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# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report studies the relationship between conflict and education in Côte d'Ivoire, and suggests policy and program approaches for analysts and those engaged with education and peacebuilding in societies affected by conflict. Although the situation in Côte d'Ivoire has evolved since the main recommendations of this report were written in early 2008, the report, which was funded by the United States Institute of Peace's Education and Training Center, provides useful insights for interventions aimed at strengthening education within the country.

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*Joseph Sany*

## Education and Conflict in Côte d'Ivoire

### Summary

- In 2002, civil war broke out in Côte d'Ivoire, dividing communities and destroying already fragile public institutions, including its education system. While the education sector in Côte d'Ivoire was clearly a victim of the civil war, which raged until late 2004, it was also a catalyst for the conflict.
- The underlying causes of the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire are multiple and complex. In regard to the role played by education, the problem rested less with the curriculum, which was the same across the country, and more with access to and coordination and allocation of resources, which were unequally distributed by region.
- Such education-based inequalities exacerbated frustrations and more importantly created the space for violent political and social contestations, which have opened the road to the politicization of education and fueled the conflict.
- The conflict seriously damaged an already struggling education system, relegating education to the bottom of the national priority list and preventing thousands of stakeholders—both students and teachers—from gaining access to it.
- It is important to think beyond previous interventions, which saw education as a strategy for poverty reduction, and embrace those efforts that recognize the intricate relationship between education and conflict.
- Interventions in Côte d'Ivoire's education system should not only address those issues related to coordination, capacity building, resources, curriculum, and access, but also those issues related to peace and conflict.
- The government of Côte d'Ivoire should take the lead in such education-sector interventions and request technical and financial support from specialized international institutions, NGOs, and financial institutions.

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## Introduction

In 2002, civil war broke out in Côte d'Ivoire, dividing communities and destroying already fragile public institutions. Although most of the fighting ended by late 2004, the violence left behind a legacy of contentious issues that have yet to be sufficiently resolved. The latest of numerous peace deals—the Ouagadougou Peace Accords (OPA) of March 2007—promised to address many of these issues, but tensions remained high and several thousand French and United Nations troops (United Nations Operations in Côte d'Ivoire, or UNOCI) are still in Côte d'Ivoire to maintain the peace. This case study will review the relationship between conflict and education in Côte d'Ivoire and illustrate several points of particular concern for analysts of Côte d'Ivoire and for those engaged with peacebuilding and development elsewhere.

In situations such as those found in Côte d'Ivoire, a nuanced understanding of the education system is needed. While the education sector was clearly a victim of the civil war that raged, it was also a catalyst for the conflict. A better understanding of the Ivorian education system will allow for a more accurate analysis of events and provide a firmer foundation for recommendations and intervention.

Since gaining its independence in 1960, Ivorian society has placed a high value on education; this value was further heightened under the leadership of Laurent Gbagbo, who became president in 2000. Education was at the center of the *politique de refondation* (policy of renewal), a process to overhaul the nation, including a concerted effort to give every child in Côte d'Ivoire the chance to go to school. Under this new directive from President Gbagbo, education became a key symbol of Ivorian identity and status. As the conflict developed, it was also a particularly effective symbol that parties to the conflict could manipulate to achieve their political agendas, thereby exacerbating the conflict.

The inability to resolve the Ivorian conflict has been a cause for great concern regionally and internationally. On the regional level, conflicts, weapons, combatants, and violence flow easily across borders in West Africa. A destabilized, ethnically divided, and fragile Côte d'Ivoire poses great risk to regional stability; the issues driving the conflict must be resolved to avert further death and displacement within the country and the region. On the international level, connections between conflicts in the education sector and struggles in the political arena, such as that witnessed in Côte d'Ivoire, are not unique. Indeed, one could argue that this is a common feature among undemocratic governments or nascent democracies, where institutions are not yet ready to handle conflicts in nonviolent ways. Understanding the Ivorian conflict may therefore help us understand this larger issue.

## The Education System prior to the Conflict

For the most part, Côte d'Ivoire follows the French education system. Six years of primary education sanctioned by the *certificat d'étude primaires elementaires* (CEPE) are followed by seven years of secondary school, which culminates with the baccalaureate in the student's final year. Higher education comprises universities and technical and vocational schools (*grandes écoles*). The system is centralized, with the government playing a key role in the planning of curriculum, coordination and allocation of resources, and organization of national exams through three ministries (Education, Vocational Education, and Higher Education). There are also private and religious schools and universities, which previously received some subsidies from the government. Growing under the shadow of the formal education system are the informal preschool system and Koranic schools preponderant in the northern and southwestern regions, poor neighborhoods of big cities, and areas near the border with Liberia.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the outbreak of the rebellion in 2002, the education system in Côte d'Ivoire was already struggling to meet the goals set by the government under the international framework established by the Education for All (EFA) movement, which aims to meet the learning needs of all children, youth, and adults by 2015. In 1997, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which leads the movement, reported a net enrollment rate (number of children enrolled as a percentage of the total school-age population) in primary education of 58.3 percent; in 2001, that ratio improved to 64.19 percent. Although still low, it has been climbing. The same growth was also noticeable in secondary education, even though the rate is still below the target set by the government and compared to other countries nearby. These numbers nevertheless masked the disparities between regions of Côte d'Ivoire, particularly between the well-served southern and central regions where net enrollment in primary schools reached 80 percent and the northern and southwestern regions where it barely reached 50 percent.<sup>2</sup>

In 2000, there were conflicting reports on the illiteracy rate; however, by all accounts the illiteracy rate was above 50 percent and illiteracy was far more widespread among men than women. Since 2000 the illiteracy rate among young people aged 15 to 24 has increased. Some experts estimate that the illiteracy rate will increase to 70 percent by 2015, due to several factors, including the conflict itself and HIV/AIDS. According to a Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) report, 70 percent of teachers' deaths in 1997 and 1998 were due to HIV/AIDS, exacerbating the existing shortage of teachers and increasing the already high pupil-to-teacher ratio, which went from 39.6 in 1998 to 40 in 1999 and is expected to go well above 50 pupils per teacher due to the crisis.<sup>3</sup>

These figures are far from a detailed account of the performance of the education sector in Côte d'Ivoire; however, they reflect the insufficient progress of the education sector toward the goals set by the government within international frameworks such as the EFA. It was therefore to address these insufficiencies that the Gbagbo government announced in July 2001 a bold agenda for education. The proposal focused on the following key points:

- Improvement of the status of teachers, particularly by increasing their pay. This would require removing them from the pay scale of civil servants, where they were "attached" by President Félix Houphouët-Boigny under the Structural Adjustment Program mandated by both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in 1989 to reduce the country's fiscal imbalances.
- Development of a formal nationwide preschool education system.
- Free public education through the fourth grade of secondary school (the tenth grade overall).
- Making school compulsory till fifth-grade secondary (eleventh grade overall).
- Readjustment of the policy of subsidies to privately owned schools, including a gradual downsizing of the subsidies.
- Elimination of school uniforms in primary schools with the aim of reducing unnecessary education costs for parents.
- Promotion of participation by all stakeholders, especially parents and teachers, and increased accountability in the management of schools.

The Gbagbo government succeeded, not without tough public debates, to complete some aspects of its education agenda, notably to improve the status of teachers, to review the policy of subsidies to private schools, and to make the wearing of school uniforms noncompulsory at the primary level. Unfortunately, the momentum of reforms was broken by the attempted coup of September 19, 2002, which sparked the civil war.

## Root Causes of the Conflict

The underlying causes of the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire are multiple and complex. They include economic and political factors and the politicization of ethnicity.

### *Economic Disparities: Trouble Brewing*

The French colonial system laid the groundwork for division and inequality between the North and the South, and postcolonial economic realities only served to deepen these inequalities. Both the economic boom that postcolonial Côte d'Ivoire enjoyed during the 1960s and early 1970s and the steep decline that followed have helped nurture the seeds of division between the North and the South. While Côte d'Ivoire had rising cocoa and coffee exports to thank for its economic growth, prosperity, and stability during the 1960s, it also relied heavily on largely Muslim immigrants from poorer countries to the North to do the majority of the cocoa cultivation. The immigrant population swelled from 3 million in 1960 to 4 million in 1970, so that roughly a quarter of the population was comprised of "foreigners," mostly from Mali and Burkina Faso. At the time, President Houphouët-Boigny's government encouraged this influx, welcoming migrants and promising them ownership of the land that they cultivated, but it never followed through with the provision of actual land titles.

The fall in the price of cocoa and coffee in the 1980s exacerbated poverty in the country. Here again, the poorer regions suffered most, as the poverty rate rose from 25.6 percent to 56.9 percent in the savannah region in the North during this period.<sup>4</sup> As the economy declined in the early 1980s and job opportunities grew scarce, the original farmers in the South began to demand that their land be returned to them, thus igniting conflict between northern immigrants and the southwestern Bété and the southeastern Baoulés.

These socioeconomic disparities, while important, did not ignite the current conflict. But they did combine with existing ethnic tensions to lay the groundwork for a volatile situation waiting to explode, and it did not take much to create the explosion.<sup>5</sup>

### *Politicization of Ethnicity: Ivoirité*

As noted, approximately one quarter of Côte d'Ivoire's 16 million people are either immigrants or descendants of immigrants from the neighboring countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana, and Niger. In 1995, President Henri Konan Bédié introduced into the public discourse the concept of Ivoirité, whose initial goal, according to its advocates, was to strengthen national identity.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, as this concept gained momentum, it ended up becoming a factor of exclusion from political participation and citizenship for some citizens alleged to be immigrants from neighboring countries.

The concept was legitimized in the 2000 constitution, which restricted presidential candidates to those citizens who were born in Côte d'Ivoire and from Ivorian parents (both parents). This law excluded many potential candidates, the most prominent of which was Alassane Dramane Ouattara, former prime minister under President Houphouët-Boigny, who was accused of being a citizen of neighboring Burkina Faso, therefore making him ineligible to run for the presidency in Côte d'Ivoire. Additionally, this new law called into question non-Ivorians' rights and access to land. Property ownership and land rights are vital to the livelihoods of most West Africans. In this particular case, the dispossessed were mainly Muslim, either from the North or from Mali or Burkina Faso. Therefore, it was easy to portray the discrimination as a strategy against the northerners who also happened to constitute the bulk of Ouattara supporters. This politicization of identity based on national origin has become a divisive force that has torn the social fabric of this once prosperous country.

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## The Scope of the Conflict

After the 1995 presidential elections that brought President Bédié to power, the political system in Côte d'Ivoire headed toward collapse. In a bloodless coup in December 1999, a division of Ivorian troops deposed Bédié and installed retired general Robert Guéï. Bédié was accused of mismanagement and discrimination against Ivorians from the North. Guéï promised free, fair, and inclusive elections. Meanwhile, the army was completely out of control, exacting "protection money" at roadblocks and torturing or killing any people suspected of opposition. Unfortunately, Guéï did not fulfill the promises he made, which resulted in the exclusion of the opposition leader, Ouattara, from the October 2000 presidential election. In that election, the Ivorians voted Guéï out and Laurent Gbagbo in. Capturing nearly 60 percent of the votes, Gbagbo took office after street protests and pressure from the international community forced Guéï to relinquish power.

Ivorians loyal to Ouattara called for new elections, but they were quickly suppressed by government loyalists. After the unsuccessful coup attempt in September 2002 against Gbagbo's regime, a group of largely northern former army officers led by Guillaume Soro (a civilian) seized control of the North. Fighting ensued between northern-based rebels and elements of the national army loyal to President Gbagbo. France rushed several thousand troops in to protect its citizens from the massacres, and the African Union, the United Nations, and the Economic Community of West African States sent in an additional 6,000 troops. In January 2003, the French government brokered a power-sharing agreement between the principal actors—the Linas-Marcoussis Accords—but the day after the accords were signed, Gbagbo's militias rioted in Abidjan in protest against what they saw as the former colonial government undermining Gbagbo's regime. Fighting broke out around the country and killings and fighting continued through 2003 and 2004. Despite UN and French efforts at peacemaking and the threat of UN sanctions, Gbagbo rejected calls for new elections in 2005.

The conflict divided the small nation. During the conflict, the rebels controlled the northern part of Côte d'Ivoire, approximately half the country and home to the majority of Muslims, while the government held the Christian South. A zone of confidence separated the two parties and was secured by a UN peacekeeping force, the UNOCI. Fighting reached its worst in 2002; it is estimated that some 5,000 have died since then. An estimated 709,000 internally displaced people (IDP) remain vulnerable to disease and malnutrition, and 150,000 people fled the violence to neighboring countries, adding stress to an already weak regional network of states.<sup>7</sup>

The main rebel group was the Forces nouvelles (FN), led by Soro and composed of three smaller rebel movements: Mouvement patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI), Mouvement justice et paix (MJP), and Mouvement populaire ivoirien du Grand Ouest (MPIGO). The rebel groups have been accused of numerous human rights abuses. The Dozos, a traditional tribally based civil defense group that worked in coordination with the FN, has also been accused of committing serious violations, including extortion, arbitrary detention, torture, and rape.<sup>8</sup>

The ruling party is the Front populaire ivoirien. The government police, the army (Forces armées nationales de la Côte d'Ivoire), and the Centre de commandement des opérations de sécurité (Central Command Security Operation Force, CCOS)—a security force of about 1,700 men created by presidential decree in July 2005 to ensure security in Abidjan—have been accused of extrajudicial killings, torture, disappearances, and extortion. They operated in coordination with several other progovernment militia groups, some of which are student organizations. The government used comparatively sophisticated tactics against the rebel groups, including bombing the North with warplanes. The government has also been known to respond to opposition rallies and marches with violence, often killing demonstrators.<sup>9</sup>

One progovernment group composed of university students calling themselves FESCI (Fédération estudiantine et scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire, or the Student Federation of Côte d'Ivoire) has been accused of numerous acts of violence. Another progovernment group, Congrès panafricain des jeunes et des patriotes (COJEP), commonly known as Jeunes Patriotes (Young Patriots), has also been accused of political violence. These progovernment groups are driven by nationalistic aspirations; they view the conflict mainly as a struggle for the emancipation of Côte d'Ivoire from France's colonial agenda. At the early stages of the conflict, their actions consisted mainly of street protests and vandalism of French-owned properties. As the conflict escalated, they were accused of abusing civilians on the streets and on university campuses and causing mayhem in the main cities in the South controlled by the government.<sup>10</sup>

Key international parties include France and Burkina Faso. France, the former colonial power, with a force of 4,000 monitoring the zone of confidence, has been accused by both parties of being partial to the other side. Burkina Faso, whose citizens constitute the majority of foreigners in Côte d'Ivoire, has been accused by the government of supporting the rebels.

Despite lingering issues related to elections—in particular, the electoral list, the impartiality of the electoral commission, and the date of the presidential elections—Côte d'Ivoire is gradually emerging from the conflict. If it is still too early to call the Ouagadougou agreement of March 2007 a success, the constructive mediation effort of President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso and the cordial working relationship between Prime Minister Guillaume Soro, the former leader of the rebellion, and President Gbagbo carry the hope of a peaceful transition.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to stressing the redeployment of the state authority and administration to ensure the provision of all public services, including basic services related to education, health, and water, the Ouagadougou Peace Accords opened up new opportunities for international support, as illustrated by the \$120 million aid package provided by the World Bank to support the implementation of the accords. However, in order to fully appreciate the level of effort needed under the OPA, it is important to better understand how the education sector in Côte d'Ivoire has been affected by the conflict.

## **The Impact of the Conflict on Education**

The conflict has relegated education to the bottom of the national priority list. Thousands of stakeholders including students and teachers were barred access to the education system, and the education sector itself was seriously damaged.

Due to the massive displacements caused by the civil war, the education system in the rebel-controlled zones in the northern and southwestern regions has experienced severe problems. It was estimated in 2004 that as many as 700,000 children had been out of school since the beginning of the crisis.<sup>12</sup> Even university students were not exempt from this mass exodus. Soon after rebels took control of Bouaké, a major northern city, its university was looted and closed down. A temporary campus was later opened in Abidjan for the thousands of students who fled the rebel-held North; those students who could not leave saw their education interrupted. Concern has grown that with this many out-of-school children and youth Côte d'Ivoire may be developing a ready pool of malleable youth who could contribute to further instability. In November 2004, riots against the French force in Abidjan—after the French bombing of Ivorian military aircraft—destroyed numerous schools, which has had long-term repercussions for the education-sector infrastructure. Additionally, schools in the South are burdened with the large numbers of IDP children who have fled the violence in the North to continue their education in the south-

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ern school system. This overcrowding has placed a stress on the system and has brought the politics of displacement and conflict inside the school walls, undoubtedly influencing classroom dynamics and student behavior.

Education in the North has been affected more severely than education in the South, however. While the numbers of children deprived of schooling during the crisis are high nationwide, the Ministry of Education in 2004 estimated that 50 percent of the children in the North had been deprived of education. Clearly, this acute education crisis parallels the political crisis of the country. Further, the Ministry of Education estimated that only 20 percent of the government-paid teachers stayed at their posts in the North or have returned since the fighting has subsided.<sup>13</sup> Since then, the return of teachers has been stymied by the lack of security and the occupation and destruction of education infrastructure. There is concern that because the voluntary return of teachers has been so slow, the government's redeployment of school staff will also be slow. In the meantime, schools in the North will continue to suffer from teacher shortages as they struggle to get the education system back on track.

Another issue concerns examinations. School exams benchmark individual achievement as well as community development; poor school systems earn poor marks on the standardized exams, which in turn limit the employability of the graduates of these systems. Exams in the North were postponed during the conflict. Some students who have missed these crucial exams may have slipped between the cracks of this educational system and the futures of hundreds of thousands of children may be forever altered.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have stepped in to try to fill the education gap in the North. It was estimated in 2004 that 286,000 children were attending NGO-run primary schools and 55,000 were attending NGO-run secondary schools.<sup>14</sup> The success of the NGOs in organizing education in the North suggests that the bottleneck in getting education to the North had more to do with the political agendas of the parties in the conflict and their capacity to deliver education than to the lack of security and fear of violence. Prior to the conflict, the North was already counted among the least-educated regions of the country, with an overall net enrollment rate below 40 percent in Korhogo and Odienné in 1998.<sup>15</sup> The longer the government waits to rebuild the northern education system, the more the civilians and communities suffer. This in effect denies them their rights, limits their livelihood options, and frustrates entire generations of learners, further complicating reconciliation efforts.

In addition to impacting access, quality, organization, and resources, the conflict has had a more subtle and pernicious sociopsychological impact on individuals, particularly on students. The overall state failure and the failure of the education system have undermined children's self-confidence, leaving them vulnerable to criminality, illegal drugs, prostitution, and unsafe sex leading to HIV/AIDS. Some of these students have joined warring parties (voluntarily or by abduction), subsequently committing horrible acts of violence and abuses against other students, as has been the case with members of FESCI.<sup>16</sup>

As we have seen, the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire has had a devastating impact on the education sector, which is of course not unusual in civil conflicts. Destroyed infrastructure, displaced students and teachers, and school closures are just some of the results. The resumption of education, including harmonizing school calendars between the South and North and validating previous exam results in rebel-controlled zones, was a part of all peace agreements signed by the parties. Unfortunately, failure to implement these successive peace agreements created a stalemate between the rebels in the North and the government forces in the South, with civilians suffering in the middle as they awaited resolution of the situation.

Beyond the destruction and displacement, there is a more intense and reciprocal relationship between the conflict and the education sector in Côte d'Ivoire. And to truly understand

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the education-conflict relationship, one needs to examine more closely the strategies used by the parties, the evolution of the education sector within the political struggle in Côte d'Ivoire, and the role played by students and teacher associations.

## **The Education-Conflict Nexus**

Since the beginning of the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire in 2002, the education sector has been the scene of several confrontations involving the government, the rebel movements, teachers, and student organizations. The issues range from education policy to the status and coordination of teachers, access to education, and the organization and administration of exams. While these issues may not seem salient to the conflict at first glance, their analysis reveals a link between them, the history of political struggles in Côte d'Ivoire, and the calculations of and the tactics used by the parties to the conflict. This story of how education has become enmeshed in the conflict's dynamics is important to understand in order to resolve the conflict.

### ***Education as a Tactic of War***

From the beginning of the conflict, the parties have been conscious of the importance of the education sector and attempted to use it for strategic and tactical purposes. As a tactic of war, education has been used in two important ways. First, realizing the organizational and institutional challenges rebel groups were facing in delivering education in their zones, the government played up these difficulties as a way to discredit nongovernment parties and legitimize specific government positions. Second, the actors in this conflict actively sought to co-opt key groups in the education system, mainly university students, to their cause.

### ***A Means to Assert Legitimacy***

Schools have reopened in the North after being closed in 2002. Even so, the pace of reopening has not been sufficient to absorb the more than 700,000 students who could not attend school due to violence, displacement, and a direct government policy that made some schools illegal on the basis that they did not meet the requirements defined by the government.

On April 24, 2003, the cancellation of exams in the northern and southwestern regions of the country effectively shut the doors of many schools. The closing of schools was justified on the basis of security concerns for the children in the region during the process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants or because of the displacement of many students and teachers due to intense violence.

Meanwhile, in the government-controlled South, public services went uninterrupted. Some believe that the underlying motive of the government was to portray the rebel movements as incapable of governing the territory under their control as well as disinterested in organizing social programs for their citizens, thereby discrediting them in the eyes of their supporters and the international community. The rebels have accused the government of committing "cultural genocide" by denying northern citizens education and other social services. However, the rebels countered this strategy by organizing the delivery of education services through international NGOs and donors. The parallel education system put in place helped provide education to more than 200,000 primary and secondary children.<sup>17</sup> At the same time the reopening of schools and organization of exams in the rebel-controlled zone became an important demand during negotiations.

Accordingly, the NGOs and donors operating in the North unintentionally became part of the conflict dynamics. NGOs that operated in the North were likely seen as supporting the

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rebel groups, a perception that was and probably still is especially strong for French-funded programs. In addition, the resources that these NGOs introduced into the northern zone influenced the outcome of the conflict. One might argue that this is a necessary side effect of ensuring that all children have the right to an education, but it is worth closer scrutiny. By providing education to the northern citizens and contributing to the development of a parallel education system, the NGOs may have inadvertently prolonged the conflict by bolstering the rebels' legitimacy. However, further studies will be needed to clearly understand the impact this education intervention has had on the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire.

### ***Students Mobilized for Violence***

University students are often known for their passionate involvement in social movements, and this passion sometimes turns to violence. To understand the power and influence of student organizations in the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, we need to examine the complex history of violence, repression, and manipulation by the government.

Ironically, FESCI, now seen by many observers as a progovernment student organization, was set up in 1990 in response to repression by President Houphouët-Boigny's government, a failure of dialogue to address the increasing demand for political freedom and rights in Côte d'Ivoire. Therefore, from the onset, FESCI's aims went beyond the traditional academic role of most university student movements.

Even though its bylaws specify that it is apolitical, FESCI carried its struggle outside the campus to challenge the government on political and social issues, organizing strikes and antigovernment protests. The repressive response of the government brought FESCI to the forefront of the political conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. More than a student organization, FESCI became a space for the expression of political consciousness among students from different social and academic backgrounds. Charles Blé Goudé, leader of the Jeunes Patriotes, and his rival Guillaume Soro, leader of the FN who occupied northern Côte d'Ivoire and now prime minister, led the organization at different stages of those tense years.

The governments of Bédié and Guéï that followed Houphouët-Boigny did not succeed in overcoming the determination of FESCI through tactics of repression. But the next government, led by Gbagbo, used a different approach to tame FESCI and create a controversial working relationship. Blé Goudé, general secretary of the FESCI campaign for Gbagbo during the 2000 elections, made a decision that cost him his membership in the organization and inflamed tensions within the association. From the role of an ardent student leader, he went on to become the leader of the progovernment movement Jeunes Patriotes. Gbagbo succeeded in developing good relationships with Blé Goudé and Eugene Djue, who were among the founding members of FESCI and had led several antigovernment protests in the 1990s.

Although FESCI disputes the claims, human rights organizations have accused the group of committing continuing acts of violence and human rights abuses during the conflict.<sup>18</sup> FESCI remains active on campuses and in the streets, but its future direction in the post-OPA environment is still unclear at present.

The trauma caused by the student-led violence will require more than academic reforms to address the memories of violence that have corrupted the ethos of campus life. Merely resuming classes will not address the issue. There must be a special effort to "demilitarize" schools in the future.

## **Education as a Catalyzer of Political Struggles**

What started as a movement for the betterment of conditions on campus spilled into the political sphere as a movement for more political space. Since the 1970s, the struggle within

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the Ivorian education sector has paved the way for the enlargement of those conflicts into the political sphere.

As noted earlier, this connection between conflicts in the education sector and political struggles is not a unique feature of Côte d'Ivoire. However, in Côte d'Ivoire, the growing membership of FESCI reflected their capacity to mobilize students from different social classes and regions, as they moved from the academic sphere of addressing the issues of university students to becoming important players in the political arena.

In addition to the students, the struggle by teachers since 1991 to regain their status lost to the Structural Adjustment Program became a defining and decisive issue for the presidencies of Bédié, Guéï, and Gbagbo, who finally gave in to teachers' demands. This concession seems to have been motivated more by political reasons than economic rationale, given the countrywide economic deterioration coupled with other pressures on the state budget.

The education system has served as a springboard for the political career of leaders such as President Laurent Gbagbo, Charles Blé Goudé, Guillaume Soro, and many other leaders of the parties in conflict, reinforcing the Ivorian sentiment that the education system has produced political leaders rather than business leaders.

## **Raising Expectations and Exacerbating Ethnic Tensions**

The rise of the educated class and political awareness in Côte d'Ivoire has not been matched by economic mobility. The disconnect between what is taught in schools and the knowledge and skills demanded by the jobs available to its graduates has made it difficult for them to successfully integrate into the world of work. This situation has created disenchantment and frustration among youth in the urban areas, who generally have a high literacy rate. In fact, students who have not been able to find jobs have been forced to go to rural areas to find ways to make a living, mainly through agriculture. This influx has added stress to the already fragile social cohesion in rural areas suffering from competition for fertile land between natives and nonnatives. This stress has exacerbated already tense ethnic relations caught up in the debate around the concept of Ivoirité. The conflict in Côte d'Ivoire has claimed the lives of hundreds of people in ethnic clashes, particularly in the western region of Côte d'Ivoire, home to thousands of nonnatives from neighboring countries in search of work on the cocoa plantations.

The link between education and conflict in Côte d'Ivoire is complex; at first sight, one can see ample evidence that illustrates how the education sector has suffered from conflict; but a deeper analysis reveals a more dynamic relationship where education, without having been directly linked to the immediate causes of the conflict, provided a fulcrum to the strategies of the parties and to conflict dynamics. Unlike in other conflicts witnessed in sub-Saharan Africa, such as in South Africa during apartheid and Sudan during the civil war between the Sudan People's Liberation Army in the South and the Sudanese government, education in Côte d'Ivoire did not contribute through a discriminatory curriculum to shaping different and sometimes incompatible identities of ethnic communities. There is no evidence that education contributed to an "us" versus "them" mentality among ethnic groups, as it has in conflicts elsewhere. Here, the problem rested less with the curriculum, which was the same across the country, and more with access to and coordination and allocation of resources, which were unequally distributed by region. These inequalities exacerbated frustrations and more importantly created the space for violent political and social contestations, which have opened the road to the politicization of education and fueled the current conflict. In such a context, interventions in Côte d'Ivoire's education system will be stymied if the challenges posed by all aspects of the complex relationship between education and the conflict are not addressed.

## Recommendations

Côte d'Ivoire has moved from a period of "no war, no peace" to one of peaceful transition. The process is still very fragile, but the Ouagadougou Peace Accords and the cordial working relations between Prime Minister Soro and President Gbagbo have provided a window of opportunity that begs for rapid concrete actions, particularly with regard to the electoral process. As far as education is concerned, it is important to think beyond previous interventions that viewed education as a strategy for poverty reduction and embrace those efforts that recognize the intricate relationship between education and the conflict, as highlighted in this report. Such interventions in Côte d'Ivoire should not only address those issues related to coordination, capacity building, resources, curriculum, and access,<sup>19</sup> but also those related to peace and conflict. This approach means that the government of Côte d'Ivoire should take the lead and that technical and financial support should come from specialized international institutions, NGOs, and financial institutions.

### *Situational Assessment*

**Undertake a thorough assessment of the state of education in the North.** It is extremely important to determine the impact caused by the years of parallel education systems designed and operated by international NGOs with the acquiescence of the rebels. The conflict has led to the de facto partition of the country, which has resulted in a parallel system operated under different sets of expectations and personnel. The education system in the North was supported by a mixture of international donors' funding and private contributions through informal transactions and procedures. Although the reopening of schools under the supervision of the central government is in general a good step, it can be counterproductive in the short run if the parallel education system that existed in the North during the conflict is not well understood and accounted for in the reconstruction plan. We know that education in the North was done on an ad hoc basis without much advance planning and that the schools suffered from a lack of trained teachers. We need to know much more about the impact of this situation and the strategies enacted to address major weaknesses and social implications of the parallel system put in place during the conflict.

### *Coordination and Capacity Building*

**Ensure the coordination of education policy and funding.** By working with administrative, traditional, and religious authorities and the business sector at the state, regional, and local levels, the national government should harmonize planning, implementation, and evaluation of education policy throughout the national territory. This coordination will require a two-level strategic approach. First, within the government, there will need to be a restrengthening of interministerial collaboration, particularly between the three main ministries (Education, Vocational Education, and Higher Education) in charge of different segments of education and training, in order to jointly develop an initial set of policy options and priorities as the basis for broad consultation with other stakeholders. In addition, the government will need to reinforce channels of communication between regional divisions of education (Départements régionaux de l'éducation nationale) and the central division, thus enabling the regional directors to be fully involved in the design, implementation, and monitoring of budgets and funding.

Second, this approach needs the involvement of other stakeholders, particularly parents, teachers, and the business sector. Prior to the conflict, initiatives had been taken to better engage parents through parent-teacher associations. This dialogue must be restored and strengthened. Initiatives such as the Comité enseignement supérieur et développement

(Committee for College Education and Development), which aims to create a space where all stakeholders of higher education could meet and define the agenda and orientation for higher education, could be revived and extended to other levels of education.<sup>20</sup>

These strategies for coordination are of paramount importance given the de facto partition of the country during the conflict. This coordination of education does not only make sense from an education management perspective, it also carries the promise of a return to normalcy and reconciliation, as well as strengthened integrity of the country. This process of coordination and collaboration requires both a vertical approach from local communities to state level and a horizontal approach that encourages the participation of different stakeholders, including government agencies, parent and teacher associations, the business community, and local community groups. In the North, extra efforts will be needed to reach out to Koranic schools.

**Encourage the return of teachers and students to the North in order to ease the pressure on schools in the South.** This return will be made possible through the normalization of the security situation, rehabilitation of schools that have been damaged and the construction of new ones, and the reinstatement to their previous status of teachers who have fled, as well as the regularization of the status of those volunteer teachers who provided education in the rebel-controlled zones and are willing to join the formal education sector.

One of the main expectations of volunteer teachers is to be integrated into the public service, which is a legitimate demand given the shortage of teachers, particularly in the former rebel-held zones in the northern and southwestern regions. But this demand should be addressed through a comprehensive plan based on a solid teacher-training program that incorporates human rights and peace education as well as preparation for employment and adequate compensation.

**Develop a comprehensive policy for promoting and investing in education in the North with a special focus on girls' education.** Prior to the conflict, the North was already lagging behind as far as education was concerned. And girls have suffered the most from this lack of education. It is therefore necessary for the government to make the North a priority region for investment in education, and to work with parents and community and religious leaders to convince them of the importance of educating young girls.

### ***Curriculum and Extracurricular Activities***

**Enrich the curriculum.** Add content that promotes peace and tolerance and engages students in activities that recognize and strengthen the multiethnic fabric of Ivorian society. The resumption of civic education in primary and secondary schools, the introduction of peace education into the curriculum, and other extracurricular activities that promote cultural understanding and a sense of national identity could be ways of enriching the curriculum and promoting peace and national reconciliation.

**Place special emphasis on addressing the issue of student violence.** This effort requires a series of programs to engage students in dialogues that help them frame in their own terms the issues they are facing, possible solutions, and how they can be involved in the implementation of those solutions. In particular, Côte d'Ivoire needs to begin reconciliation processes at the university level, where major abuses have been committed and terror has prospered as a result of actions taken by some progovernment student groups. Interventions to address the culture of violence might include "peace clubs" as a way to provide students with the opportunity to discuss the underlying causes and impact of the conflict, and ways forward in high school and universities; and a national

peace essay contest for students at all levels might encourage reflection and youth-driven strategies for sustained peace.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Education for War-Affected Youth and Children***

**Set up alternative forms of education for war-affected youth.** Children and young people have been particularly affected by the conflict. Thousands of children have been separated from their families, physically and sexually abused, and abducted and forced to join combat operations. Others have dropped out of school due to constant displacement. The civil service training promised to youth affected by war and ex-child soldiers by the OPA is an important step in addressing these issues, but the focus should not only be on job skills. These children have specific needs that can only be met through an education system that teaches life skills and addresses health issues, including HIV/AIDS, alongside literacy and numeracy and that provides psychological counseling where needed.

**Implement an accelerated learning program.** Côte d'Ivoire can also learn from Liberia and Sierra Leone by adopting aspects of their Accelerated Learning Programs, which enable children who have missed two to three years of school to complete primary education in three instead of six years and to graduate to high schools, vocational schools, or the workplace. It is also imperative to focus on retraining unemployed certificate holders and apprenticing dropouts in occupations that need workers to help their reintegration into the work life.



## Notes

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2. Ministère de l'éducation nationale, *L'évaluation de l'éducation pour tous à l'an 2000: Rapport de la Côte d'Ivoire* (Abidjan: Ministère de l'éducation nationale, June 2003).
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8. According to several Human Right Watch reports and briefings on Côte d'Ivoire: "My Heart Is Cut: Sexual Violence by Rebels and Pro-government Forces in Côte d'Ivoire," August 2, 2007; "Because They Have the Guns . . . I'm Left with Nothing: The Price of Continuing Impunity in Côte d'Ivoire," May 25, 2006; "Country on a Precipice: The Precarious State of Human Rights and Civilian Protection in Côte d'Ivoire," May 3, 2005; "Trapped Between Two Wars: Violence against Civilians in Western Côte d'Ivoire," August 5, 2003.
9. Human Rights Watch, "Côte d'Ivoire: The Human Rights Cost of the Political Impasse," December 21, 2005. See also reports cited in note 7.
10. Ibid.
11. For an analysis of the Ouagadougou Peace Accords, see the International Crisis Group (ICG) report *Côte d'Ivoire: Can the Ouagadougou Agreement Bring Peace?* Africa Report no. 127 (Brussels: ICG, June 27, 2007). For a detailed analysis of the stakeholders in the conflict, including NGOs, see Arnim Langer, *Policy Levers in Côte d'Ivoire*, Policy Context Paper no. 3 (Oxford: CRISE, December 2003).
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