



# Escaping the Repertoire of Election Crisis: Prospects and Challenges of the Evolving Infrastructure for Peace in Côte d'Ivoire

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## SUMMARY

As a conflict prevention and management tool, national peace infrastructures have largely contributed to peace and security in countries where they have been established and adopted. This paper focuses on the emerging infrastructure for peace (I4P) in Côte d'Ivoire by examining the country's socio-political environment and how that impacts on the composition and effectiveness of the proposed I4P.

## Introduction

Globally, violent conflicts have had a devastating impact on lives and property. In an attempt to prevent existing conflict situations and potential ones from occurring, several regional consultations have been organized in order to garner support for the creation of national infrastructures for peace (I4P). Infrastructure for peace is defined as “the dynamic network of interdependent structures, mechanisms, resources, values, and skills which, through dialogue and consultation, contribute to conflict prevention and peace-building in a society”.<sup>1</sup>

Plagued with various forms of conflict situations and violence, Africa has hosted several of these regional consultations, one of which was held in September 2013 in Accra, Ghana. The meeting was jointly organized by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union Commission (AUC) and other partners such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with the support of the government of Ghana. These partners sought to explore the feasibility and modalities for establishing and strengthening national infrastructures for peace in West Africa. The regional consultation also aimed at drawing linkages and synergies between national, regional and

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<sup>1</sup> See Report of the Experience-Sharing Seminar on Building Infrastructures for Peace, Naivasha, Kenya, 2-4 February 2010, p. 3.

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continental efforts at conflict prevention. The result was a joint declaration on the 10 September 2013 in which the three partners called on all ECOWAS member states to develop national infrastructure for peace within the next three years<sup>2</sup>. Following the regional consultations, Côte d'Ivoire, with support from ECOWAS and other stakeholders such as the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) initiated the process of establishing an I4P potentially modelled after Ghana's National Peace Council (NPC)<sup>3</sup>. These institutional frameworks are recognized as an important emerging model for developing state capacity to protect civilians and prevent conflicts in the sub-region.<sup>4</sup>

This policy brief examines the evolving Ivorian Infrastructure for Peace from two angles. First, we explore the historical and contextual issues which contributed to, and perhaps, precipitated instability and the checkered democratization processes; and secondly, we highlight the potential challenges which have to be considered and addressed to ensure the effective operationalization of the proposed I4P.

### Understanding the Historical Context for Developing an Ivorian I4P

To understand the context for the country's long history of instability and polarization, two factors are key, namely: the lack of formal mechanisms for conflict resolution and sustaining peace, and the concept of *Ivoirité* applied during Félix Houphouët-

Boigny's regime and subsequently reintroduced and exploited by Henri Konan Bedié.

### *Lack of Formal Mechanisms for Conflict Resolution and Sustaining Peace*

Although Côte d'Ivoire flourished socially and economically under the 'personalist' rule of the country's first president, Houphouët-Boigny, that system could not be sustained after his demise. This is because the regime lacked legitimate democratic institutions, multi-party politics and formal mechanisms for conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.<sup>5</sup> As an individual, Houphouët-Boigny built a fragile foundation for peace through 'patronage and appeasement'<sup>6</sup> which he employed to pacify the divided Ivorian population<sup>7</sup>. As Brohou states, the sudden fall of that individual opened the Pandora's Box and things began to fall apart.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, there was temporary political vacuum after his death, which plunged the country into a period of tense struggles for power and ethnic strife.

### *The Concept of Ivoirité and its Consequences*

Konan Bedié succeeded Houphouët-Boigny following his demise in 1993. In his attempt to monopolise political power, Mr. Bedié reintroduced the concept of *Ivoirité*, which sought to assert the particular rights of the Ivorian citizen *vis-à-vis* the country's immigrant population. The concept gave these anti-immigrant sentiments an explicitly ethnic connotation and laid the ideological foundation for an emerging political culture dominated by ethnic

<sup>2</sup> See the Declaration on Strengthening National, Regional and Continental Co-ordination Towards Building National Peace Infrastructure for Conflict Prevention, Accra, Ghana, 10 September, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> The Ghana National Peace Council (NPC) is a three-level peace infrastructure (national, regional and district), which is supported by Act 818, and was established as an independent state mechanism to facilitate the prevention of conflicts

<sup>4</sup> Awinador-Kanyirige, W. A. (2014). Ghana's National Peace Council. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. Policy Brief.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Christian Brohou, member of the Conseil Supérieur des Rois et Chefs Traditionnels de Côte d'Ivoire (CSRCTCI). He is the traditional chief of Kouibly district, in the west of the country; 16 December 2014.

<sup>6</sup> <http://africanworldpolitics.site.wesleyan.edu/2014/09/23/neo-patrimonialism-and-political-culture-cote-divoire/>, Neo patrimonialism and political culture: Côte d'Ivoire, 23 September 2014, jmasand

<sup>7</sup> Bridgette Kasuka (2013). *Prominent African Leaders since Independence*. Dar es Salaam: New Africa Press.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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and regional loyalties. *Ivoirité* was used by President Bedié to rally support for his own Baoulé ethnic group, exploiting issues of nationality and citizenship by giving political expression to xenophobic tendencies thereby marginalizing his primary political rival Alassane Ouattara. By 1992, this trend had already resulted in the introduction of identity cards for foreigners and in 1994 there were changes to the electoral code, including the removal of the right of foreigners to vote and more restrictive citizenship requirements for those competing for public office.<sup>9</sup>

As a consequence of the exploitation of the concept of *Ivoirité* in the run-up to the 1995 elections, three candidates, namely Yadi Soumah, Dieudonné Zadi Agui and Philibert Kouassi, were disqualified for varied reasons and Alassane Ouattara, a formidable opponent and an alleged Burkinabe by descent, was particularly targeted and sidelined from participating in the 1995 elections. This strategy had a backlash on Konan Bedié's regime as the same policy was manipulated and intensified by General Robert Gueii, who removed Konan Bedié from office through a *coup d'état* on 24 December 1999<sup>10</sup>. Similar to his predecessors, when Laurent Gbagbo succeeded in wresting power from Robert Gueii in 2002, he intensified the application of the *Ivoirité* concept by superintending a series of politically motivated and ethnic-based massacres of Muslims (Julas) and human right abuses which created an unstable political environment and entrenched the polarization of the country<sup>11</sup>. Sustained application of the policy of *Ivoirité* damaged the economic and social cohesion of the Ivorian state, laying the groundwork for eventual civil war.<sup>12</sup>

As Côte d'Ivoire prepares for elections in October 2015, there is growing apprehension about whether

the relative peace in the country can be maintained and consolidated. It is in this light that we believe a successful I4P in Côte d'Ivoire would have to hinge largely on its responsiveness to the contextual issues raised in the following section.

### Proposed Ivorian I4P: Composition and Potential Challenges

Côte d'Ivoire's history of electoral violence necessitated the development of the Ivorian I4P to address broader issues of insecurity. This puts the focus on the composition of the Ivorian I4P and the potential challenges that it could face. The organogram below illustrates the structure and composition of the Ivorian I4P. When adopted, it will comprise a Central Council, an Executive Secretariat and local representation in districts and sub-districts. This structure will be presented to the National Assembly which will then pass a bill to adopt and legalise the infrastructure as a working document.

An interview with a cross-section of Ivorian institutions indicated that the current structure was arrived at based on broad consultations with key stakeholders. Its composition – which includes a government official, traditional and religious leaders, civil society groups, women's groups, and a member of the Academy of Science, Art, African Culture and the Diaspora (ASCAD) is considered representative enough to initiate mediation processes aimed at preventing potential conflicts in the country.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, there are concerns about the integrity of some religious and traditional leaders and the credibility of some national institutions which must be addressed before the Ivorian I4P can be deemed

<sup>9</sup> Bouquet, C. (2005). *Géopolitique de la Côte d'Ivoire*. Paris: Armand Colin.

<sup>10</sup> Doudou Sidibe (2013). Peace processes in Côte d'Ivoire: Democracy and challenges of consolidating peace after the post-electoral crisis. Conference Paper, *ACCORD*, Issue 1.

<sup>11</sup> See Godspower O. Okereke, Peter Racheotes and Karen Linstrum (2012) Crime and

punishment in Côte d'Ivoire, *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, 36:1, 61-73.

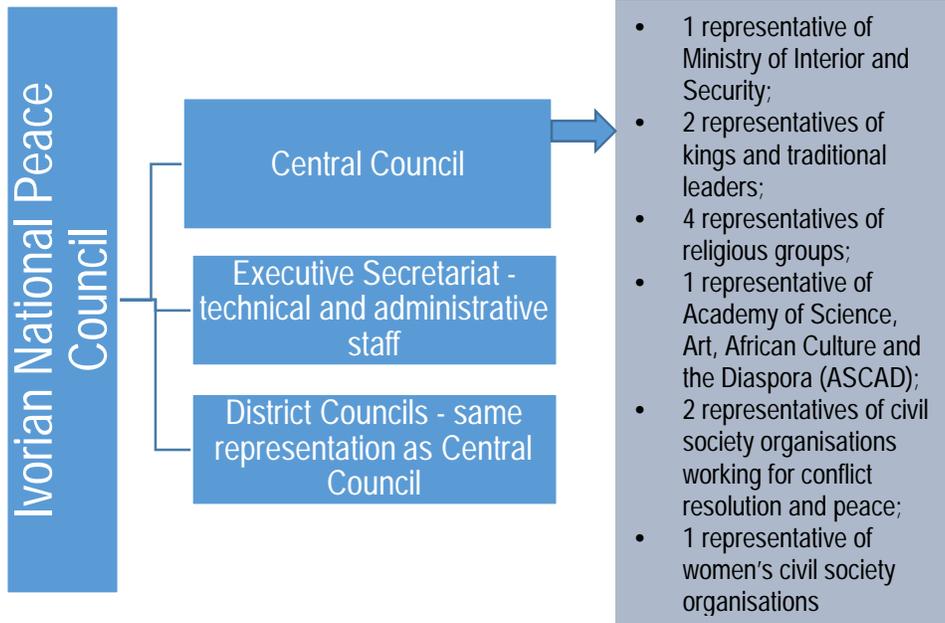
<sup>12</sup> Bradley Dubbelman, Pre-election Report – Côte d'Ivoire, <http://www.polity.org.za/article/pre-election-report-cote-divoire-2009-12-04>.

<sup>13</sup> Focus group discussion at WANEP – Côte d'Ivoire office, 17 December 2014.

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to be credible and effective. These concerns will be discussed in detail in the next section.

### *Composition of the Proposed I4P*



among the key government stakeholders involved in the process of developing the I4P. However, they are currently working separately, and in their individual institutional capacities<sup>15</sup>. This situation may not be conducive to the development of a robust infrastructure. The National Programme for Social Cohesion (PNCS) in particular, is an institution

which is directly under the Ministry of Planning and has been mandated to operationalize the development of the infrastructure. However, concerns have been raised about its capacity (technical and financial) to undertake the exercise. Some have asked whether or not the PNCS is effectively coordinating the views and inputs of stakeholders from the local to the national level to enhance solidarity among the Ivorian population. The credibility of the PNCS has also been questioned. This is because it

was created by the government and there are concerns among some political parties and some civil society groups that the PNCS was created to facilitate victory for the current administration in the subsequent elections.<sup>16</sup>

### Concerns and Potential Challenges to the Ivorian I4P

Based on field information, a number of potential challenges have been identified.

#### *Lack of Effective Coordination and Solidarity*

An interaction with a cross-section of civil society organizations indicated a lack of coordination among the various stakeholders.<sup>14</sup> To ensure that the I4P is well developed, there has to be unity of purpose among the institutions with the responsibility of designing the infrastructure. Various ministries and groups such as the Ministry of Planning, National Security, Ministry of Women and Solidarity and Ministry of Foreign Affairs are

#### *Weaknesses in the Ivorian Electoral Commission*

Unlike electoral commissions elsewhere in the region – such as Ghana’s electoral commission, which is widely recognized as an independent body – the Ivorian Electoral Commission (EC) is largely tied to the government because declaration of election results are subject to confirmation by the Constitutional Council, which arguably can manipulate the results. With reference to the I4P, members of the Ivorian EC play a dual role as commission members as well as representatives of

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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political parties. In this regard, there are concerns about the credibility of the EC and its impact on the effective implementation of the I4P. These concerns have to be considered and addressed to ensure the credibility of the EC and its contribution to conflict prevention.

### *Timelines*

As the next elections are scheduled for October 2015, there is the need for urgency in the development of this infrastructure, considering the country's long history of election crisis. This is to ensure that the I4P will be effective in helping to prevent possible election crises given the polarized nature of the country along pro-Ouattara and pro-Gbagbo lines. Considering the capacity of the PNCS and the load of concerns that have been raised about the polarization of the country and the weaknesses and ambiguities in the operations of the Electoral Commission, it would be ideal to operationalize the infrastructure before the next elections in October. This is important because it is believed that this year's election will serve as a test case of whether Côte d'Ivoire can exit its 20-year history of election crises and restore social cohesion among the various fronts such as the Muslims and Christians, and traditional authorities who are loyalists of either Ouattara or Gbagbo.

### *Integrity of Religious and Traditional Leaders*

In past elections, some religious and traditional leaders in the country took sides with political parties, especially with the two main contenders – Ouattara and Gbagbo. For instance, it is reported that leaders of some churches in the country openly displayed their support for Gbagbo by praying in the open for God to sustain Gbagbo's hold on power – which was deemed by some Muslims as blasphemy<sup>17</sup>. Consequently, this brewed discontent among some Muslims who are also loyalists of Ouattara. Furthermore, concerns have also been

raised about some religious and traditional leaders who are perceived to have displayed their party colors by keeping silent and not condemning the chaos that ensued during the 2010 elections. It is believed that some of these leaders receive financial support from either Ouattara or Gbagbo. How to ensure that there is trust and solidarity between the two major religious denominations is critical to the effective functioning of the I4P<sup>18</sup>. Despite these apprehensions about the integrity and neutrality of these leaders, it is envisaged that through the right selection criteria and adequate resourcing for the design of the I4P, religious and traditional leaders will be given the opportunity to play a 'stabilization role' during conflict situations by helping to mediate and to calm tensions.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This brief has illustrated that, the Ivorian I4P constitutes an important step towards conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the country. However, there is growing apprehension among some stakeholders that the draft I4P, if adopted, might not be effective and responsive to the challenges of the country. Thus, for the infrastructure to stand the test of time, it should reflect the socio-cultural and political context of the country. In this regard, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **ECOWAS** should:
  - a) Provide financial assistance for the successful implementation of the infrastructure;
  - b) Organize experience-sharing platforms for the countries in the sub-region where they can exchange ideas and draw lessons from experiences of Ghana's National Peace Council for example, and effectively implement ECOWAS protocols on conflict resolution and governance.
- **State:** The Ivorian government should:

<sup>17</sup> Interview with religious leader, Côte d'Ivoire, 19 December 2014

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

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- a) Provide sufficient resources for the National Programme for Social Cohesion (PNCS) to ensure that it is able to sensitize Ivoirians on its functions and coordinate the activities of various institutions that play supporting roles in the development of the I4P;
  - b) Ensure the autonomy of the Ivoirian National Peace Council to prevent any political interference in their work;
  - c) Attach urgency to the development of the I4P;
  - d) Reform the Electoral Commission and the Constitution regarding elections to ensure the effectiveness of the EC;
  - e) Establish early-warning platforms in districts and sub-districts which will gather information for effective early response to conflict situations.
- **Civil Society** should:
    - a) Maintain interest in the development of the infrastructure and sensitization campaigns on non-violent approaches to the settlement of disputes;
    - b) Play its watchdog role of holding the government accountable to the people.

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