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SNAPSHOT

Ivoirian Youth Take the First Steps Toward Reconciliation

Activities, trainings and dialogue help youth move past conflict.



Photo: SFCC

Ms. Nahawa Ouattara (center), telling her story at a youth reconciliation event.

"I wanted to avenge my sister's death at all cost... Gradually, the idea of vengeance has begun to disappear and leaving room for forgiveness."

- Nahawa Ouattara

November 2011 - Violence stemming from the contested November 28, 2010 presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire pitted neighbor against neighbor as opposing political candidates mobilized their supporters and political campaigns devolved into violent confrontations. In the capital of Abidjan, the violence severely affected the low income neighborhoods of Abobo and Youpougon. After the cessation of violence, animosity in these neighborhoods, particularly among the youth, remained perilously high. In efforts to mitigate these tensions, OTI supported a two-phase reconciliation activity.

During the first phase, experts from Search for Common Ground, OTI's grantee, trained two representatives from eight youth groups on both sides of the political spectrum on reconciliation techniques, conflict transformation, and communication strategies. These representatives in turn shared what they had learned with their groups, ultimately reaching 3,000 Ivoirian youth. During the second phase, OTI supported 16 youth groups to carry out "awareness activities" such as sporting events, theater and dance performances, dialogues, and "solidarity festivals" within and between the neighborhoods in order to spread the message of reconciliation to the wider communities.

These activities promoted friendly relationships among youth of different backgrounds, increased knowledge of conflict management, and promoted public attitudes in favor of tolerance and reconciliation. Nahawa, an Ivoirian youth, had not been able to stand being in the presence of neighbors who had been on the opposing side of the conflict, and had wanted to avenge her sister's death at any cost. She felt that previous reconciliation efforts were impersonal and politically motivated. The fact that youth participating in the OTI project took the time to meet with Nahawa personally convinced her "of the necessity for forgiveness and reconciliation...and gradually, the idea of vengeance has begun to disappear, leaving room for forgiveness."