the agency of local communities as peacebuilders and supporting this agency through training – e.g. in gender-sensitive conflict analysis, the use of social accountability tools and mediation training – helps increase their credibility with local government and community members. The newly acquired skills are not used to 'intimidate' or to have 'power over' the local communities or local government officials, the capacity creates acquired legitimacy to mediate in conflicts, including constructively engaging with local government and security actors.

- Local ownership supports community Early Response mechanisms:

Understanding the root causes enabled communities and local government to chart a common path, act in union and create their own shared solutions. This increased local responsiveness to resolve tensions without waiting for the state or others to intervene.

- Dialogue as an effective Early Warning and conflict prevention mechanism:

Dialogue processes should be supported to prevent conflict and to act as early warning mechanisms. Dialogue should not only be used when violence breaks out.

- Consensus building approaches facilitated by DPDs between community and local government actors supported reconciliation.
- Participatory processes improve policy.
- Support for improved local governance builds peace:

Strengthening the institutions of local governance in post conflict contexts is vital to sustaining peace, especially in local border communities. In remote border communities, the state is often absent, services can be limited or non-existent and the specific needs and interests of border communities are often not heard in capitals. Yet these are the locations where conflict may first emerge.

- Foster links between local and national actors:

Empowering local actors has enabled them to engage proactively to challenge the perspectives of national actors and contribute to decision-making for improved security. Local actors are able to share their experiences of living in the insecure environments in question and can also suggest alternatives to resolving some of the issues. These local actors can provide information, which the government and security officials are often not privy to.

5. <http://www.c-r.org/resources/declaration-security-along-ivorian-liberian-border>

○ Show flexibility in working with government officials:

Engaging government actors requires flexibility in planned activities, the timing of activities and adequate budgets for travel. The commitment of government officials to participate is often dependent upon the emerging political

interests of the day. The constantly evolving political environment of these contexts means that it is extremely difficult to plan activities. Greater flexibility within projects would enable peacebuilding facilitators to respond more quickly and proactively to accommodate the emerging interests and schedules of official actors, especially at the national levels.

Annex 1

Table of prominent attacks in Western Côte d'Ivoire between January 2012 and December 2015.

	Date	Location	Deaths
1	04 Jan 2012	Petit-Guiglo, Bloléquin Department	4
2	06 Jan 2012	Duékoué, Duékoué Department	4
3	20 Feb 2012	Konankro, Taï Department	6
4	25 Apr 2012	Sakré, Taï Department	8
5	08 Jun 2012	Para, Taï Department	23
6	11 Jun 2012	Siebloe-Oula, Taï Department	4
7	13 Jun 2012	Taï, Taï Department	17
8	20 Jul 2012	Duékoué, Duékoué Department	5
9	21 Jul 2012	Duékoué, Duékoué Department	11
10	13 Aug 2012	Péhékanhouébli, Toulépléu Department	4
11	17 Jan 2013	Diboké, Bloléquin Department	4
12	12 Mar 2013	Zilebly, Bloléquin Department	6
13	20 Mar 2013	Tiobly, Toulépléu Department	0
14	23 Mar 2013	Petit-Guiglo, Bloléquin Department	8
15	05 Jun 2013	Duékoué, Duékoué Department	2
16	30 Nov 2013	Taï, Taï Department	1
17	23 Feb 2014	Fete, Tabou Department	5
18	15 May 2014	Fete, Tabou Department	13
19	10 Jan 2015	Grabo, Tabou Department	3
20	16 Jan 2015	Irato, Tabou Department	0
21	24 Feb 2015	Irato, Tabou Department	2

Source: Collated from 30th-37th 'Secretary-General's Report on Côte d'Ivoire' and the 'Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire' from March 2012 and March 2013. Available at: <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/cote-divoire/>

Map of prominent attacks in Western Côte d'Ivoire between January 2012 and December 2015 (Numbers correspond with the attack number in the table of attacks)



Source: Adapted from map on page 15 of the 'Cross-border violence as an external stress' report. © Institute of Development Studies/ Conciliation Resources

About this project

'Capacities for Peace' is a global project undertaken by Saferworld and Conciliation Resources funded by the EU under the Instrument for Stability. The project involves working with local actors to enhance the effectiveness of local analysis, early warning and early action in 32 countries around the world. This report was produced as part of the 'Capacities for Peace' project.

For more information about this project, please visit: www.c-r.org/featured-work/capacities-peace.



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Conciliation Resources is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. We provide advice, support and practical resources to help divided communities resolve their differences peacefully. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end conflict, to improve policies and peacebuilding practice worldwide.

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