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Search for Common Ground

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Search for Common Ground – Côte d'Ivoire
Key Findings from EIDHR and PUR III Action Research

Founded in 1982, SFCG is an international non-governmental organisation dedicated to transforming how the world deals with conflict. SFCG supports programmes that aim to resolve conflict, build consensus, solve problems collaboratively, and promote reconciliation. SFCG programmes create and implement innovative models for the successful management and transformation of conflict, moving away from adversarial approaches toward cooperative solutions.

> With a mission to transform the way the world deals with conflict, from adversarial approaches to finding cooperative solutions, SFCG's approach in the Mano River Union countries and Côte d'Ivoire is to employ a regional strategy and a number of multifaceted tools to address four thematic priorities: ***Youth Engagement, Leadership, Exclusion, and Communication and Information.***

Guided by its West Africa regional strategy, SFCG's interventions in Côte d'Ivoire seek to address regional conflict themes in concert with national programmes in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. In 2005 studios were established in Daloa and in Abidjan modelled after similar studios in Liberia and Sierra Leone with the same general goal of reducing political and ethnic violence.

PROGRAMME BACKGROUND

Established in 2005, SFCG in Côte d'Ivoire started a programme that integrates multi-media programming with community outreach efforts, particularly focusing on the West and North of the country. With studios in Daloa and Abidjan, SFCG has built a national audience with its regular weekly programmes that address governance, reconciliation, and conflict issues.

SFCG in Côte d'Ivoire and the European Commission (EC) have signed cooperative agreements[1] to promote dialogue around democratic and electoral processes in Côte d'Ivoire so that the population will develop confidence in the institutions and in the national reconciliation process. Accomplishing this includes concluding the transition period and ensuring that Ivorians are well informed about the electoral and other national processes. SFCG's approach uses media programming and community-based engagement to target groups in the wider population supporting them to become better informed and better able to take decisions on their future and the peaceful future of the country.

Key groups in the country include women and youth so research was undertaken to shape the design of a civic education programme targeting them. These two categories of people have distinct interests and needs, yet are frequently marginalized from decision-making processes. despite the major roles women and youth played during the civil war: from victims; to abusers; to peacemakers. While some women emerged as leaders on both sides of the conflict able to

[1] Agreements have been signed through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the Emergency Post Crisis Rehabilitation Project III (PUR III).

mobilize and manage their communities in favour of either the government or the *Forces Nouvelles*, more widely women can be seen to hold a unique position in society, as they are well placed to reason and pacify their husbands and children. In terms of youth, there are numerous examples of young people engaged in both sides of the conflict, including the *Jeunes Patriotes* who fuelled protests and riots in support of the government.

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this Action Research is to gather information on the knowledge, attitude and practice of Ivorians on democratic and electoral processes, civic education, good governance, conflict management and prevention. The key findings of this research will inform the next steps in the design and implementation of SFCG and its partners' sensitisation and dialogue initiatives. The results of this research will also contribute to SFCG Côte d'Ivoire's efforts to improve the quality of its programming. Moreover, the lessons learned inform programming of similar activities across several regions where SFCG works. This research contributes to monitoring efforts to assess the extent to which SFCG's program in Côte d'Ivoire has strengthened local capacities to promote reconciliation and peace.

EIDHR Objectives:
1) Development of local structures supported which serve as platforms allowing other voices to be engaged in civic education and in the sensitization on electoral process.
2) Informed participation in electoral process strengthened for women and youth in particular.

PURIII Objectives:
1) Access to quality and credible information improved in relation to key issues in the communities.
2) Participatory, inclusive and social dialogue enhanced.
3) Local capacities reinforced to reduce tensions and to manage conflict through cooperative solutions.

STRATEGY

Several factors enabled the smooth rollout of the action research. For one, SFCG has established partnerships with two local organisations through the EIDHR and PUR III projects: "Organisation des Femmes Actives de Côte d'Ivoire (OFACI)" and "Club Union Africaine (Club UA)". In general, OFACI is engaged in fostering women's rights and inclusion, while Club UA organizes sensitisation programmes on democracy and human rights for youth. All three organisations have experience working in the targeted communities and have established contacts and relationships in those areas. The research team members were drawn equally from SFCG, OFACI and Club UA and were selected in relation to their operational communities targeted for the research. SFCG, OFACI, and Club UA worked through their local contacts to mobilize the targeted population to constitute the focus groups.

The research was conducted in nine localities, selected from SFCG's project target areas. The selection criteria, (gender, age, number of ethnic groups existing in the community, literate & illiterate) were designed to result in a profile for the regions reflected in the sample where the two projects will be implemented (types of conflicts, regional situation, mix of people, government zone and *Forces Nouvelles* held territory). In each location the research team selected research participants representing different backgrounds from three main categories: older women (ten maximum), young women (ten maximum), and young men (ten maximum). This approach ensured that differences in opinions and knowledge between different categories were captured. In addition to these people, three opinion leaders (generally older people) were interviewed per locality so that their reflection could help in validating the findings from the discussion groups.

The key informant interviews targeted opinion leaders, traditional heads and religious leaders and proved useful in triangulating findings from the focus group discussions.

METHODOLOGY

SFCG used focus group discussions and key informant interviews as its primary tools for the research. As discussed above, three categories of people were targeted: older women (over 35), young women (18-35) and young men (18-35). The research team conducted focus groups with each category separately, bringing together ten participants from different ethnic groups, levels of literacy, and political alliance within each focus group. In a few specific instances, the focus groups needed to be divided by ethnicity because of the sensitivity of the questions for the participants. All of the focus group discussions were recorded and later transcribed for the accuracy of the material gathered.

The research team split into pairs to conduct the fieldwork. Each pair was comprised on one SFCG representative and one partner representative, as well as one male and one female. Fieldwork was conducted over March 3-17 2007, beginning with a training session for the team. During the training, the objectives of the EIDHR and PURIII projects were reviewed, interviewing techniques addressed, and practice interviews conducted to ensure common understanding of the questions. Each discussion was guided by a questionnaire, which was tested and revised during the training session. The questions centred on the following:

1. Why do people listen to the radio?
2. How are relations between groups?
3. What is the existing base of knowledge on civic education?
4. What type of information about elections do people want to know more about? Particularly women and youth?
5. What are the best ways to reach women and youth?

KEY FINDINGS

Through the research, SFCG and its partners were able to identify key points that will guide and inform the implementation of the two projects.

A) Radio as a communication tool

Discussion participants said that they usually listen to radio in order to keep in touch with the world around them. During the focus group discussions, participants stated that they have access to at least one radio station in each of the localities. Several other sources were mentioned through which they get information, including television, newspapers, the internet and from word of mouth. Generally speaking, a lot of people rely on the radio as a means to get information, although they stipulated that this finding is dependent on the particular radio in question does not manipulate information.

B) Relations between groups

Response to questions about the relationships between different groups varied by location. In some localities, the discussion participants said they live in harmony. However, in other localities participants spoke of land, political and intergenerational conflicts. In the Confidence Zone—the region between the territory held by *Forces Nouvelles* in the North and the Government in the South—the participants spoke of insecurity as armed men usually stop vehicles and take away money and goods from travellers, and suspicions abound on who is responsible. In this area most discussion participants were not comfortable to speak frankly in the presence of people from other ethnic groups.

According to the participants land conflicts are most prevalent type of conflict, but the number and intensity vary in scale from one community to another.

> "At Talere, my village, the Dioula were told before they settled that the piece of land was meant for the construction of a market. When the chief died and the late chief's nephew became chief, the Dioula refused to leave the land for the market to be constructed. So the young Senoufo went into that part of the town and started demolishing their houses."—*A youth participant in Korhogo*

C) Levels of knowledge around civic education and the democratic process

Generally, the research found the knowledge level of youth and women (with the exception of university students), on democratic and electoral processes is low, particularly in the rural areas sampled. At the same time, all three of the participating groups, youth and women young and older, said that they would like to be informed on all the stages of the democratic and electoral processes in Côte d'Ivoire. One common point that came out among the groups was that they were not adequately informed on decisions taken by Government on issues. For example they wanted to get information on the peace talk between the Government and the *Forces Nouvelles* in Ouagadougou. They said they would like to be more informed on what is going on in their country.

When asked about citizen rights and responsibilities, generally, youth and women know more of their rights than their responsibilities. In every community the research found that very few sensitisation programmes have been organized on civic education that could have had effect or impact on the population; with the exception of the school civic education programme [which is not exhaustive].

There were some differences between the views of women, and particularly the older women, and youth on how they viewed the electoral process. Many women said that before elections could move forward, there needed to be peace in the country. On the other hand youth generally seemed to feel strongly that elections were very important, and should be held soon. Several youth in the different locations identified elections as their opportunity to express their opinion and make their statement about who should be leading the country.

> "Old people don't want to give way to youth".—*youth participant*

Freedom of expression

Generally, freedom of speech is restricted in both urban and rural settings. However, there exists a certain level of freedom amongst people who share common interests. This limited freedom was exemplified by the research team's difficulty in getting participants in Bangolo to discuss their opinions about the different questions in front of people from other ethnic groups.

> "As an artist, a rapper, they often censure what we say; which is not easy and people say we are in a democratic state."—*Musician in Abidjan*

D) Information needs and interests

The following points were frequently raised by discussion participants when asked what more they want to know about civic education and democratic processes including elections in Côte d'Ivoire:

- A general consensus exists among discussion participants to reinforce civic education programmes in schools.
- Youth groups would like trainings in civic education and democratic processes transmitted through cultural activities.
- Several participants in the focus groups are interested in obtaining information on the national identification process in Côte d'Ivoire.
- Participants would like to have the Ivorian constitution, official information and texts to be simplified and made widely available.
- The participants also said that they would like to understand the functions of the Independent Electoral Commission and the National Institute of Statistics.
- Youth and women would like to participate in the decision-making processes in their respective communities; as they are normally marginalized in this area. This sense of alienation clearly came out during the discussions.
- Civil society (youth and women) would like to reinforce their capacity through trainings for them to be involved in credible electoral monitoring.
- Most of the people interviewed wanted to have clearer information on each step of the direct dialogue which took place in Ouagadougou
- From general point of view, the involvement of women, particularly those in rural areas, should be encouraged to look out for information that is relevant to them.

E) Communication preferences

- Most women in rural areas prefer getting information in their local languages.
- The targeted population would prefer programmes that would allow them to interface with programme animators so that they can ask questions for clarifications such as Parliament, agoras (if depoliticised), interactive theatre, and video shows which explain the democratic and electoral processes.
- In the discussion groups some male youth came with the idea of simplifying the Ivorian Constitution and other Government texts and messages; and that the simplified information should be made accessible to the population.
- In some regions the television is not accessible (Like Danane and Bangolo).
- The women (younger and older) prefer women associations for the transmission of information.
- Several male youth spoke of solidarity events that assemble people together as significant in that they allow people to discuss community-burning issues and find solutions to them in a collective manner.
- During the discussion groups in Korhogo and Cocody in Abidjan, youth spoke of using brochures, posters and comic drawings to transmit messages. The same discussion groups in Korhogo and in Cocody mentioned praise singers, artists and megaphones as useful instruments to disseminate information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following preliminary recommendations have been made to the SFCG team for consideration for its civic education and democracy programming.

- Programming in local languages emerged as an element to take into account in order to target the majority of project participants particularly women in rural areas.

- It is necessary to target youth and women by finding them where they are, and through things that they like (i.e. markets, associations, entertainment -particularly football- in schools and in families). Following recommendations of some young people, more should be made of the presence of local schools for their multiplier effect. By transmitting messages to youths in school, they are in turn able to inform their parents at home.

- It was also observed during the discussions that several conflicts exist in the project operational communities. These are areas where SFCG and the two partners can use their expertise to promote social cohesion.

- Some focus groups expressed the need to reinforce the capacities of the partners involved in the implementation of the two projects.

- Given the presence of radio stations in the project operational areas, SFCG and partners should use these tools more in the implementation of the two projects.

- Since very few sensitisation programmes have been organized on civic education in most communities, a full civic education programme strategy should be developed by SFCG and the two partners for, in order to obtain desired results in the final analysis. One idea might be to reinforcing the civic education programme in schools.

- A strategy might be developed to promote freedom of speech through methods such as facilitating dialogue and the using the participation of women and youth in community decision-making processes.