

Local Inclusion Dynamics of Peacebuilding and Horizontal Inequalities in Côte D'Ivoire

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Abstract

This paper examined the peacebuilding effort in Côte d'Ivoire, with a view to ascertain how the peacebuilding process promoted local inclusion in addressing horizontal inequalities in the country. Historically, a perceived marginalization and exclusion of particular regions has resulted in tensions and confrontations in Côte d'Ivoire. Policies and resource distribution by the central government have occasionally favored particular regions or ethnic groups over others, causing resentment, inequality and eventually two civil wars in 2002 and 2011. To overcome these obstacles, the Ivorian government began implementing peacebuilding programs alongside the United Nations, with attempts made to improve local inclusion. According to a policy statement by the International Peace Institute, international peacebuilding is more likely to succeed when it can connect with local and community-level efforts. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, which is a diverse country with various ethnic, religious and regional groups, the inclusion of local communities, civil society organizations, and traditional leaders, in the decision-making processes were critical to addressing horizontal inequalities and achieving peacebuilding. Using an exploratory research design and qualitative methodology (which emphasizes words, as opposed to numerical values, to answer the questions *how* and *why*), the paper reveals that there was insufficient inclusion of traditional leaders, community members and civil society organizations at the decision-making level of the Ivorian peacebuilding process. Indigenous capacities for addressing horizontal inequalities were underutilized because existing religious and traditional methods of peacebuilding were not adequately explored. This approach led to inadequate grassroots engagement and use of indigenous capacities necessary for addressing horizontal inequalities and an effective peacebuilding process in Côte d'Ivoire. Even though the United Nations peacebuilding effort in the country was successful in restoring fragile peace, it was however not successful in addressing the horizontal inequalities and building a lasting peace

Keywords: Côte d'Ivoire, Horizontal Inequality, Local Inclusion, Peacebuilding, Social Cohesion, Human Needs Theory

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a great deal of attention paid to the complicated and sometimes difficult dynamics of peacebuilding in post-conflict communities. Examining the contribution of local inclusion dynamics to long-term peace and stability is a crucial part of this complex process (Bangura, 2015; Senehi, 2022, Habyarimana, and Leonardsson, 2022; Brenner, Kübler, and Nassar, 2023). Côte d'Ivoire, a country in West Africa once characterized by protracted civil war, makes a fascinating case study for examining these processes. The purpose of this paper therefore is to provide an overview of the problems and potentials for peace that have evolved in the context of Côte d'Ivoire's peacebuilding efforts by shedding light on the complex interplay between local inclusion and horizontal disparities.

Although the horrific civil conflict that characterized Côte d'Ivoire came to an official end in 2011, the social, political and economic climate of the country is still shaped by the after effects of this protracted conflict (Oyekanmi, 2023). Analyzing the horizontal inequalities that occur along ethnic, regional and religious lines is essential to comprehending the difficulties of peacebuilding in this setting. These differences have fueled continuing hostilities and pose a threat to the tenuous peace that currently governs the country (Oyekanmi, 2023). Likewise, local inclusion dynamics which focuses on the methods and procedures through which people, communities, and various social groups participate in determining the direction of peacebuilding is critical to achieving successful peacebuilding. Thus, examining the ways in which local players are included in or left out of peacebuilding initiatives is essential to comprehending the chances for long-term peace and development in Côte d'Ivoire.

Previous studies on peacebuilding had focused mainly on modern state institutions, negotiations, transitional justice and human rights, with little attention on local inclusion and horizontal inequalities. In essence, while some studies often acknowledge the role of horizontal inequalities in peacebuilding, an analysis of their intricate connection with local inclusion dynamics remains an underexplored area. Thus, a more nuanced exploration of how these inequalities intersect with local inclusion efforts in peacebuilding in Côte d'Ivoire; this is the emphasis of this paper. By adopting the Human Needs Theory, the paper focuses on efforts to identify the specific needs of different levels of social engagement at the grassroots level in Côte d'Ivoire's peacebuilding process. Accordingly, the critical question this paper seeks to answer is about how the inclusion of local participants contributes to the peacebuilding process in Côte d'Ivoire. For more clarity, a brief background on the Ivorian conflict and the peacebuilding process is first discussed.

Peacebuilding and Horizontal Inequalities in Côte D'Ivoire: A Brief Background

With the prevalence of violence and resurgence of armed conflicts in many parts of Africa, the subject of local peacebuilding has gained a significant attention, particularly with countries ravished by horizontal inequalities (Peacedirect, 2019; Nganje, 2021). Côte d'Ivoire, a West African country once referred to as the oasis of political and economic stability, grappled with challenges arising from its history of deep-seated horizontal inequalities and internal armed conflicts. It plunged into political conflict and economic instability after the demise of its first President, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, in 1993 (Ogunmola and Badmus, 2009). This cascaded into the manifestation of two violent conflicts: (1) the first civil war on September 19, 2002; and (2) the contested 2010 Ivorian presidential election, which served as the catalyst for the second civil war between 2010 and 2011. These conflicts which resulted in substantial loss of lives and destruction of properties exposed deep-rooted inequalities that had been seething beneath the surface for years, further dividing the

country along ethnic, regional and political lines.

The sudden change from a stable country to a volatile one had grave consequences that were the outcomes of an internal political power struggle for leadership and the abuse of power. Following these events, a peacebuilding structure was introduced in Côte d'Ivoire to address the effects of the conflicts and the prevailing horizontal inequalities that spurred the conflict in the first place. It was necessary, therefore, to rally support for a quick resolution to the conflict by initiating peacebuilding strategies through the United Nations Operations in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). Beginning in 2004, the Ivorian government began implementing peacebuilding programs with the assistance of the United Nations. The post-conflict peacebuilding was intended to address the causes of the conflict, foster national harmony and stability, and encourage reconciliation through self-sustaining and long-lasting structures.

The concept of peacebuilding was introduced in the early 1990s into the global political discourse as part of the mechanisms for developing a peacebuilding framework for restoring peace and civil harmony in conflict zones around the world. Within the African continent, and especially post-conflict spots like Côte d'Ivoire, the attendant political crises it brings and the peacebuilding process which typically follows every civil war has remained a somewhat challenging phenomenon. Given the opaque nature of peacebuilding and the ambiguity around the concept, including the complexity of violence, statehood, and wars in most Third World states like African countries, political analysts and researchers have struggled to sufficiently illuminate scholarly understanding of peacebuilding to an appreciable degree. In some instances, the political actors may come to an agreement to resolve their conflicts, establish a balance for all parties, and agree to coexist in a shared geographical territory during periods of political change. Within the context of Côte d'Ivoire, there have been tremendous challenges in attaining long-term peace and reconciliation despite remarkable progress in recent years. The peacebuilding framework established in the country between 2004 and 2017 did not effectively address the never-ending threats to long-term peace and stability. Likewise, efforts at building peace after the wars were either undermanaged, mismanaged, or aborted midway through implementation.

Theoretical Framework

The Human Needs Theory of conflict that is used to ground the analysis of this paper is generally attributed to the 1990 work of John Burton, who borrowed the concept from John McHale and Magda Cordell McHale (1979) without attribution, and those of other scholars and practitioners such as Herbert Kelman (1981) and William Ury (1991). Kelman focuses on understanding the psychological dynamics of conflicts, while Ury focused on the underlying interests rather than positions during negotiation processes. According to Burton, conflicts start when people or groups believe that their basic needs are being disregarded or suppressed by others. These needs include security, recognition, identity and participation in decision-making (Burton, 1990). He argues that disputes could only be settled when these demands were met in a way that pleases all parties.

In utilizing Human Needs Theory to explain the local dynamics of peacebuilding and horizontal inequalities in Côte d'Ivoire, I explicate that there are universal needs that require full satisfaction of the people if conflicts, deviant and violent behaviors, and destructive conflicts are to be avoided. Sandole (2001) suggests that people's beliefs, the values assigned to them, and the emotional cost of being disappointed by highly valued beliefs can all be explained by Burton's Human Needs Theory.

Echoing the perspectives of Paul Sites (1973) on basic human needs, Burton acknowledges the ensuing six needs. The first need requires that a good level of satisfaction must be seen in order

for the population to live a normal existence, and the second is to have the need to not express deviance or violent behavior when those needs are not satisfied (Burton, 1979). In explaining some of Sites' needs perspective in line with the circumstances in Côte d'Ivoire, the government's consistency in establishing a sense of belonging to all groups is subsumed under the first categorization of needs. Hence, in the case of the leadership in Côte d'Ivoire, this was deliberately absent. Another need was the effort of stimulating the people to economic prosperity and political relevance, which was seen as only applicable to certain regions of the country. The third need was the security need that was not satisfied and had led to a protracted struggle for political power by disadvantaged groups to ostensibly take revenge and better the lot of their people as practiced by the previous leaders. With this prejudicial behavior and conduct, the government in power set the pace for huge insecurity and destruction that was exhibited during the armed conflict in which ethnicity was used as a ploy to further wider hidden agendas. The fourth one was the lack of recognition of the peculiar needs of the people, especially those in the grassroots and economically disadvantaged regions that were dissatisfied.

The fifth need precludes the fact that justice was not provided in different circumstances in the immediate aftermath of the war when many of the recognized rebel leaders who coordinated genocide during the wars were not sanctioned; rather, they were enlisted into the Ivorian armed forces. Many were alleged to be supporters of the government and were rewarded with army employment or cash gifts and material things to begin a new life after the war. A majority of the victims were, however, left to their own fate and denied justice. The sixth need involved the government not giving meaning to the lives of the people. These issues undoubtedly bred acrimony in the polity; and it affected every sector of the economy.

From the foregoing, Côte d'Ivoire was metaphorically sitting on a ticking time bomb which literally exploded into a full-blown war in 2002 and relapsed in 2011. In preferentially selecting the Human Needs Theory, three basic features were crucial in the decision making. First, it allowed the use of multiple choices in the identification of the foundational causes of the war, resolution of conflicts, either by the force of arms, law, or power-differential based compromises with all parties or other expedient measures. Second, its use of the needs-based planning of conflict environments assists peace strategists and analysts to understand the inequalities affecting the different populations and help to design peace resolutions that match or correspond to the basic issues of the moment in those conflict areas. Third, in applying a needs-based approach, the theory illuminates the point that in failing to satisfy needs, leaders are culpable in generating the conflicts or in failing to resolve them, which invariably frustrates the peacebuilding process established. Significantly, the Human Needs Theory of conflict provides a useful framework for comprehending the underlying factors that contribute to conflict in Côte d'Ivoire through the formulation of adequate local inclusion in designing peacebuilding programs.

Research Methodology

The time scope of this study is from 2002 when the first war began to 2017 when the UNOCI exited. The area scope of this study is the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, one of the sovereign states located in West Africa. It is bounded by Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and the Atlantic Ocean. The country's demographics show a diversity in terms of gender, age, religion and ethnicity. There are about 60 ethnic groups in the country distributed into four major groups: (1) Voltarians, (2) Mandés, (3) Akans, and (4) Krous. Other smaller ethnic groups also exist in the country aside from the aforementioned. Côte d'Ivoire is religiously diverse. The country's major religious blocs are Muslims, Catholics, Evangelicals, and minority practitioners of traditional

religions. Economically, Côte d'Ivoire is a major exporter of cash crops such as palm oil, coffee, and cocoa beans for which it is recognized as the largest producer in the world till date.

Using an exploratory design, the study adopted the qualitative method of data collection and analysis. Twenty-nine key informant interviews were conducted with purposively selected respondents, comprising, three United Nations officials, two Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) officials, three officials of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), two government officials, four university academics, four religious leaders (two each from Christianity and Islam), four ex-combatants (two each from Laurent Gbagbo and Allasane Ouattara's camps), two youth leaders, and five community leaders. Also, six sessions of focus group discussions were conducted with men, women, and youth groups from the northern and southern regions. In particular, Tiebissou was selected for sampling citizens from both northern and southern region of Côte d'Ivoire. The town is unique in its cosmopolitan characteristics as an accommodating cluster of all ethnicities and nationalities. During the war, the town was labeled as the "zone of confidence." It was a buffer zone that served as a safety net for people who were escaping the ravages of the war from other regions. The data collected were thematically analyzed.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The inclusion of local residents or indigenous people at all levels in the maintenance and sustenance of peace in Côte d'Ivoire after the wars were analyzed while emphasizing the adequacy of engaging local dynamics in effective peacebuilding. In the surveys and meetings with respondents, efforts to identify the different levels of local engagements of the peacebuilding process with people at the grassroots were made. There was a focus on local involvement and the efforts of local chiefs, community leaders, civil society on the peace process in the country; and the traditional mechanisms of peacebuilding adopted. Addressing a broad category of actions and strategies, three main case studies were significant to the local inclusion dynamics and the horizontal inequality gap in Côte d'Ivoire. They include conflict resolution and reconciliation, community engagement and ownership, and the challenges of the peacebuilding process itself. The case studies are discussed separately in the ensuing subsections for the sake of clarity.

Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation

Local conflict resolution entails managing tensions, settling disputes, and resolving conflicts within communities without resorting to violence. This strand focused on addressing the immediate and deeply entrenched causes of the Ivorian conflict and working toward repairing relationships and trust. This involved the truth and reconciliation commissions, dialogues, and forgiveness procedures. The foundation of the Ivorian conflict has often been considered as a multifaceted one. One of the issues was the first steps taken toward the transition program for the constitutional enthronement of former President of the National Assembly Henry Konan Bedie as President. It became a public exhibition of personal differences between him and then Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara after the death of President Biogny. The action arguably, contributed to the protracted Ivorian conflict. According to Bado and Zapata, "the breakup of political alliances is heightening competition between ethnic and political groups, increasing the likelihood of the kind of severe political instability that usually precedes mass atrocities" (2019, 13). In an effort to explain the deepened differences occasioned by political gladiators after the demise of President Felix Houphouët-Biagui, a now retired United Nations field officer during the period stated the following: "It is a political affair conflict and when you go deep down you will find that ethnicity, discrimination between

ethnic groups, started with the death of Felix Houphouët Boigny. When he passed away there was a misunderstanding at the level of the one who was to succeed him” (KII/Male/Tiebissou /February 23, 2020).

The immediate frictions after the demise of Houphouët Boigny partially had negative effects on the Ivorian political system which was not a core responsibility of the United Nations’ peacebuilding process. Following the introduction of reconciliation as a function of the organization’s peace process, key political actors remained not only politically distant but also socially isolated, thereby contributing maximally to a heated polity. Hence, the peacebuilding programs concentrated more on a ceasefire agenda with pockets of social programs for the populace without embracing a holistic reconciliation framework for the political actors. This situation incited political instability and ethnic competitiveness especially at the grassroots level. In 2018, a year after the UNOCI handed over its duties to the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), and two years before the Ivorian presidential elections, the Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI) broke away from the coalition of political parties called the Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP). RHDP had supported the candidacy of Ouattara during his reelection bid in 2015 (Bado and Zapata, 2019). This development was evident in the fracturing of key political parties and political actors aligned along ethnic lines, which influenced the mistrust, fear and eventual violence that erupted prior to the election and during the October 2020 elections. Accordingly, these events led to a series of military mutinies and civil rioting after the exit of the UNOCI. The situation became even more complex considering that in 2017 the West African CFA franc (XOF) 12 million representing US\$20,400 bonuses paid to each of the 8,400 Forces Nouvelles (New Forces) veterans integrated into the army appeared as an unfair reward by existing military members. They believed that it was a special grant packaged for northerners for rebelling against the government (Bado and Zapata, 2019)..

Additionally, the controversial release of former President Laurent Gbagbo by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the body language of the Ivorian government presented an indication of a lopsided peace process. The failure of the peacebuilding process to address the negative effects of the political elite’s influence on the political landscape of Côte d’Ivoire was the key variable that quickened another conflict. Corroborating this assertion, a respondent stated the following: “To testify to what I just said, we are in 2020 and we are going to hold elections and we have the same politicians, the same actors and they are doing the same thing and people are afraid of the known consequences. And if we do not pay attention, we may have another lapse in security and safety of the people” (KII/Female/Abidjan/February 21, 2020).

Although the reality of another conflict was looming given that previous elections had transcended into violence, the 2020 presidential elections thankfully did not evolve into another war, but it did reveal the fragility of the peace in Côte d’Ivoire. Hence, from the analysis, the outcome of the 2018 and October 2020 general elections, especially as it relates to electoral induced violence, suggests that the peacebuilding process was not successful (Moody, 2021). More so, the lack of an efficient peace process that will create a synergy with the reconciliation programs at the national and local levels has a greater propensity to truncate the United Nations’ efforts at the local level. A United Nations official in revealing the skewed peace process stated lucidly that peacebuilding cannot be complete without the reconciliation of the key individuals at that national level, as they had led the crisis and Côte d’Ivoire into the abyss of civil war (Oyekanmi, 2023). At the time of data collection for the present study, the three major politicians in the country—Ouattara, and Gbagbo and Bedie, who were formerly in a coalition with Ouattara—were still at conflict with each other. Nonetheless, by 2022, in an effort to unite the West African country ahead of elections in 2025, Ouattara met with his predecessors and longstanding enemies Gbagbo and Bedie (Coulibaly, 2022).

While this meeting was significant to the peacebuilding process, the longstanding rift between these political gladiators had negative impact on the reconciliation of the larger population.

Considering that the fieldwork for this study was conducted eight months before the October 2020 elections, the perceived fear of non-reconciliation at the national level sliding into another major violence was apparent by most respondents (Coulibaly, 2022). In any case, these comments suggest that the possibility of successful peacebuilding in Côte d'Ivoire and national security is linked to the roles and antecedents of the three major political actors aforementioned. Indeed, the eventual reconciliation of the three major political gladiators in July of 2021 was a step in the right direction, despite its cosmetic approach that further reveals the skewed peacebuilding outcome. Thus, the potential seeds of conflict such as land rights and ownership, grievances over local or national identity, and uneven distribution of national resources are all embedded in the conflicting relationship among the political elites. Inadvertently, this course of action, occasioned by the return of well-known political players presents a platform for persistent divisiveness and conflict at the national and local levels, which can impair the remaining gains of the United Nations' peacebuilding effort in Côte d'Ivoire. Another respondent reiterated that the problem of Côte d'Ivoire is not at the level of the representative of every group in the government but much more complex than what is perceived (KII/Male/Abidjan/March 24, 2020). In effect, the main problem as another respondent alluded was the lack of social justice, whereby the chiefs of the rebel gangs were specifically selected and financially rewarded. This was reflected in the following assertion by another respondent: "Rebels were recompensed, some got rich overnight thereby sending wrong signal to the effort to get justice after a war, where both parties to the conflict were grossly affected" (KII/Male/Tiebissou/March 6, 2020).

In the same vein, Moody (2021) also opined that war-related offenses were unfairly targeted for prosecution and arrest; while numerous pro-Ouattara supporters were charged with crimes related to the conflict, not large number of arrests were made of opposition supporters. Simply put, there were still persistent ethnic tensions and a palpable sense of impending war.

Relating the open reward to rebel leaders, cases of impunity, widespread rape, and extra-judicial killings that were alleged against them during the ICC trial, the issues were yet to be addressed by either the government or the United Nations agencies that oversee such allegations. In the course of conducting focus group discussions with women from the south, a respondent who witnessed some of these atrocities stated the following: "These new crimes were like blood to the veins of these wicked rebel leaders. They were quite malicious in the killing of people, and were exhilarated at raping girls and women. Most of the women, who were sighted in that protest march against war in Abobo town were massacred by these gang leaders and the issue have been left without justice been given to them or their families" (FGD/Female/Abidjan/February 22, 2020).

Most of these revelations were uncovered during the trial at the ICC. Before then, many people had not known that such atrocities ever happened. With such findings, the remit of the truth and reconciliation committee was to ensure that justice is served, regardless of what support or ethnic group to which the political actor belonged. The allegations and the reasons for the arrest warrants on only Gbagbo and his former youth minister may not be clear to several quarters; nonetheless, their eventual release and exoneration from all charges were significant to the peacebuilding process. A religious cleric from the South narrated that the situation in Côte d'Ivoire is a complex one as follows: "You can see that the kind of peace you have in Côte d'Ivoire is like a fake peace. We have people who do not have job and all of those things. And today we are not recompensing people who deserve something but recompensing people who are in the political party, their followers and loyalists. This is what they are doing here in Côte d'Ivoire" (KII/Male/Abidjan/February 24, 2020).

No doubt, the reconciliation among the major political actors initiated after the elections by Ouattara in 2021 was instructive, but this did not translate into mending the acrimonies among their supporters, as the conflict that ensued during the October 2020 elections had brought significant setbacks that the 2021 reconciliation was yet to address. The 2020 elections were adjudged fraudulent and oppressive, with opposition candidates boycotting the elections given the constitutional amendment granting a third term to Ouattara. Throughout the election season, the government outlawed all public protests, and those that did occur were violently suppressed. Numerous incidents of violence between supporters of the government and those opposed to it marred the campaign season itself (Oyekanmi, 2023). In essence, the reconciliation of major political actors at the national level, isolated from justice, watered-down the reconciliation process and limited its effect at the local level and the entire peacebuilding process.

Community Engagement and Ownership

The strategy for training local people in order to sustain peace and development through grassroots initiatives and local inclusion through policy making were examined. By the end of the first war, although five peace agreements were signed and a government of national reconciliation formed, the issues that caused the war remained unclear in the peacebuilding process in Côte d'Ivoire. Nevertheless, flowing from the ensuing analysis, part of the problem was the uncertainties and the lack of inclusion of local leaders from the affected communities.

Local governance strategy is a basic feature in addressing root causes of fragility, conflict and violence in any country. The technicalities of local involvement in peacebuilding are central to its sustainability in many African communities. More so, the absence of local inclusion may exacerbate greater conflict, whereby a management system or technical committee would likely hinder community-based interventions. According to a World Bank report in 2008, most villagers were cautiously excluded at the participatory levels of the peacebuilding in Côte d'Ivoire due to insufficient time and resources allocated to establishing the committees at the local level (Quitow, 2008). In an interview with a youth leader in Tiebissou, he stated the following: "Efforts towards building peace were not inclusive but largely exclusive. The process was a top-down approach yielding little or no result at the local levels. For instance, the UN gave financial aids but the locals were not part of the process" (KII/Male/ Tiebissou /February 23, 2020).

Programs targeted at closing the inequality gap were a top-down approach to peacebuilding, considering that they lacked the input and support of the local population and particularly women that constitute a significant number of the Ivorian population. For instance, the rationality of including women into the program ought to have been considered by relevant organizations involved in the peacebuilding processes because most women could have experienced emotional traumas caused by losses of children, sisters, parents, brothers and husbands in the two wars (UN Women, 2014). Their inputs and contributions could have been relevant and important in the documentation of the array of causes leading to the conflicts. The absence of women's contributions in the program may have led to the series of street protests and public marches in support of the men. Many of them took up the role of engaging in prayers for their families and neighborhoods (Oyekanmi, 2023). By not including the women as major stakeholders in the peacebuilding process as the men were, feminist apologists could claim that the Ivorian society was sexist and have underrated the social values in solving the country's crises. Nonetheless, working for peacebuilding in different other roles, women have shown that they could be instrumental to managing the peace and restoring hope to the country.

In a focus group discussion session with men of Tiebissou South, it was discovered that the

men believed that the United Nations' programs only ceased when the UNOCI operations were concluded. It was also alleged that the inclusion of local women was almost zero because they were never really considered as an important variable in managing conflicts of a national status. One of the respondents pointed accusing fingers at the United Nations and other organizations by stating the following: 'When they were going, they left with a large part of all those programs and also when they came the population was not included in their plans. The women were set aside. They were only watching what the organizations were doing, though we were provided food from time to time' (FGD/Male/Tiebissou/February 20, 2020).

In addition to the non-inclusiveness of women, Moody (2021) affirms that the paramilitary institutions such as the police were mere instruments of protection and security for United Nations personnel. A large portion of the population was not involved, and there was no power or social structure and national institution on which to fall back in order to continue the programs.

Also, there were local initiatives in the Ivorian peacebuilding structure which in most cases involved the regular interactions among Christians, Muslims and traditional leaders from the ethnic groups. For instance, in February of 2003, the traditional chiefs and representatives of the various ethnic groups at Guidoubai came together and organized a solidarity meeting. The significance of the meeting was the sacrificial killing of a cow that served as a symbolic moment in containing the communal tensions. This sent an important message, according to the Wè culture and traditions, that peace is what the people want. Consequent on this meeting, many people from the Baoulés ethnic group who had ran away began to return home because that animal sacrifice signified a return to blessing and peace, and placed curses on whoever initiated conflicts again in the land (Allouche and Jackson, 2019). Nevertheless, some of these local peace initiatives had external and internal contradictions. In essence, the local programs were initiated at the instance of influential local personalities: for example, personalities like Zadi Kessy Marcel and Yahi Octave who all reside in the capital but have strong influences in their native towns were in charge of most of the programs. They also represent a complement of influential personalities during the periods of conflict and peace who externally appointed insiders. These initiatives, although locally generated, were at the whims and caprices of these external influencers, and their potential to sustain durable peace was limited.

During the two wars, the country consisted of several armed groups. There were five pro-government militias operating in the western region where the most violent episodes of the wars took place. These included (1) the Alliance Patriotique Wè (AP-Wè), (2), the Forces de Libération du Grand Ouest (FLGO), (3) the Mouvement Ivoirien pour la Libération de l'Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire (MILOCI), (4) the Union des Patriotes pour la Résistance du Grand Ouest (UPRGO), and (5) the Liberian-backed LIMA forces. Among the anti-government militias were (1) Mouvement Patriotique pour la Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI), (2) Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest (MPIGO) and (3) Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix (MJP). The three militias later merged into one force in February of 2003 called Forces Nouvelles (FN). There was also a traditional hunter's group called the Dozos. This group of local hunters was a key ally to the FN (Allouche and Jackson, 2019). One of the significant effects of these local peacebuilding initiatives was to project the interest of the government in power, and not necessarily for the good of the people. As one of the United Nations field officers in one of the areas of Zone of Confidence recalled, the government focused mainly on the election without involving the people on their future after the elections. He noted that government policies and programs were presented like handouts to the people without a consideration of the people's inputs and peculiarities. He added the following:

But I think they have not done a lot regarding the involvement of the local

population. People are sitting, they are talking only about the election but they are not preparing the population to accept what is going to happen right after the election. They are emphasizing participation only in the upcoming election. They are not really involving the local population, as in promoting social cohesion during and after the election. The government did a lot in establishing the authority of the community leaders. They did a lot but I think they are not using them properly to prepare the minds of the population regarding the social cohesion (KII/Male/Abidjan/February 24, 2020).

The peacebuilding approach employed in Côte d'Ivoire was the same assertive implementation style witnessed during violent conflicts in some Latin America states and the Middle-East countries. Such strategies and initiatives were external to the local communities. Interpeace (2017) noted that any effective peacebuilding process must not be based only on the whims of external actors who want to foster the real change alone but must be rooted in the realities of the local peace-recipients whose trust and confidence must be earned for the process to be truly successful. Due to the error of not taking in the inputs of the local residents who are supposed to benefit from the programs, the payments of financial reparations initiated another social problem of hatred for both government and those who received them, who the locals considered were responsible for many of killings in the rural communities. Most people who saw themselves as victims, for their physical and emotional traumas were denied any reparation while members of many pro-government armed groups and the militia were selected for the compensations (KII/Male/Abidjan/March 3, 2020).

Furthermore, ex-combatants while overlooking other groups of victims in the conflict established a situation of discrimination and bitterness. The citizens who lost their homes and government employees whose monthly compensations were suspended during wartime are not known to be called for any documentation processing in readiness to receive any reparations from the government. As such, transitional justice mechanisms have arisen almost entirely at the instance of elites, with little participation of the victims most affected by the conflict and the locals. In an interview with a respondent working for a human right NGO, his responses suggested an opposing viewpoint. The senior NGO official acknowledged the implementation of several reconciliation programs in the local communities. According to him, campaigns on convincing locals on reconciliation were made through religious leaders. He made the point as follows: "...in this year 2020 alone, there are a number of programs designed to include reconciliation. The officials responsible for these programs have located and identified some target communities where there are still some ill feelings and animosity about the consequences of the war and the unresolved effects on them..." (KII/Male/Abidjan /February 12, 2020).

Another respondent held similar views with the previous respondent but differed in the manner of the implementation efforts of the peacebuilding programs and low local inclusion rate of locals in the process. According to the commentator, some of the training offered to the youths were without motivation like meals and financial incentives. The respondent stated further: "It is just what should have been adequate for some of us when business is not as good as before. And the fear of losing your livelihood is always imminent when any election is forthcoming. More efforts at training the youths, keeping activity records and other documentation and to acknowledge these participants from time to time will help to raise their involvement in building the already fragile peace..." (KII/Male/ Ferkessedougou/ /February 12, 2020).

Another measure that helped the peace process was the emphasis on inclusive local participation that included the provision of medical support for the sick and elderly. A respondent

who is the resident chief in Tiebissou, in Southern Côte d'Ivoire added that United Nations officials and the local chiefs were readily available to help with medical support. These collaborative efforts with local chiefs also helped in resolving several local disputes in some selected communities. In his community, there was strong collaboration with the United Nations through direct engagement with a known chief of the Bouale community and this made the collaboration effective and adequate. The chief recounted as follows: "Sometimes there were problems between the Senegalese population and Ivorians in Tiebissou, they tried to resolve it in order to avoid what will bring about conflict, misunderstanding between the local population and the Senegalese people who have come to remain here" (KII/Male/Tiebissou/February 21, 2020).

At the level of fostering dialogue within the local population and addressing the pertinent issues of improving the peace, a respondent from the United Nations confirmed that "the conflict resolution mechanisms that were implemented actually emphasized community dialogues, where local authorities, community leaders, religious leaders, even some armed group leaders are invited to come and discuss some issues in the area and try to find solutions, durable solutions to the problem addressed in those areas" (KII/Female/Abidjan/February 24, 2020). Contrary to this report, however, some members of the local communities disagreed with the modalities of the invitations that were claimed. They were distrustful of the claim that the United Nations program officials actually invited the local chiefs. One of the respondents from the focus group discussion stated the following: "...I don't think they did not invite relevant people. However, I know that they came with government ministers and government officials and made the program known at the state level but the local communities were rarely involved. They did not invite the people here. They did not call the chiefs and the population to sensitize them on how the program was going to work" (FGD/Male/Tiebissou/February 20, 2020).

In the same vein, respondents from the North corroborated the opinion from southern respondents, inferring that possibly because of the abrupt nature of the conflict, most programs and activities did not tailor the peacebuilding framework to Côte d'Ivoire's reality (Oyekanmi, 2023). In effect, locals were involved in the peacebuilding process bearing in mind that programs like the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and social cohesion were robustly activated at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, based on empirical findings, there was no synergy between most of the programs and the indigeneity of the people. They were brought in wholesale without exhausting possibilities of indigenous efforts in peacebuilding. In addition, most of the representatives of these NGOs, community groups, etc. were mostly from the city centers and were not fundamentally in synch with the activities of the community. This in itself meant that the local dynamics in the Ivorian conflict was inadequately targeted, which resulted in the under-provisioning of the human needs of the Ivorians that would have been relevant in designing an effective peacebuilding framework. In sum, the horizontal lines and peacebuilding approach in Côte d'Ivoire were deficient in terms of inclusiveness and support from local communities.

Challenges of Local Inclusion in Peacebuilding

While local inclusion is recognized as a fundamental element of effective peacebuilding, achieving it in practice presents numerous challenges in countries with group inequalities. One significant challenge as observed in Côte d'Ivoire is the legacy of mistrust and animosity among different identity groups exacerbated by historical grievances and competition for scarce resources. Overcoming these deeply ingrained suspicions and fostering an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration demands innovative strategies that go beyond superficial engagements. Additionally, issues of power dynamics and representation emerge as hurdles to effective local inclusion.

Marginalized groups, often victims of historical injustices, may find themselves sidelined in decision-making processes, thereby perpetuating the very inequalities that fueled conflicts in the first place. Balancing the need for inclusive representation with the practicalities of governance structures poses a delicate balancing act.

Flowing from the foregoing analysis, the peacebuilding process assumed major challenges ranging from the unpreparedness of the United Nations contingents, inadequate inclusion of locals, trust deficit, logistics, data gathering, etc. Specifically, a member of a United Nations contingent narrated his ordeal on the difficult nature of peacebuilding in the country. He recalled the following: “In all our attempts to collect data, and gather intelligence, the risks of suspicion on the part of government forces became a major source of concern for us. It was the gravest challenge to our work in working towards building peace in the country” (KII/Male/Abidjan/February 24, 2020/Abidjan).

Incidents of hostility and risks to the lives of United Nations personnel were not only the risks generating suspicion, there were also cases of highway kidnappings that characterized the activities of the rebels in and around Daloa where access roads to Tiebissou, the buffer zone (Zone of confidence), was restricted. This became a challenge, as it was required that the United Nations armed escorts with the agreement of the rebels can move around. These issues informed the nature of the peacebuilding process in Côte d’Ivoire. Along with some setbacks on the process, the abrupt departure of the UNOCI in 2017 was one of the other reasons for failed peacebuilding in Côte d’Ivoire. There were speculations that the United Nations should have stayed for a while as a United Nations field officer stated as follows: “A lot have been done, but you see trying to find peace or trying to create peace, the efforts take much more time. I think personally that the UN should have remained much longer in the country to strengthen the programs of social cohesion they really supported” (KII/Male/Abidjan/February 24, 2020).

Furthermore, the United Nations’ designated handover date was carried out with a quick handover to its United Nations Country Team without a final assessment of the program before the departure. Human Rights Watch (2017) reported the situation and criticized the departure of the United Nations as ill-timed, especially when incidents of communal conflicts and ethnic violence still plagued many lives and tore populations apart. The report also appeared to view the recovery of the country to normalcy as sustainable. Nevertheless it warned of the possibility of the dividends of peace already harvested being squandered, if the government did not address the blanket immunity granted to the rebel gangs and its army’s lack of military discipline.

The sudden exit of the United Nations in Côte d’Ivoire, according to the human rights organization, raised major concerns over the effectiveness of its security reforms. More so, the need to curb the culture of impunity and lack of political will to act and strengthen its institutions of law and justice that may weaken the peacebuilding project and the propensity to advance social cohesion were apparent (KII/Male/Abidjan/February 21, 2020). In sum, whilst the United Nations peacebuilding process adopted social cohesion as one of its focal objectives to closing the horizontal inequality gap, its approach did not go far enough as factors such as local inclusion which mirrors social cohesion were under-addressed.

Another challenge that limited the inclusion of locals in achieving a successful peacebuilding process was the feeling of fear and mistrust by returnees. A respondent from the academic realm asserted this: “the culture of fear has currently returned, as the country awaits the return of thousands of externally-displaced people returning from neighboring countries while running from the war. It is important that the reconciliation program should have started with those returning to the country and those internally displaced” (KII/Male/Abidjan /February 24, 2020).

The home return of the displaced people ought to have been the starting point of the

reconciliation program. In other words, those who were returning were afraid of being accused of having committed crimes as the reason for their disappearance. Moody (2021) considers the DDR process as a major challenge for peacebuilding in the context of the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. Prominently, there has been significant risk of social destabilization where strong coordination programs were attempted. Thus, the DDR and transitional justice contents of the peacebuilding program are, in some respect representing contradictory processes for peace in the country. One of the demobilized and reintegrated ex-combatant revealed the following: "while the others seeks to hold them (*the rebels*) and seek to make them accountable to all crimes during the war, this is likely to prompt them to spoil the peace process if the warlords in all the rebel groups are not brought to book to account for all the inhuman crimes they have committed. Initiating these programs was a dangerous plan since former warlords have been made prominent, rich and powerful" (KII/Male/Abidjan/February 21, 2020).

In addition to the preceding situation, poor monitoring of the peacebuilding process has also contributed to the challenges of the program. In a focus group discussion conducted in Tiebissou with selected men from the southern region, they argued that the program was a success in their region but the setback experienced was the poor follow-up or monitoring of the process at the grassroots. A respondent from the focus group recounts the following: "After the war, people were free to move around but they had no jobs, so they could seize any kind of opportunity, good or bad, to make money. The young people were free to seize an opportunity on the spur of moment" (FGD/Baoule Christian men/ Tiebissou /February 20, 2020).

The peacebuilding effort was also hindered partly because of the palliative measure that was used in addressing the welfare and poverty issues arising from the conflict. Where there was a need to provide proper retraining for the displaced, the accompanying incentives were designed for ex-combatants and usually not those who had returned from exile and did not fight the war. These efforts achieved success in certain areas while it failed in others. Due to the complexity of the conflict and the underlying factors that caused it, the Ivorian peacebuilding effort encountered several hurdles such as deep-rooted ethnic and regional divisions, political instability, proliferation of armed groups, transitional justice, humanitarian crisis, etc.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

In conclusion, local dynamics and horizontal inequality have played a significant role in the Ivorian peacebuilding process. The evidence presented in this paper demonstrates that severe political horizontal inequalities at the elite level cascading to the grassroots have been present in Côte d'Ivoire and has contributed to violent conflicts. Social cohesion has been touted as a tool of peacebuilding, and the concept is linked with efforts to address inequality and build trust.

In order to address the complex interplay among local inclusion, peacebuilding, and horizontal inequalities in Côte d'Ivoire, certain measures must be established and strengthened. The Ivorian parties have framed their conflicts in different ways, and there is a need to establish a viable solution of lasting peace for the region. The international community has been involved in the peacebuilding process, but there is a need for a new conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategy that focuses on the establishment of sustainable democratic institutions and their legitimization through a truly democratic process for writing and adopting a new Ivorian constitution. Ultimately, addressing local dynamics and horizontal inequality will be crucial to achieving lasting peace and social cohesion in Côte d'Ivoire if policymakers and practitioners facilitate inclusive dialogue platforms that actively involve diverse identity groups in shaping peacebuilding processes. Mediation efforts should tap into local conflict resolution mechanisms, ensuring that traditional practices align

with broader reconciliation goals. Community-based truth and reconciliation commissions can further facilitate healing while addressing historical grievances, thereby ensuring that justice is pursued in a manner that resonates with affected populations.

This study also recommends the execution of a well-crafted peacebuilding program supported with sufficient local inclusiveness. A program that is not indigenous to the people, executed by the people, and managed by the people with external bodies performing only guidance functions will most likely fail. Taking into account the contextual peculiarities of each region and community as seen in the Côte d'Ivoire experience suggests that going forward, a repurposed program of peacebuilding by the United Nations should bring on board a combination of well-trained personnel who must understand the local dynamics and peculiarities of peacebuilding in each region and locality.

Finally, strengthening the capacity of local leaders, including traditional authorities, can enhance their ability to facilitate constructive dialogue. It can also help them to mediate conflicts and engage with formal peacebuilding mechanisms.

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