

Case Study: Capturing the Impact of the Project “supporting a conversation with youth on leadership” in Sassandra.

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Executive Summary

In July 2010 Search for Common Ground (SFCG) conducted a case study in the region of Sassandra, Côte d'Ivoire, to capture the impact of the project "supporting a conversation with youth on leadership" (DRL) among young people. This study sought to examine in depth the extent to which SFCG activities strengthened youth capacity to reduce political manipulation and promote tolerance.

With financial support from the United State Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, SFCG implemented a program in Sassandra, along with seven other regions throughout the country. Launched in 2008, with the expectation that the presidential election would be held within the project's lifetime, specific objectives were to increase youths' knowledge and skills of conflict resolution concepts and to promote and depoliticize the dialogue among diverse youth groups.

This eighteen month long project sought to achieve this objective through a combination of community outreach and media based activities targeting Ivorian youth from diverse religious, ethnic, and political backgrounds. Cote d'Ivoire's economic recession combined with social and political restrictions resulting in significant levels of youth unrest, including violent protest that created a tense environment worsened by the failed military coup of 2002. With limited job opportunities and existing inter-ethnic tensions, young people became easy targets of manipulation by political elites and opinion leaders. Therefore, many young people played an active role in the conflict, becoming involved in violent confrontation between supporters of competing parties.

Despite this history, SFCG believes that young people can play an important and transformative role in conflict resolution. In Cote d'Ivoire, young people constitute the majority of the population. Therefore, it is critically important for the younger generation to be actively involved in and support the democratic process. In addition, a 2007 baseline study conducted by SFCG showed that youth knowledge about the democratic process was low. Indeed, few were aware of their responsibilities as citizens. Therefore, without a solid grounding in democratic principles, youth will not be able to play an active role in the coming election and beyond. The activities organized by SFCG in Sassandra strengthened a conversation with youth on leadership by partnering youth leaders from different political parties and associations, and youth representatives from different religious and ethnic groups through training and dialogue sessions. This case study focuses on the effects of community outreach and media based activities on youth in the locality of Sassandra. This case study looks at how participation in project activities helped youth acquire new knowledge and skills. This case study also looks at the changes produced by the acquisition of this new knowledge and skills within the community.

The research tools used to collect information included a document review, five focus groups (consisting of young men and women who participated in a training session or benefited from a replication session), five informant's interview, and four individual interviews. In this way, the study took into account the viewpoints of a variety of stakeholders such as young men and women who participated in SFCG's training sessions or benefited from replication sessions organized by the trained participants. Discussion group and interview participants included community leaders, political leaders, and community members at-large (some of whom attended community events, or listened to SFCG's radio programming, or who never heard about SFCG before).

By utilizing the above methods this case study concluded several key findings related to the impact of the DRL project on youth in the Sassandra area.

- The project increased knowledge regarding conflict resolution and transformation skills and knowledge in order to develop young people self transformation. Youth leaders are now aware of and familiar with conflict resolution techniques and are using the manual provided by SFCG to empower other young people.
- SFCG facilitated training sessions and subsequent training sessions organized by youth leaders create and reinforce young people's capacities to deal with violent conflict and political manipulation. Youth from different ethnic, religious, and political groups are working together to reduce violence.
- There is a diminished risk of political manipulation among young people due to strengthened self-confidence and analysis skills. In the case of the upcoming election, youth will be more likely to unite and ask future leaders for development projects in their hometown.
- Violence around the electoral process has been reduced.
- There is positive a shift toward greater youth inclusion in the decision making process in most areas. Young people are more and more involved in the decision making process.

Although there are certainly other interventions that may have contributed to the conclusions mentioned above, the testimonials and stories elicited from a wide range of community actors offer compelling evidence of the link between SFCG's activities and the changes in knowledge and behavior observed in Sassandra. At the same time, information, attitudes, and opinions through focus group and one-on-one interviews show that there is still a poor representation of females in replication session.

Introduction: Background to the Activity

Context

Although acts of violence related to the 2002 conflict have stopped, the situation in Cote d'Ivoire remains precarious. During the conflict, young people were actively involved in armed groups. Due to growing rates of unemployment and increased inter-community tensions, young people have been easy targets for political manipulation. This in turn has the potential to increase violence among young people as well as politicize dialogue around the election and derail progress that has been made in recent years. The political situation of Sassandra was similar to Cote d'Ivoire overall socio-political condition. The town of Sassandra, located in the Bas-Sassandra region in Southwest Cote d'Ivoire, was significantly affected by the conflict because of the high level of political division. This region is known as a primary producer of cocoa, coffee, and timber that represent 40 percent of the country's economy. Due to the region's economic importance, immigrants from neighbouring West African countries, such as Burkina Faso and Mali, have been coming to the region to work on the plantations for generations, cultivating the land and settling in the area. The growing youth unemployment has led to displacement issues, as children of "native" Ivorian landholders who leased or sold their land have been returning home and seeking land to cultivate. This situation has led to violent land conflict in the area. In addition, this precarious economic situation has affected youth ability to resist political manipulation and has led to intolerance and other antisocial behaviours such as aggression against the foreign communities (Ghana and Burkina Faso). As national elections are still pending, it is necessary to strengthen youth capacity to mitigate conflict and promote tolerance.

Project overview

In order to address some of these challenges, SFCG launched a project “Supporting a conversation with youth on leadership” in 2008 with the financial support of United State Department of State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. With an overall goal of strengthening youth capacity to mitigate conflict and promote tolerance, this project’s specific objectives were to increase youths’ knowledge and skills of conflict resolution concepts and techniques as well as democratic principles and values, to strengthen youth’ confidence to play a key role in preventing manipulation and violence around the democratic process, and to promote and depoliticize political dialogue among diverse youth groups.

To execute this project, SFCG’s strategy included community outreach activities and radio programming. Through training sessions which discussed conflict resolution concept and techniques and leadership, SFCG aimed to increase youth knowledge and raise awareness about conflict transformation and reduce violence among young people. Through dialogue sessions, participatory theater, and other community events, young people would be able to build coalitions and manage conflicts in order to avoid political manipulation and violence. In addition, youth leaders would gain the abilities to create this shift in their community and play a constructive and active role in their communities. At the same time, they would get a better understanding of the principle of governance and democracy.

Furthermore, through media based activities, the project sought to provide a conversation platform, where youth from various background and political affiliations would engage the conversation in a non confrontational way. In this way, a collaborative environment could be created that would in turn lead to peaceful elections.

SFCG organized training sessions on leadership and conflict prevention with youth from various ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds on November 2009. These trainings were organized around the concept of leadership, conflict resolution skills, political tolerance and diversity. They enabled young people to have a better understanding of the qualities which constitute good leaders. The training program for each location lasted for three days. During this time, youth aged between 18 and 35 years deliberated on issues influencing their lives. At the end of the three day training, the participants developed an action plan which they were to follow rigorously. In each location the training workshop had 25 participants. These training sessions were complemented by SFCG’s radio programming to further support the project’s goals.

Case Study Design

Objective

The objective of this case study is to evaluate in depth the impact of SFCG’s activities in Sassandra on youth participants in the DRL project. In particular, this case study aims to measure changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior of those who participated or benefited from SFCG’s activities through the DRL project. This case study will also contribute to the monitoring effort of the DRL project regarding SFCG commitment to conduct an interim project monitoring in order to capture the first qualitative outcome of this project.

Methodology

We conducted a Program Effects Case Study that aims to capture the impact of the DRL project on youth in Sassandra. The case studies were implemented in the town of Sassandra and the villages of Niézéko and Tiazalé. These sites were chosen for their easy access and for their representativeness in the

project. In order to achieve its objectives, the case study concentrated on analyzing the activities that took place in Sassandra. Several research tools were used to collect data:

- Document review
- focus group
- key informant interview
- One-on-one interview

The document review included the reading and analysis of existing documents related to the project such as the DRL proposal, six quarterly reports, field reports, monitoring document etc... These documents served to inform the context and provided a better understanding of the overall project.

Four focus groups were organized in Bassa, Niézeko, and Tiazalé, three villages of the area. However, one focus was organized in the town of Sassandra under the direction of the monitoring team. This focus group was found useful and relevant for the purposes of this case study. It was conducted by Clotilde Gouley, an external evaluator, and Quentin Katyansi, the Guinea's Country Director who were in Sassandra to conduct the DRL project evaluation. The focus groups were comprised of six (6) young men and four (4) women who participated in the training sessions or who benefited from the replication sessions. In addition, the participants were selected by the local SFCG field agent in order to assure a diversity of gender, ethnicities, political affiliations, and religions.

Furthermore, five key informants' interviews were conducted with the chief of village: chief of Niézeko; two notables from Bassa and Tiazalé; an elementary school principal, and a political leader. One-on-one interviews were also conducted with four youth leaders: two from Bassa and two from Niézeko. These interviews provided further insight into the context and current situation in Sassandra, while supplementing the points of view expressed by the participants of SFCG activities during the focus groups.

Findings

This case study draws on the experiences of young people in Sassandra and the surrounding area. The time required for the fieldwork did not allow us to visit all localities where the project was implemented. Therefore, this case study will be focused on three different cases: the town of Sassandra, the village of Tiazalé, and Babo Toussaint of Niézeko.

Case one: the town of Sassandra

Overview

The city of Sassandra, located in the Bas-Sassandra region in Southwest Cote d'Ivoire, was significantly affected by the conflict because of the high level of political division. This region is known as one of the primary producers of cocoa, coffee, and timber that represent 40 percent of the country's economy.

Immigrants from neighboring West African countries, such as Burkina Faso and Mali, have been coming to the region to work on the plantations for generations, cultivating the land and settling in the area. The growing youth unemployment combined with displacement issues, as children of "native" Ivorian landholders who leased or sold their land have been returning home and seeking land to cultivate. This

situation has led to violent land conflict in the area. In addition, this precarious economic situation has affected youth ability to resist political manipulation and has led to intolerance and other antisocial behaviors such as aggression against the foreign communities (Ghana and Burkina Faso). Moreover, Sassandra is one of the two localities in Cote d'Ivoire which has no General Council that can implement development projects for the well being of its population. Due to this situation, Sassandra has been faced with low economic opportunities.

How the training session effected changes

One of the main goals of the DRL project was to increase young people's knowledge about conflict resolution skills and techniques. Although a baseline study was not conducted before the beginning of the project, the level of new knowledge regarding conflict resolution skills, democratic principles and values by young people can be measured using a baseline study conducted in 2007 which analyzed civic education and democratic process among youth and women. This baseline study showed that this knowledge was low in Cote d'Ivoire in general. This finding was also applied to the town of Sassandra.

A tailored survey was one of the most effective ways to determine and measure the knowledge gained through the DRL project, unfortunately because of time and logistical constraints, we were unable to use it. In fact, the case study investigation was implemented with the project evaluation. So, there was not enough time to conduct a survey.

However, through answer received from interviews and focus group discussions, we noticed that most of young people who participated in the training sessions demonstrated **a high level of knowledge concerning conflict resolution concepts and skills as well as democratic principles and values.** These young people have an extended knowledge and clear idea of what a

"Although we did not attend the training sessions, we were able to benefit from the replication sessions which allowed us to resolve a conflict that occurred between students and professors" - A female participant

conflict is, how to manage a conflict, and more questions related to the project. Youth leaders were familiar with conflict resolution techniques. Additionally, they were able to identify the different steps that should be taken in order to resolve any kind of conflict. As one focus group participant described:

"I settled a land conflict between two Burkinabe who were fighting over a plot of land. They were about to use machetes to kill each other. I ran into them randomly in the field. Thanks to SFCG training on conflict management, I was able to analyze the situation, listen to each person, take them to compromise and finally, they dropped their machetes. It was a great joy. I felt like a new person." - Focus group participant

Beyond the training session, the participatory theater and the radio programming also provided a learning environment for young people. A female participant in the focus group said that she learned how to obtain a *titre foncier* (land title) through one of SFCG's radio programming, *Unis Dans Nos Differences*. She then added that this program is useful for villages because it provides people the necessary knowledge they need to delimit their land. In addition, a key informant noticed that SFCG's media based activities have complemented the government awareness campaign on land conflicts. . Informants and focus groups participants recognized that they had acquired new knowledge through SFCG activities. Therefore, we can assume that young people and the general population have gained a better understanding of conflict resolution concepts and techniques as well as democratic principal and values.

Young people also took many initiatives that were supported by SFCG agents. In the town of Sassandra, young leaders who participated in the training session were able to replicate what they have learned to the youth of FESCI (Students Federation of Cote d'Ivoire) the most violent and active student association. In fact, they were able to involve every FESCI's youth leaders from all high schools. During the replication session, they were trained on the importance of gathering curate and update information to their peers in order to avoid violence among students. Soon after, one of the General Secretary of FESCI became member of the listening club which is a SFCG youth led monthly activity that provides feedbacks on SFCG's radio programming. In addition, the Peace Club of Ahirko Middle School members were also positively impacted during the replication session. Before their participation to SFCG activities, the Peace Club did not know how to engage FESCI members or teachers in discussion to find a common ground when they had to deal with a strike threat. For instance, this session provided these students with the necessary skills to manage a conflict between their peers and their teachers. Over three days of mediation, they reached a common solution that benefited both parties.

Furthermore, training session participants have formed participatory theater group which have performed in the community in order to pass on skills and knowledge to the broader population. These performances are also used to educate villagers. The coordinator of the JPDCI (Youth of the Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire) expressed his feeling towards these performances:

"We use participatory theater performances to raise awareness because most of the people in our community are illiterate and these performances are the best way to attract their attention. In addition, they are able to interpret our actions more easily and receive the message that we bring."

In regards to political manipulation: young people in Sassandra are acutely aware of regional damages caused by manipulation over the past years. Due to political parties' rivalries, the General Council elections did not take place. This situation has intensified youth un-employment rate and increased poverty in the area. As a result, the training session gave young people the opportunity to express their viewpoints on the issue and to engage in peaceful political discussion. Most of the focus group participants and youth leaders interviewed attested that SFCG's outreach and media activities have provided them with knowledge and skills necessary to avoid political manipulation. The JPDCI's coordinator explained that when a leader from his political affiliation tries to persuade him to do something unethical or asks him to bribe other young people from different political parties in order to join their cause he is now well equipped to have a sound discussion with his leader and make a polite refusal. Another youth leader, president of the NGO S.O.S Youth, also described how the training on leadership, youth, and manipulation provided him with concrete examples and analytical skills to resist political manipulation:

"After discussing political manipulation and leadership, SFCG is seen as an instrument to illuminate youth understanding of good leader and allow youth from different political parties to get together. A real change has happened. SFCG's activities have been truly a training school for me."

Therefore, youth have acquired the capacity to think deeply and critically in regards to their political involvement. To this extent, it seems that a new kind of relationship is being established between youth and the political elite. For some political leaders, this change is perceived as threatening because they are losing their power over young people who were once easy targets. It seems that now political leaders see youth as bad militants or suspect them of abandoning their political parties.

Another specific objective of the DRL project was to build youths confidence to prevent violence around the democratic process. During the focus group, participants spoke extensively about how violence has diminished among youth from different religious, ethnic, and political affiliations. They all unanimously attributed this change in their behavior to SFCG's training sessions and radio programming. In general, there is a shift in their role, from perpetrator of violence to non violence activist and peacekeeper.

"I was one of the first leaders of the FPI in charge of youth here in Sassandra. I was an active participant in civil disobedience organized by my party. SFCG activities allowed me to pull myself together .We still belong to different political group but we do not want to undertake political violence anymore. I'm no longer a radical. I work for peace."- **Focus group participant.**

Youth inclusion in the decision making process was also revealed as a key element in this case study. Participants in most of the discussions agreed that local administrative authorities such as mayor and prefect are not taking necessary actions to include youth in the decision process. A participant indicated that there are two kinds of authorities: political and traditional. According to his analysis, one category of authorities consists of elected political authorities such mayors and members of parliament. These leaders are not willing to implicate young people in major decisions that have to be taken in Sassandra. It seems that they do not value youth's role in society and do not consider that youth can play a decisive role in the decision making process. They perceived youth as lacking credibility, not trustworthy. In addition, focus group participants revealed that political authorities do not take into account youth opinions seriously. However, they do not hesitate to manipulate youth during elections. The second category of authorities consists of traditional authorities such as traditional chiefs. This second category of authorities is more likely to include youth in the decision making process. In the past, traditional chiefs used to believe that elders have the final say, but now this viewpoint is shifting toward an increasing youth inclusion in the decision making process. Traditional chiefs listen to youth and take their opinion into consideration. This shift will be fully argued in the session below.

Case two: The village of Tiazalé

Overview

Tiazalé is located at 70 kilometers of Sassandra in "the sous-prefecture" of Sago. It was chosen because it has been known as a breeding ground for violent actions emanating from youth. In October 2009, SFCG field agent conducted three days training session at Sago; Most of the participants invited were from Tiazalé. These sessions stressed that unity at the community level helps to generate resources necessary for local development. The success of the sessions held in this community is indicated by the fact that youth grew to understand the need for unity irrespective of their social status and ethnic backgrounds. The training stressed the importance of unity in order to achieve political stability, economic progression and to improve the lives of youth and other members of the community. The training also highlighted manipulation at the community level.

On November 20, 2009, a youth led exchange session on "Political tolerance and diversity" was organized to assess the impact of the previous trainings and foster dialogue among youth from diverse political, ethnic, and religious background. This exchange session also aimed at continuing youth self empowerment. A second exchange session on conflict resolution was held on December 19. This session was followed by a participatory theater that aimed at raising public awareness around conflict resolution techniques.

How the training session effected changes

Participants in the training session and those who benefitted from the replication session affirmed that they have **learned a lot about conflict management concepts and skills**. They were able to apply this new knowledge in their community. Youth leaders and youth in general have been actively working as mediators in various conflicts in their community. In some cases, they were able to use the conflict transformation manual produced by SFCG to refresh and consolidate prior knowledge. Youth in this locality told us how SFCG's training sessions provided them necessary skills to manage the conflict between local taxi drivers and young people from their village. In addition, youth have organized several sessions to share the contents of the training on conflict management skills, political manipulation, and democratic principles in their communities. As in other regions, these replications sessions were supported by SFCG's field agents. Following the session, a participatory theater and a mass film screening of SFCG's new TV Soap Opera, *The Team*, were carried out in the village. According to a community leader interviewed, these performances were a wonderful learning experience for the entire village and allowed others young people to get involved in conflict management and learn how to deal with difficult interpersonal relationship. Overall, young people interviewed in the focus groups gave numerous examples of activities that they have organized to positively impact their communities.

Furthermore, youth in Tiazalé affirmed that **political manipulation has significantly decreased** since the training session. Before the training when politicians came into the village, young people fought over tee-shirts and other gifts. They were divided based on their ethnic adherence. In addition, political affiliation and issues used to set apart family members. Since some young people have participated in SFCG activities, the population at large saw that there is less politicization around ethnicity and political parties. At the same time, divisions and tensions around political issues among young people have been rare in the village. Now youth would rather get together than fighting in the village. As an example, youth in Tiazalé, have united and formed a football team with young people from all ethnics groups who lived in the village. A focus group participant told the following story about an SFCG activity that had a strong influence on him and encouraged him to fight for the creation of a diversity football team:

"I have been marked by the training on democracy. During the meeting, there was a role playing where we were attached to each other and we had to move. When everyone was on its side, we could not move, but when we all went in the same direction, we were able to move. I learned that if there is no unity, nothing great can be constructed. So, we do not have to work in scattered ranks."

During the different focus group sessions and the interviews, participants pointed out on how collaboration between youth has increased thanks to SFCG's contributions. A community leader expressed his viewpoint on youth's collaboration:

"After SFCG's training, I noticed the revival of solidarity between young people of Tiazalé. They gathered to clean the village and the school. There is a sound understanding between our youth."

As stated above, youth have understood the necessity to work together to achieve economic development and improve their lives.

In Tiazalé, the DRL project also aimed at **reducing the risk of violence around the national election**. Regarding this goal, young people who participated in the training session and those who benefitted from the replication session acknowledged that they faced critical moments when they wanted to resort to violence, but thanks to the skills and techniques learned from SFCG, they were able to exert self-

control. For example, a conflict occurred between a young man of the Godié ethnicity and his peer who was Guéré. The two young men choose to resolve this conflict in a peaceful manner instead of resorting to violence as in the past.

Another proof of reduction of violence was found in youth's language. A more smooth and conciliatory language has emerged among young people. They have banned the usage of their former divisive and polarized language. A young man who benefited from a replication session in Tiazalé affirmed that:

"We are not anymore engaged in inflammatory dispute over political issues and parties, we now discuss with respect and self-control, avoiding any resort to violence."

In total, youth in Tiazalé have succeeded in creating a space for dialogue in their community to discuss the common problems faced by the local population.

Finally, youth in Tiazalé revealed that **their inclusion in the decision making process** was based on the traditional rules. However, these past years a big change happened within the ruling class. In this village, youth play a prominent role at the community level. The chief of the village is slightly young, so this aspect had greatly contributed to youth active participation in the decision making process. Youth's opinion is extremely important and takes into consideration. One key informant mentioned that youth have been consulted regarding majors' conflicts or issues in this community. These explanations were complemented by the role of guidance play by elders in Tiazalé. As a result, Youth have really been involved in the decision making process. However, participants in focus groups as well as those interviewed, indicated that this involvement of youth in the decision making process was not due to SFCG's activities.

Case Three: Babo Toussaint of Niézéko

Overview

Niézéko is a village located at 7 kilometers of Sassandra. The main activity of the inhabitants of this village is agriculture (palm oil, coconut and cassava), but this activity that does not interest many young people who are more attracted by the city. When young people are not in town to talk politics, they were in the village where they hang out on the beach in political groups, family or in some village pubs to drink traditional liquor dubbed "koutoukou". Political issues have divided young and old in this village. Every time a politician went into the village, there was a wave of conflicts over the distribution of T-shirts bearing the image of the politician. These conflicts opposed young people to one another, elders and youth, including traditional leaders. Babo Toussaint, a young man from this village is the main focused of this section of the case study. He is a member of the local chapter of the UDPCI (Union for Democracy and Peace of Cote d'Ivoire). He farmed a small field of cassava. It is in this context that Babo Toussaint was invited to youth conflict management and prevention training in Sassandra in November 2009. This training changed his life forever. Beyond his example, we will talk about young people in Niézéko who benefited from his experience.

How the training session effected changes

Babo Toussaint had gained an extensive knowledge on conflict management skills after his participation in the training session. The one-on-one interview conducted with him has demonstrated a relative strong understanding of conflict resolution concepts and skills. It is interesting to note that even the chief of the village who was interviewed during the data collection confirmed that this young person now possessed the skills and abilities necessary to manage conflict.

After the training session, Babo Toussaint organized a replication session to share the contents of the training on conflict management skills, political manipulation, and democratic principles in his community. This session saw the participation of the entire village. Therefore, youth of Niézéko benefited from the initiative of Babo Toussaint. The chief of village recognized in the interview that:

“The entire village has been informed on how to manage interpersonal and land conflicts. Young people have been particularly empowered.”

During the session he explained to the participants the necessity of self empowerment. Youth were given the chance to understand the importance of self development and learned that there were other alternatives to violence in conflict situations. Babo Toussaint set a good example of self realization and self empowerment to youth in the village by working harder than ever in his plot of land. This change of behavior has a great impact on the youth that benefited from the replication session. Some participants to the focus told us how they are now active workers who take their farm work seriously. Therefore, this session facilitated the achievement of self development necessary to facilitate economic development. In the same vein, **this session allowed youth to realize that they have been manipulated by politicians** over the past years. Indeed, politicians never provided solutions for daily concerns and broader issues. Through the replication session, youth have been equipped with the self confidence and knowledge necessary to impact the electoral process and resist political manipulation. Now, youth know that they will have to play an important role in the upcoming national election. A statement of the president of Youth in Niézéko expressed this will to have a new relationship with politics and politicians:

“We decided that when a politician will come in the village to meet us, as a prerequisite we will ask him to submit proposals and development ideas to prove his commitment to helping youth and the entire village. All politicians, whatever their political affiliation, will be subject to this exercise. We will no longer follow a politician like blind people.”

Moreover, nine out ten young people who participated in the focus group discussion said that the replication session contributed to the reduction of violence in their village. The level of violence between young people has considerably diminished. Fighting around political affiliations is rare and there is a better cohesion and collaboration in youth activities in the village. As a result, youth are on good terms with one another. According to one of the focus group participant:

“Now we are a more united group who enjoyed spending time together and drinking at the sea side. Political division and confrontation around political issues are irrelevant to the development of our village”

“After the training session in Sassandra, I gathered youth from my village in order share with the necessity to bury internal dispute and work towards mutual cohesion and understanding. I also brought to their attention the necessity to work for our self realization. After talking to them, I turned towards adults. I also shared with them how the training could help our village deal with land conflicts that we were mostly confronted with. Since then, every time that adults get together to deal with land conflicts they ask my point of view. After my village I went to Bassa to discuss with the youth president of this area about the training... I am often called upon to manage conflicts between youth in the village...I have even been given the nickname “Search for Common Ground.”

Babo Toussaint

Another important contribution of Toussaint in his community is that since the training session, he has been consulted in the mediation of some land conflicts. In general, youth have the opportunity to speak their mind during public meeting and give their opinion on major issues. Henceforth, youth will participate in the decision making process.

Overall, the focus group participant and people interviewed in Niézéko indicated that SFCG's activities through the DRL project have a big impact on Babo Toussaint's life and on other young people. It is clear that Babo has been empowered by the training; he is using his conflict management skills to solve conflicts and empower his community. Even if self empowerment was not the main goal of the DRL, the increase in confidence in this young man has had a large impact.

Analysis

From the three cases studies it appears that SFCG activities were more successful among young people who participated directly in the training sessions than those who benefited from the replication sessions. By contrasting these two groups of participants, we found that there was a big knowledge gap between these groups. For example, during the focus group discussions, we noticed that youth in the town of Sassandra were more knowledgeable about conflicts resolutions skills, the quality of good leaders, and democratic principles than youth in Tiazalé and Niézéko. In both villages, focus groups participants who benefited from the replication session had knowledge on conflict skills, but were lacking knowledge on democratic principles and leaderships concepts. They were unable to identify the quality of a good leader, or talk about youth role in the democratic process. However, through explanations, it was evident that these young people achieved an attitude change based on their testimonies.

Furthermore, youth in the town of Sassandra seemed more engaged in the political arena and more aware of political issues than participants from villages. They thus felt more confident in their capacity to transfer their knowledge to their peers in order to achieve the goals of this project. Their leadership role was more evident and relevant to impact the risk of political manipulation and reduce violence. Regarding the risk of political manipulation, we observed that youth in general were aware of the damaging effect of political manipulation. All young people who attended the focus group discussion unanimously agreed to resist and disavow politicians or elites who will try to manipulate them through donations and money. Furthermore, SFCG activities contributed to some extent to the reduction of violence in Sassandra as well as in both villages. People interviewed and focus groups participants mostly confirmed that violence has decreased in their communities. This observation was perceived through a more unite and collaborative youth who are engaged in collective activities. Youth total inclusion in the decision making process remain a big challenge in the town of Sassandra. The political authorities who are more influential and able to implement development projects for youth self-sufficiency seem to ignore the role of youth in their locality. They are still not involving youth in the decision making process neither taking into consideration youth viewpoints on major economics and developments issues that Sassandra is facing. Although, youth's role is shifting in villages, there is still much to be done in order for youth opinions to be fully considered as valuable as elders.

Recommendations

The recommendations made in this case study are aimed at enhancing the impact of SFCG's future activities. One recommendation is that SFCG should reinforce training on conflict management and democratic principles in order to refresh and consolidate prior knowledge and provide extensive and

better understanding of key concepts to those who benefited from the replication sessions. Indeed, we noticed that there was a notable knowledge gap between those who participated directly in the training sessions and those who benefited from the replication sessions.

Another recommendation is related to participants to the DRL project. SFCG should include more female in order to achieve gender balance. Indeed, we notice a weak female participation in the focus group discussion and interviews.

SFCG should also determine a baseline study before a project is initiated. It was difficult to determine the gain in knowledge throughout this project because we did not have access to a before project knowledge assessment in order to conduct an after project comparison.

Furthermore, to impact a great number of Ivorian youth and create a dynamic youth able to play a notable role in the upcoming election, SFCG should concentrate its efforts in urban area and big cities such as Abidjan where the most violent clashes and political manipulation are more likely to happen.

Finally, in the longer run SFCG should include political and traditional authorities in such a project to sensitize and facilitate youth inclusion in decision making process in their respective localities.

Conclusion

This case study has found that youth in the locality of Sassandra have gained new knowledge on conflict resolution techniques, democratic principal and values through SFCG activities. These activities contributed to this gain based on testimonies and interviews from the different informants and focus group participants. They demonstrated their knowledge by using skills and techniques learned to resolve interpersonal conflict in their community by acting as mediators.

Youth thus undertook actions to share the knowledge and skills they had gained as result of their engagement in SFCG activities. They were able to organize replication sessions to share the content of their new knowledge. They also formed theater performance group in order to perform in their community and raise awareness on issues they are facing in their community.

Furthermore, testimonials and interviews stressed how young people have been well equipped to avoid the risk of political manipulation and reduce violence around the democratic process. Young people that took part in the project have put aside their differences and have been working in a collaborative manner towards a common ground *the development of their locality*. Even if youth violence around election will be difficult to overcome as the electoral process accelerates, young people of Sassandra have set a new example for their locality in Cote d'Ivoire. They were not involved in February's manifestations that followed the joint dissolution of the government and the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI). As young people continue to be empowered and equipped with the confidence and knowledge needed to resist to political manipulation and violence, their desire for economic development and self independence will continue to increase. In addition, youth from diverse ethnic, religious, social, and political affiliation have been working in a collaborative manner and have been engaging in a new political dialogue concerning the upcoming national election. However, despite the contribution of SFCG's activities to these positive changes, it is important to keep in mind that in the absence of holding the national election, the risks of political manipulation among young people remain a consistent threat in Sassandra. Only the post electoral period will allow us to truly measure the impact of the depth of the exhibited changes.

Finally, progress has been made about the role of youth in the decision making process in Sassandra, but much remains to be done. Remaining challenges will be addressed through SFCG's radio programmes and outreach activities.

We did try to capture the impact of the DRL project on Youth in Sassandra, but because the national elections were not held in the timeframe of the project it was difficult to get the effectiveness of the overall project.