

*Democracy, Conflict, and  
Coexistence in West Africa*  
**Workshop**

**October 8–10, 2008  
Mensvic Palace Hotel, Accra, Ghana**

**MEETING REPORT  
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## Workshop Description

### *Background*

The Democracy, Conflict, and Coexistence in West Africa workshop was held at the Mensvic Palace Hotel in Accra, Ghana, from October 8-10, 2008. It was co-sponsored by Coexistence International (CI), the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). The workshop was convened as part of the Democracy, Conflict, and Coexistence in West Africa project, initiated in 2008 by CI and funded by the Alan B. Slifka Foundation and the Compton Foundation.

The goal of the project is to create a platform for the sharing of experiences, best practices, and lessons learned among the intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions, both international and regional, that design and implement democracy and governance programs in West Africa. Through research and workshop components, it aims to expand the field of coexistence, create sustained connections between the people and organizations dedicated to coexistence issues, and increase the possibilities for positive coexistence in the region.

Prior to the workshop, CI commissioned a research paper, “Coexistence and Democracy in West Africa: Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities,” explaining the interplay between democracy-building and coexistence work and examining how organizations and practitioners in West Africa define and practice those two fields. This paper built upon CI’s earlier research and publications on complementary approaches to coexistence and democracy-building globally, including the paper “Focus on Coexistence and Democracy-building.” The research paper was shared with participants prior to the workshop as summary background information on the state of coexistence and democracy in the region. It is currently available from the CI website ([www.coexistence.net](http://www.coexistence.net)).

The October workshop brought together regional and international leaders from the peacebuilding, democratization, and coexistence fields to engage with one another in addressing key questions related to the intersection of coexistence, conflict, and democracy in West Africa.

This meeting report includes: briefs on the discussions regarding coexistence, peacebuilding, democracy, and the state of coexistence in the countries from which participants were drawn; a thematic synthesis of issues raised throughout the workshop; and a summary of measures that could be taken to improve and strengthen the state of coexistence and democracy in West Africa.

## ***Structure, Aims, and Expectations***

The workshop's structure consisted of small group work, plenary sessions, and panel discussions, which were enriched by several coexistence-themed group activities and a topical luncheon presentation. The aims and expectations of the workshop are stated below:

### **Workshops Aims**

- (1) To learn about the work necessary for groups to live together peacefully and productively;
- (2) To share experiences, perspectives, and challenges on democracy-building in the region;
- (3) To reflect on the ways that a coexistence lens can support democratic governance and vice versa;
- (4) To facilitate collaborative learning and development of best practices, concrete strategies, and policy needs for coexistence-sensitive democratization and governance programs;
- (5) To explore possibilities for ongoing strategic networking and partnerships among actors at intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions who are positioned to design, fund, and promote participatory and inclusive governance policies in divided societies.

### **Workshop Expectations**

- (1) A draft version of policy recommendations for creating socially inclusive democracies in the region;
- (2) Identification of challenges, solutions, and policy recommendations to consider in the forthcoming paper on governance and coexistence in West Africa;
- (3) Exploration of the potential for building a coexistence network;
- (4) Meeting report.

## ***Partner Organizations***

Each of the co-organizers contributed particular knowledge and familiarity of the issues to be addressed in the workshop. CDD-Ghana brought a wealth of knowledge on issues related to democratization and good governance in West Africa. WANEP contributed its wide-range of thematic expertise on peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution, along with its connections to organizations across West Africa. CI, which is on the forefront of strengthening the field of coexistence, unified the expertise of the organizations to shape the direction of the research paper and the workshop. All three organizations have significant public-policy experience.

The partnership of these institutions, with their strong experience in the fields of coexistence, democratization, and conflict resolution, reflects the complementary approach to coexistence work advocated by CI.

### **Coexistence International (CI)**

Based at Brandeis University (Waltham, USA) since 2005, Coexistence International (CI) is an initiative committed to promoting coexistence at local, national, and international levels by strengthening the field of policymakers, practitioners, and funders. CI promotes a complementary approach to coexistence work through facilitating connections, learning, reflection, and strategic thinking among those in the coexistence field and those in related areas, such as democracy, rule of law, transitional justice, sustainable development, and cultural work.

### **Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana)**

CDD-Ghana is an independent, nonpartisan, public-policy-oriented non-profit based in Accra. Its mission is to promote democracy, good governance, rule of law, and integrity in public administration. With a strong capacity for research, analysis, and advocacy, the Center collaborates with a wide range of domestic and external partners to undertake programs that address national and regional challenges in areas such as democracy-building and governance, conflict resolution, transitional justice, and reconciliation.

### **West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)**

WANEP extends throughout the region with programs that promote the vision of just and peaceful communities where dignity is paramount and where people can meet their basic human needs and decide their own direction. WANEP's mission is to enable and facilitate cooperation among peacebuilding practitioners and organizations in West Africa by promoting cooperative responses to violent conflicts; providing structures for regular exchange of experience and information on issues of peacebuilding, conflict transformation, social, religious, and political reconciliation; and promoting West Africa's social cultural values as resources for peacebuilding.

## Workshop Overview

### ***Opening Remarks***

The workshop began with an opening plenary of welcoming remarks by the workshop organizers and was chaired by Victor Brobbey, research associate at CDD-Ghana. The opening remarks were provided by Mr. Kalie Sillah, the lead researcher at WANEP; Mr. Eric Boateng, head of programs for CDD-Ghana; and Dr. Mari Fitzduff, chair of the advisory board to CI.

In his welcoming remarks Kalie Sillah emphasized that the workshop marked the beginning of long-term relationships between organizations that will work together with vision and creativity to develop new approaches to democratization, peacebuilding, and coexistence. Making note of the destructive conflicts that have plagued post-colonial “democratic” West Africa, he spoke of a need to take “a step backward from any ready-made assumptions of the links between democracy and peace—as argued by the proponents of the theory of democratic civil peace.” He emphasized that the workshop was an opportunity to examine the underlying features of democracy and peace—“two interconnected concepts [that] can practically reinforce each other at the grassroots for the sake of peace and security in the sub-region.” In particular, he identified a specific need to pay attention to the question of coexistence as it relates to ethnic groups whose geographic reach extends across national borders.

Eric Boateng also observed that the West African sub-region is home to a number of post-conflict areas where organizations are working to promote sustained peace, partly through justice and accountability for human-rights abuses. These include peacebuilding programs geared towards the promotion of democracy. While some progress has been made, he noted that much work remains to be done and that civil-society organizations face many challenges. CDD-Ghana believes that the more West Africans learn from each other the better entrenched good governance systems will be. He expressed his encouragement at the representativeness and qualifications of the participants in the workshop and his hope that the workshop would address some of the key questions facing coexistence and democracy in the region.

In her welcoming remarks, Mari Fitzduff noted she is both chair of the CI advisory board and also director of the Master’s Program in Coexistence and Conflict at Brandeis University. She cited a need to be careful throughout the conference in discussing how the terms coexistence and democracy are used and how programs related those concepts are implemented. In her home country of Northern Ireland democracy proved a challenge to coexistence. Initially, the majority community was able to essentially rule over the minority community because the democratic structure favored its majority status. This gave them the means to dismiss the interests of the minority community. In this way, democracy enabled the oppression of one group by another and caused grave harm to notions of coexistence between them. Around the world the question is being asked whether democracy can look different from the ways it is most commonly structured or whether democracy is even the best solution for meeting a people’s needs. She cited

China's interest in the European Union's experiments with an alternative form of democracy known as "citizen juries" and highlighted recent news from Iraq that many citizens expressed a preference for a strong leader over democracy because a strong leader could accomplish things more quickly. In bringing a coexistence lens to democracy work, she noted that as the world becomes more globalized the concept of coexistence grows in importance, because the increasing diversity of nations around the world presents new coexistence challenges. With this in mind she asked participants to consider two questions:

1. How can those of us in the field of coexistence and related fields help as many people as possible to participate in the power we have as regions, countries, and global entities?
2. How can we do so, such that our differences are a richness and not something to be afraid of, so we can move forward in peace?

### ***Summary of Discussions on Coexistence, Coexistence Work, and a Complementary Approach***

Jessica Berns, CI program director, presented an overview of coexistence and a complementary approach to coexistence work from the perspective of CI. Coexistence work was broadly defined as "the work that is necessary to ensure that groups live together peacefully, equitably, and productively," and five core values of coexistence were identified: diversity, human dignity, interdependence, equality, and the decreasing use of weapons to address conflicts. The term coexistence has evolved over time; one of the principal aims of the workshop was to come to understand the empirical and conceptual meaning of 'coexistence' in the West African context.

Berns emphasized that coexistence issues are not particular to a region of the world or to only those places experiencing violence. In addition, coexistence work is not only *responsive* to violence, but can be *proactive*, by addressing strains on positive inter-group relations before violence occurs. It is within this framework that coexistence work can also be viewed as conflict prevention.

When organizations approach their work with an active awareness of coexistence values and aim to orient operations and programming decisions to positively impact inter-group conflict and social inclusion, they can be considered to be coexistence-sensitive or operating with a coexistence lens.

A coexistence lens creates ways for many sectors (i.e. human rights, transitional justice, and democratization) to positively impact inter-group relations on the ground. On the other hand, when work is not conducted in a coexistence-sensitive way, there can be unintended negative consequences on inter-group relations. One example of this is the implementation of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) employment programs. These programs are usually reserved for ex-combatants, and in the past the exclusion of unemployed youth who were not involved in the fighting has increased existing tensions between them and the ex-combatants.

This introduction to CI's understanding of coexistence work opened the floor for participants to discuss what coexistence might mean within the West African context. Though coexistence is defined by CI using the core values articulated above, the workshop sought to create a picture of the coexistence contexts in West Africa and of the relationship between democracy and coexistence in the region. The following bullet points synthesize the main issues raised during this session and the related comments made during other sessions of the workshop.

- Participants stressed the importance of arriving at a practical rather than solely academic understanding of the term, including placing value on the grassroots interpretations of the concept.
- It was noted that a coexistence lens could be applied not only to inter-ethnic or inter-religious conflicts but also to socio-economic ones.
  - On the national level, socio-economic issues become manifest when economic classes come into conflict.
  - The same thing happens at an international level when organizations such as the World Bank, World Trade Organization, and International Monetary Fund fail to take into account that the economic policies they promote and/or apply can negatively impact inter-group tensions within states.
- One way in which a coexistence lens could address socio-economic divisions in society is through its explicit recognition that there is value in diversity and that groups are interdependent. If societies could build on this recognition, they might start to value the increased socio-economic benefits accorded to all sides during times of peace, versus the skewed division when groups are divided and in conflict.
- Coexistence is considered a complex term whose meaning depends on the context. The concept of coexistence is familiar to both practitioners and academics, yet they don't often use the term. Thus, it's important to use other terms beyond just "coexistence."
- The result-driven orientation of most donor agencies keeps them focused on measurability and short-term deliverables. This is not conducive to coexistence work, since meaningful and serious coexistence activities need time to take root.
- Two types of coexistence exist in West Africa. A positive coexistence, referred to as "permissive coexistence," and a negative coexistence known as "submissive coexistence." The former occurs when people coexist out of good will and feelings of mutual respect, equality, and interdependence. The latter occurs when communities coexist simply out of fear over what would happen if their fragile *détentes* fell apart.
- Coexistence was seen as leading to stronger democracies, but democracies were not necessarily seen as leading to coexistence.
- The participants were interviewed by an outside consultant commissioned to evaluate the workshop. Prior to the workshop, participants were asked to share

their understanding of the term coexistence. A summary of their responses may be found in Appendix C.

### ***Country Perspectives: What Is Happening on the Ground?***

The second day of the workshop included a plenary of presentations on countries' perspectives on conflict and peacebuilding. Seven presentations were given (two from Cameroon, representing Anglophone and Francophone perspectives, and one each from the following countries: Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone). The table on the following pages summarizes the presentations.

The goals of this session included:

- To summarize the state and nature of conflict and coexistence;
- To identify the challenges facing coexistence and reconciliation work;
- To articulate the roles and responsibilities of the participants' respective organizations.

The presentations were designed to respond to some of the pointed questions already raised in "Coexistence and Democracy in West Africa: Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities." In addition, each presenter was asked to highlight lessons learned and to share practical field experience. With this framework, the presenters shared experience from their organizational and governmental perspectives, and combined this with recommendations for measures required to address some of the challenges to coexistence, peacebuilding, and good governance in West Africa. To streamline the information that was shared, these responses have been brought together under the categories of Challenges and Responses.

Country	Brief Description of the State of Coexistence	Challenges to Positive Coexistence	Governmental and Organizational Responses to Coexistence Challenges
Côte d'Ivoire	<p>Côte d'Ivoire experienced significant conflict following the introduction of multi-party democracy in the early 1990s. The democratization process was viewed as causing the Balkanization<sup>1</sup> of the country by mapping political divisions along ethnic lines.</p> <p>The resulting conflicts have demonstrated the weaknesses of coexistence in the country. Yet, since 2003 more proactive measures by government, civil society, and grassroots organizations have been taken to improve the state of coexistence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each election cycle steadily increases the level of Balkanization in the country as elections approach.</li> <li>• With limited freedom of expression, violence becomes one of the few outlets for expressing oneself.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land, identity, and electoral laws have been reformed in a way that is more inclusive of traditional communities.</li> <li>• A Ministry of Reconciliation has been established</li> <li>• A power-sharing agreement between the prime minister, who is a former rebel leader, and the president has been implemented.</li> <li>• Civil-society measures have been developed to address inter-group conflict.</li> <li>• Performances of group ceremonies are held in which citizens organize themselves under group banners (such as unions, traditional leaders, etc.).</li> <li>• Joint ceremonies are held bringing together former youth fighters from all sides to show that even former enemies can and must get along.</li> <li>• There are cultural exchanges such as a country-wide annual competition that asks for 5 ideas on how to bring about cohesion in Côte d'Ivoire.</li> <li>• There have been dedicated effort by CSOs after elections to mute political Balkanization by working on cohesion-building.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Balkanization refers to the breakup of a larger group or region into several smaller and often hostile groups.

Country	Brief Description of the State of Coexistence	Challenges to Positive Coexistence	Governmental and Organizational Responses to Coexistence Challenges
<b>Liberia</b>	<p>The nature of conflict in Liberia is rooted in its history and extends beyond the military intervention of 1979 by Samuel Doe to the introduction of Americo-Liberians in 1822 and the tension that has existed between them and indigenous populations ever since. The military intervention was in reaction to this historic divide and was itself divided along ethnic and religious lines, for instance, the conflict between the Mandingo, Krahn and the Gio combatants. This and other inter-communal divisions remain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many peacebuilding initiatives have been established but because there is lack of coordination and they are done haphazardly, their impact is dampened.</li> <li>• High-unemployment, especially among young former fighters.</li> <li>• Lack of confidence in the judiciary, which has led to mob violence and vigilante justice.</li> <li>• Lack of trust in government officials. Some are seen as corrupt and/or self-interested individuals who plunge the country into conflict, putting personal interests ahead of the national interest.</li> <li>• Politicians are working more to divide people than to unite them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic elections have been introduced.</li> <li>• A Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been established, but several issues need to be addressed before it can be truly effective. How far back should one look, only to 1979 or further? Some people who are known perpetrators also identify as victims, which is abhorrent to many Liberians.</li> <li>• Many reforms have been successfully introduced, including electoral reform, security sector reform (SSR), and training of police and military by international organizations; though notably all of these reforms have not fully included CSOs in the process.</li> <li>• CSOs have produced a newsletter that announces electoral promises and holds officials accountable for those promises.</li> <li>• Some CSOs have facilitated conflict-resolution meetings between ethnic groups. For example, the Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy's work with the Lorma and Mandingo communities in Lofa County.</li> <li>• There is a need for increased inclusion of all stakeholders in peacemaking and democracy work to counter political exploitation of ethnic divides</li> <li>• Continued efforts by CSOs in Liberia to move people beyond identity politics. According to two participants, in the last elections people voted on issues and not along ethnic lines in part because these efforts.</li> </ul>

Country	Brief Description of the State of Coexistence	Challenges to Positive Coexistence	Governmental and Organizational Responses to Coexistence Challenges
<p><b>Ghana</b></p>	<p>While Ghana is often hailed as a model for peace and stability in the region, it is important to recognize that the country is still rife with conflict. A serious but localized conflict is ongoing in the north of the country between pastoralists and farmers, while non-violent conflicts in the country have included civil-service employees going on strike. Ghana, like other countries in the region, also experiences a general build up of tensions each election cycle as election day approaches. The government of Ghana is, however, increasingly proactive in addressing issues of inter-communal conflict and is building a “peace architecture,” elements of which are noted in this brief.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political office is one of the few and most effective means of accessing economic opportunities. Therefore, the act of choosing one party over another becomes a question of economics. This arrangement makes it risky to vote for a losing party; people tend to maintain the status quo by voting for the two most powerful parties.</li> <li>• Citizens who complain to the government are labeled as the opposition and sidelined (again, political voice is tied in to economic cost or opportunity).</li> <li>• Intolerance exists between the elite and the poor.</li> <li>• It is difficult to obtain funding for Ghanaian projects from donor agencies due to the misperception that Ghana is peaceful and stable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established a Council of State which has one person representative from each of the ten regions who advises the president as mandated by the Constitution. This devolved governance creates an identifiable channel for grievances to move from the grassroots directly to the president.</li> <li>• Established a Panel of Eminent Chiefs who advise the government on matters affecting chieftaincy and traditional customary law and practices; they are involved in mediating the Dagbon conflict.</li> <li>• Passed the Political Parties Act stipulating that no political party may be formed on ethnic, gender, religious, regional, or other particularistic lines.</li> <li>• Article 35, section 5 (b) of the Constitution mandates that the state take appropriate measures to achieve reasonable regional and gender balance in recruitments and appointments to public office.</li> </ul>

Country	Brief Description of the State of Coexistence	Challenges to Positive Coexistence	Governmental and Organizational Responses to Coexistence Challenges
Nigeria	<p>Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-linguistic country richly endowed with natural resources. It also has a history rich in conflict tied to these very characteristics. Because of a lack of accountability, service delivery, transparency, and participation of the people in governance, participants questioned whether Nigeria can even be considered democratic. Owing to these factors, coexistence in Nigeria is weak and fragile.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of representativeness in the government and a flawed electoral process.</li> <li>• The state responds to many resource-based conflicts with violence rather than by addressing the underlying coexistence-related causes.</li> <li>• Some issues addressed at the international level lack community involvement. For example, Nigeria and Cameroon came to an agreement concerning the Bakasi region but excluded the local people from the process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 1979 the Federal Character Principle was introduced, which “seeks to ensure that appointments to public service institutions fairly reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity of the country.”<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• A National Youth Service plan has been implemented. University and polytechnic graduates of ages 30 and below are posted to regions throughout Nigeria to interact with communities different from their own.</li> <li>• Government’s and organizations should build and support a stronger electoral process.</li> <li>• Address conflicts through dialogue rather than the use of force.</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> From Adamolekun, L., Erero, J., and Oshionebo, B. (1991). *“Federal Character” and Management of the Federal Civil Service and the Military*. The Journal of Federalism 21(4). p.75-88.

Country	Brief Description of the State of Coexistence	Challenges to Positive Coexistence	Governmental and Organizational Responses to Coexistence Challenges
<p><b>Sierra Leone</b></p>	<p>After 11 years of war, Sierra Leone finally found relative peace in 2002. Since then the country has held two successful parliamentary and presidential elections, thanks in large part to the active and vocal participation of civil society in peacebuilding efforts. Yet the political process is still considered by members of civil society to favor one group over all others. This perpetuates other issues that contribute to tension and instability in Sierra Leone, including youth unemployment, pervasive poverty, lack of food security, and high rates of illiteracy.</p> <p>Peacebuilding interventions in Sierra Leone are expected to ease the transition to sustainable peace and development after the Lome Peace Accord. But the lack of political will or a coordinated response towards these goals have severely curtailed the country's progress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since the conflict ended, new conflict risks and tensions between groups have arisen. One of the critical coexistence challenges has been to recognize these new threats and to adjust priorities accordingly before they negatively impact the relative peace.</li> <li>• Deep resentments remain in Sierra Leone, due to increased social, economic and political inequalities, deep-rooted poverty, youth unemployment, weak government institutions, and the competition for limited resources. As long as these remain unsolved, Sierra Leone faces the possibility of renewed conflict.</li> <li>• Government structures such as the judiciary, and security sectors that should ideally act as outlets to resolve conflicts in fact promote them.</li> <li>• Women have been marginalized in Sierra Leonean society; they are not actively participating in the development process and face high rates of violence.</li> <li>• Traditional elders have been underutilized in resolving the various conflicts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The government has taken steps to address some issues of social exclusion, by passing a Gender Inclusion Act, conducting a truth and reconciliation process, and publishing reports assessing the state of human rights, corruption, and poverty reduction.</li> <li>• A number of government reforms and capacity-building projects are underway, including a poverty reduction strategy, security sector reform, and the signing of international instruments that promote equality.</li> <li>• Creating collaborative networks across divides and then involving those networks in a high degree of consultation both among themselves and with the leadership of conflicting factions is an important and powerfully effective approach.</li> <li>• Much needs to be done to provide better salaries and incentives to the judiciary and security personnel.</li> <li>• In light of the increasing levels of foreseeable threat to peaceful coexistence and stability, trend analysis and threat-reduction planning are essential.</li> </ul>

Country	Brief Description of the State of Coexistence	Challenges to Positive Coexistence	Governmental and Organizational Responses to Coexistence Challenges
<p><b>Cameroon</b> (Francophone perspective)</p>	<p>Identity-conflict has a long history in Cameroon and it is a popular misperception that the country is a haven of peace. The conflicts there revolve around the divide between Christians and Muslims, Anglophones and Francophones, and along tribal lines. The state—dominated by only a few tribes—systematically exploits tribalism as an instrument of maintaining its own power. Economic benefits can only be accessed via political office, yet politics is split along ethnic lines. For example, when Cameroon implemented a national construction program, it distributed the projects along ethnic lines, benefiting some groups more than others and worsening tensions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With ethnicity-driven politics comes ‘tribal immunity’ in which some groups are considered exempt from prosecution under the justice system.</li> <li>• Land issues are a major challenge in Cameroon, with many conflicts pertaining to land.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSOs have focused on training women in peacebuilding.</li> <li>• CSOs have also focused on training youth in election monitoring.</li> <li>• Cameroon needs to address the institutionalization of tribalism.</li> <li>• The country needs to focus on the future rather than looking to the past, which is filled with a history of inter-communal conflict.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cameroon</b> (Anglophone perspective)</p>	<p>Cameroon is a multi-lingual society with English and French the official and two most predominant languages. While the main area of conflict occurs between Muslims and Christians, years of peaceful coexistence between Anglophone and Francophone communities is fading. Conflict seems to be kept at bay only by the fear of sharing more directly in the horrors of war experienced by the tens of thousands of refugees who have fled to Cameroon from neighboring warring countries and told their stories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unaddressed socio-economic issues have led to political tensions.</li> <li>• Ethnicity-driven politics has led to one ethnic group maintaining power. This group is unaccountable to others, resulting in the neglect of much of the population and institutional paralysis.</li> <li>• The executive branch has utilized its power to maintain and even promote division across groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civil society has been strengthened by organizing itself into cooperative networks.</li> <li>• Interfaith dialogues and the development of inter-religious organizations have contributed to addressing the conflicts between Muslims and Christians.</li> <li>• Inter-ethnic marriage has contributed to coexistence, and some CSOs are actively promoting it as a solution.</li> <li>• Transnational conflicts, such as that between Cameroon and Nigeria in the Bakasi region, need more focused attention.</li> <li>• Greater involvement of women in conflict resolution is seen as critical to successful peacebuilding.</li> </ul>

### ***Summary of Discussion on Democracy in West Africa***

Over the three days of the workshop a familiar but nuanced picture of the West African experience with democracy materialized.

Democracy has a poor track record in the West Africa region and is often treated with suspicion if not outright contempt by citizens. These are perhaps quite legitimate perspectives given the difficulties many countries have experienced with democratic transition and democratic processes in the West African sub-region.

Both socio-economics and ethnicity were identified as major lines of division in West African societies. Democratic ideals were expected to offer a lasting solution to such social division; however, in West Africa, economics have become politicized and democratic politics have become polarized by ethno-centric, identity-driven party politics. As a result, democracy is now seen as perpetuating these divides rather than healing them.

Many of the countries discussed have strong executives and weak legislatures, making it very difficult for executives to be held accountable; in addition, the parties at the helm are often simply the political arm of an ethnic community, since political parties are often based on ethnic identity. This creates several interrelated problems that threaten coexistence. When one party gains access to state power, it can mean the exclusion of other parties and their communities from economic opportunities. The executive position is so important economically that communities will go to great lengths to secure it, including fixing elections, staging coups, and even initiating civil wars.

This situation complicates the work of organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) that seek to promote democracy in the region. They are sensitive to the prevailing negative popular perception of democracy in West Africa, and they do not want to be perceived as promoting something that people in the region do not want.

A related complication is the U.S. government's relatively recent policy of connecting aid work to its diplomatic objectives. For example, after the recent coup in Mauritania in which the democratically elected government was overthrown, all USAID funding to the country was immediately suspended. While from one perspective this may be viewed as supporting democracy, workshop participants shared another view. Some noted that in Mauritania elections were strongly suspected to have been fixed and the president was considered by many to be a dictator with little, if any, support from the general populace. The coup, on the other hand, was seen as popularly supported, which led the participants to ask: In which case are people really pursuing a right to self-determination? In a "democracy" where an unpopular figure steals power? Or in a popular coup that overthrows that leader?

The Mauritanian case highlights the complications of this policy of mixing aid work, diplomacy, and democracy. In this case and others, the policy has damaged relations with some implementing partners in the region who, resentful of aid being tied to national security and diplomatic efforts, have refused to work with agencies associated with the U.S. government.

### ***Thematic Synthesis of Plenary, Panel, and Small Group Discussions***

Throughout the workshop sessions, participants worked collaboratively to address questions related to the intersection of democracy and coexistence in West Africa, including:

- How to establish benchmarks for measuring coexistence and sustainable peace in the West African context;
- What new policies and strategies could strengthen coexistence in divided societies;
- How traditional systems and structures can help and/or hinder democratization and coexistence work in West Africa;
- What role international organizations and inter-governmental organizations (e.g. ECOWAS, UN, EU) should have in peacebuilding in the sub-region;
- How to promote inclusive governance in West Africa.

The group work and panel discussions were followed by rich and engaged plenary discussions, during which several dominant themes emerged. These themes are synthesized below to provide a sketch of the most pressing ideas raised by participants throughout the workshop. It is worth noting that, though listed separately below, these themes are in fact intrinsically interconnected.

#### **The gap between expectations and reality**

- Many national laws, constitutions, and international agreements include elements promoting positive coexistence; yet too often these laws and agreements go unenforced and are ignored by governments.
- Donor-funding priorities can change quickly. When this occurs, programs that were previously approved for funding may suddenly find their funding canceled, which negatively impacts implementing partners.
- Policies are put in place that structurally and symbolically reflect democracy and inclusiveness; yet in practice they are more often than not manipulated to reinforce existing centralized power structures and to maintain inter-group divisions.
- Participants addressed whether funders' top-down prescriptive approach to programming pushes organizations on the ground to choose programs that are likely to get funded over ones that may be truly needed. In this way, many potentially effective ideas never make it to the table. Participants called for funders to move away from this approach towards a role more facilitative of locally developed programming.
- Countries throughout the region have been successful at developing commissions that produce reports with recommendations, but those reports sit on shelves and no action is ever taken to follow-up on the recommendations.

There is a popular expression that “actions speak louder than words.” Whether it be passing laws, holding free and fair elections, or promising reforms, it is important to follow through on

those commitments. This is true anywhere, but particularly in divided societies where trust between individuals and groups often either doesn't exist or has been compromised.

### **Inattention to root causes of conflict**

- West Africa is rife with inter-communal conflicts. In many cases these become evident to the broader world only after an outbreak of violence. But violence does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is symptomatic of underlying causes. Often, it is only when these underlying causes go unattended over time that tensions rise and eventually spill over into violence.
- In many of the conflicts that affect the region, the underlying causes are viewed as being rooted in questions of inter-group coexistence, yet little to no work is ever done to address coexistence issues. Therefore, though much surface-level peace work occurs, sustained peace is rarely achieved. The Bakasi region of Nigeria and Cameroon was noted as an example.
- “Rebels” are not purely an “enemy” to be destroyed; they are human beings who fight for a reason. Too often, rebels are dealt with solely through the application of state violence with no attempts made to understand and address the underlying concerns that lead a rebel to fight.
- Fear and mistrust among leaders of armed organizations are often unaddressed before those leaders are brought into a room together to begin negotiations. The concerns underlying these fears need to be addressed before leaders can effectively work together to resolve the issues related to the broader conflict.
- Underlying causes may be exploited to foment conflict. If a person is hungry, he can be paid to fight. But if his basic needs are being met, he is less vulnerable to manipulation.

### **Information/lack of information about other groups**

- Lack of information leads to fear, and fear leads to violence. Good information related to the needs, motivations, and cultures of other groups must be disseminated.
- Often, information is monopolized by leadership and used to divide groups, promote distrust, and/or instigate conflict. Civil society has a responsibility to share and promote better information to the masses.

### **Parties who have a special role in coexistence work**

- *The role of women*
  - Women have an important role to play in coexistence work. They are perceived as natural peacemakers and somewhat neutral parties by all sides. If men are perceived as the agitators of conflict, women are perceived to be able to positively influence the men in their lives to work towards peace.

- The potential of women in coexistence work is underappreciated and underutilized. This is in part the result of traditional customs or modern policies that explicitly exclude women from decision-making processes. Some progress has been made in the past few years as a number of international, regional, and national laws have been passed that call for improved inclusivity of women. For example, most countries in West Africa that have ratified UNSC 1325 have passed bills in parliament making references to the Resolution. The inclusion of gender-sensitivity in governance to help deal with social ills such as gender-based violence, forced marriages, and gender-based discriminatory policies has brought some glimmer of hope.
- *The role of traditional structures*
  - Traditional structures can provide a culturally relevant framework for resolving inter-groups conflicts. Coexistence work in a typical African sense enables families and communities to deal with their problems by using the humanistic values they have inherited and passed on from generation to generation. The traditional practice of bringing individuals and communities to coexist is arguably not new in many African societies. Traditional structures can complement and in some instances perhaps even replace modern coexistence practice. Though traditional perceptions of justice may come at times with a cost to modern ones.
  - Traditional leaders are often not formally incorporated into the government structure. When they are outside of official circles, it's more difficult to influence them towards coexistence principles or to formally use them as local mediation resources.
  - Traditional structures can have unfair outcomes and negative consequences for women and youth, who are often excluded from traditional processes.
  - Traditional approaches for reconciliation—for example, holding ceremonies to bless the new found peace—can be included as components of post-conflict healing strategies.
- *The role of youth*
  - In a post-conflict setting, youth can be both a tremendous asset and a liability. They are often poor and unemployed, and for this reason they are likelier to agitate for conflict. Yet they are also better able to move beyond the past, and may be more willing and able to learn the tools of peace. In this way, if given the right opportunities, youth can become agents of peace rather than war.

## **Language**

- Language can be used purposefully or unintentionally by politicians, the media, and other institutions to divide groups. For example, labeling a group as a terrorist organization easily puts it outside society's sphere of moral inclusion—and such labeling is sometimes used by governments for dubious political reasons, rather than out of legitimate security concerns.
- Laws on language (establishing an official language or what is used and taught in school, etc.) have tremendous impact on coexistence. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire public documents are printed only in French, serving to distance the sizable Anglophone population from its own government.
- Choices about what language to use impacts the ability to communicate and share information across groups who are divided. This should be taken into account when doing coexistence work. For example, reading material related to coexistence can be translated and discussed in local languages to promote understanding of the concept.

## **Transnational Issues**

- Groups/communities exist within/around/beyond borders, thus:
  - One country's issues with a single group become shared by other countries;
  - A single group's problems belong to multiple countries.
- When refugees of one country move into other countries, a domestic coexistence issue becomes sub-regional and internationalized. This has been the case in West Africa, particularly in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Cameroon.

## **Sustainability**

- Coexistence programming is often affected by donors' short-term focus. Experience has shown that expectations narrowly focused on measurable results within a year are unrealistic as far as coexistence work is concerned. Coexistence work should be measured in years not months; this requires sustained donor commitment, regardless of readily quantifiable results.
- It is necessary to build and support long-term *local* human capacity. Often members of the dedicated local staff have themselves been victims of the conflicts they are working to resolve, thus they have a deep understanding of the issues involved.
- Many local organizations working on the ground lack highly skilled human resources, partly because their staff is coming from education systems devastated by years of civil war. This holds the organizations back from being able to sustain themselves, build upon their successes and increase the scale, complexity, durability, and effectiveness of their programming.

## **Socio-economics**

- Ethnicity and religion are but two ways of grouping people; another is class. When looking at inter-group conflicts, socio-economic causes should be included. Tension often exists between the few elites and the impoverished masses.
- One of the values behind the field of coexistence is that an interdependent, multi-cultural society with peace and equality for all yields better socio-economic outcomes for all groups. In other words, peaceful coexistence has strong potential to positively address socio-economic questions.
- Socio-economic issues have an important role in post-conflict coexistence because of the large numbers of unemployed, unskilled, ex-fighters who struggle to survive. If their socio-economic needs are unmet, coexistence will be hard to achieve.
- Belonging to the ruling party is a means to obtain contracts, scholarships, and jobs. Thus, economic opportunity itself is politicized.

## ***Moving Coexistence-sensitive Democratization Forward in West Africa***

Workshop sessions explored the steps necessary to apply a coexistence lens to democracy work as a way to build and promote coexistence between groups.

As a first step, a call was made to move democracy forward in West Africa by organizing and strengthening the coexistence field. Three general tasks were identified as necessary to develop coexistence-sensitive democratic governance in the medium and long-term in West Africa: coexistence capacity-building, the development of networks, and the development of coexistence tools and strategies. The three steps are further discussed below.

## **Coexistence capacity**

Recommendations for coexistence capacity-building included the following:

- Develop coexistence training and training-of-trainers in coexistence work. This includes training for professionals responsible for mainstreaming coexistence within their field, and training of trainers for outreach to the target populations of coexistence and democracy work (such as members of warring ethnic communities).
- Donor commitment to the work will need to be strong and sustained, particularly by:
  - Providing adequate funding to CSOs so they will be able to recruit qualified staff while building the capacity of the existing staff to work on coexistence issues full-time;
  - Providing funds for laptops, printers, fax machines, and other items necessary to operate effectively and efficiently.
- Many CSO members have grown-up or lived in conflict-torn societies with a limited or non-existent formal education system. Others may have been unable to attend school because they were fleeing violence or even participating in it (some of them willingly, others unwillingly). Because of these circumstances there is a salient need among CSO

staff in the region for more formalized basic education and advanced degrees. Thus, there was a call for donors to do more to support this facet of capacity-building.

### **The development and cultivation of networks**

Two distinct types of network needs were identified: vertical networks that connect different areas of the government/public sector with coexistence-minded CSOs; and horizontal networks of NGOs who are coexistence allies.

Recommendations for the vertical networks included:

- Promoting coexistence-sensitivity within government institutions through working more collaboratively with government officials. An observation was made that too often the CSOs view themselves as the “good guys” and government officials as the “bad guys”—and vice-versa. Participants also acknowledged that they generally cannot operate without the implicit blessing of the state, a circumstance that reinforced the need for a positive relationship;
- Identifying ways of influencing government officials to be coexistence-sensitive ;
- There is a perception that the concept of “coexistence” is threatening to some people in power. CSOs can engage with officials to address those concerns;
- Convening formal meetings with government officials and CSOs on coexistence and governance to clarify the underlying interests of each party and the synergies and gaps in their understanding of coexistence;
- Included in these government/CSO networking efforts is the explicit goal of modeling cooperation in a divided society.

The horizontal networks were conceived of as existing both as national networks of coexistence-allied CSOs and also as transnational networks. Recommendations for and benefits of the horizontal networks included:

- Encouraging member organizations to share information and provide mutual support to each other;
- Encouraging a more organized and strategic approach to promoting coexistence in the participants’ respective countries, region, and sectors;
- Because many countries face similar problems, the positive impact of work being done to address issues in one divided society could be enhanced through a collaborative approach by CSOs on a transnational level;
- Cooperative transnational networks could additionally serve to augment support for coexistence efforts in a particular country in times of potential crisis, when local CSOs might face added challenges (for example: before, during, and after elections, when tensions often rise, CSOs from neighboring countries could offer their support).

### **Coexistence tools and strategies**

Suggestions for these included:

- A call for the development and adoption by CSOs of a Coexistence Code of Conduct which would reflect coexistence ideals including transparency, inclusivity, mutual respect, and dedication to peace;
- Guidelines for what coexistence-sensitive governance looks like;
- Identification of, and explicit strategies for working with, relevant individuals who are unwilling or unable to mainstream coexistence out of concern over what it might mean for them (for example, politicians who benefit from divide and rule tactics);
- The creation of audits and surveys to help identify how the term coexistence is used and what structures and processes are already in place that reflect coexistence-sensitivity (such as indigenous knowledge and practice);
- The development of parameters and monitoring mechanisms to enable the measurement of the state of coexistence in a given context.

### **Short-term measures**

Meeting participants also identified several immediately implementable steps that could help promote coexistence-sensitive governance and democracy in the region. These included:

- Translate documents produced by their respective organizations into additional languages;
- Create an Internet forum to enable workshop participants and other allies to continue the conversation, share experiences, and seek advice;
- Identify and publicize the national laws and international agreements promoting coexistence principles (such as anti-discrimination legislation or agreements on gender inclusivity) formally adopted by national governments—and then hold politicians publicly accountable for their implementation. One example is the previously cited “Federal Character Principle” of Nigeria;
- Publish journal articles on the topic of coexistence and democracy in West Africa in order to promote coexistence as a field and spur academic debate;
- Monitor the media for negative or positive coexistence messages and follow-up with them appropriately;
- Encourage civil-society organizations who are coexistence allies to add information to their Web sites on coexistence issues;
- Identify other organizations in respective countries that could form part of a coexistence network.

## Conclusion

With its ethnic-driven politics and politically driven economies compounding the existing inter-communal and socio-economic conflicts in the region, West Africa exemplifies how coexistence and democracy are inextricably linked. In broadening the vision of how adoption of a coexistence lens can further the positive development of democracy in the region, participants have highlighted the complexities of this interconnectedness. Building on this emerging perspective, participants have identified initial ideas for how to move forward.

Creative and sustainable solutions to the problems in the region must be developed, and it is imperative that these solutions address the root causes of the conflicts. Too often, responses to conflict ignore the underlying causes that necessitated the implementation of the responses in the first place. One example of this is power-sharing, a currently popular solution to controversial elections in Africa (as in Kenya in 2008). Power-sharing was seen by the workshop participants as being, at best, another temporary solution to ongoing problems. Some even saw it as a *threat* to democratic ideals because it could encourage armed groups to press for power-sharing even if they lack popular support and because it weakens the ideal of peacefully accepting one's political loss and ceding power to the winner.

Many participants felt that if the underlying causes of conflict were studied closely, a number of them would turn out to be related to the inability of groups to coexist with one another. Thus, more concerted, dedicated, and strategic investment in coexistence work and the adoption of a coexistence lens in democratization and good governance work was seen as an important part of finding long-term solutions to West Africa's socio-political, religious, ethnic, and other social divisions.

Participants shared the opinion that designing, funding, and supporting coexistence work in the region are vital moves towards more stable, inclusive, and participatory societies. It is upon this coexistence foundation that democratic governments in the region will come to reflect their countries' diverse populations and to be more responsive and accountable to those populations' needs. With increased and sustained funding, coexistence-allied national and transnational networks would be strengthened and empowered to develop the tools, guidelines, and strategies necessary for building coexistence-sensitive democracies in the region.

## Appendix A Participant List

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NOTE: Names marked with an \*  
planned to attend the workshop but  
were unable to.

**Appendix B**  
**Workshop Agenda**

**Democracy, Conflict and Coexistence in West Africa**

**Workshop**  
**October 8 – 10, 2008**  
**Mensvic Palace Hotel, Accra, Ghana**

**Day One: Wednesday, October 8, 2008**

- 3:00-3:30**      **Remarks**
- Welcome Remarks by Kalie Sillah of WANEP
  - Opening Remarks by Eric Boateng of CDD-Ghana
  - Remarks by Mari Fitzduff of CI

*Chair: Victor Brobbey*

- 3:30-4:15**      **Self-introduction of participants & coexistence-type activity led by CI**

- 4:15-5:00**      **Presentation by Jessica Berns of CI**
- Overview of coexistence and complementarity
  - Discussion

*Chair: Sekou Konneh*

- 5:00-5:15**      **Tea Break**

**Session One**

- 5:15-6:15**      **Plenary Topic: Institutional perspectives. What is happening on the ground and what are the responses?**
- 3-4 panel presentations (about 10 minutes each) from NED, USAID-WA
  - Questions/Comments/Responses/Discussion

*Chair: Kwadwo Appiagyei*

- 6:15**              **Announcements/Logistics and Closing**

- 7:30**              **Group Dinner at Mensvic Palace Hotel**

**Day Two: Thursday, October 9, 2008**

**Session Two**

**9:00-9:45 Plenary: Responses to institutional perspectives continued**

**9:45-11:30 Panel Discussion: Country perspectives on conflict and peacebuilding**

- Panelists are expected to summarize and report on the state and nature of conflicts/coexistence in their respective countries, approaches to peacebuilding, obstacles and challenges to coexistence and reconciliation. They will also discuss the roles and responsibilities of their respective organizations (if any) in promoting sustainable peace building and coexistence.
- Panel Members: Alfred Babo (Ivory Coast), Caroline Bowah (Liberia), Peter Kum Che (Cameroon), Linda Darkwa (Ghana), Uche Durueke (Nigeria), Hannah Mallah (Sierra Leone), Pascal-Blaise Touoyem (Cameroon), Questions/Responses/Discussion

*Chair: Kalie Sillah*

**11:30-11:50 Tea Break**

**11:50-12:20 Group activity led by CI on “identity”**

**12:20-1:15 Group Work One: Thematic Areas**

- **Group 1:** What are the benchmarks for measuring coexistence and sustainable peace in the West African context? (Group members are expected to analyze, judge, and formulate benchmarks for determining successful interventions.)
- **Group 2:** The role of international organizations and inter-governmental organizations (e.g. ECOWAS, UN, EU, etc.) in peacebuilding in the sub-region: What have they done in the past and what should they do now to promote sustainable peace and coexistence?
- **Group 3:** What new policies and strategies are required to strengthen coexistence in divided societies?
- **Group 4:** Traditional systems and structures: How can they help and/or hinder democratization and coexistence work in West Africa?

**1:15-1:30 Report Back to Plenary**

*Chair: Linda Darkwa*

**1:30-3:00 Lunch Break**

- “The Challenges of Leadership in Divided Societies”: talk by Howard Wolpe

*Chair: Toyin Oluwaniyi*

### **Session Three**

**3:00-4:15 Panel Discussion: How do we promote inclusive governance in West Africa?**

- Panelists are expected to bring to light the roles and responsibilities of their respective organizations in promoting democracy-building, good governance, and inclusivity. What challenges and opportunities do their organizations face in promoting these principles and concepts?
- Panel Members: Alfred Babo (Côte d'Ivoire), Dauda Garuba (Nigeria), Macella Macauley (Sierra Leone), Dan Saryee (Liberia), Dieudonne Zognong (Cameroon)
- Questions/Responses/Discussion

*Chair: Kojo Asante*

**4:15-4:30 Tea Break**

**4:30-4:45 Announcements/Logistics and Closing**

**6:30 Dinner**

**7:00 Cultural Activity**

**Day Three: Friday, October 10, 2008**

### **Session Four**

**9:00-9:30 Thematic Summary by Rapporteurs Lotee Titus and John Moore**

*Chair: Mari Fitzduff*

**8:45-9:30 Choosing from among the themes raised in the thematic summary session, small groups to brainstorm together to address:**

- What is needed to do this work well?
- What are some challenges to doing this work well?
- How can our organizations move forward to address those challenges?

**9:30-10:30 Plenary Session**

- Reporting back from small groups
- Summarizing emerging issues

*Chair: Jessica Berns*

**11:00-11:15 Tea Break**

**11:15-11:45 Small Groups**

- What's next in our countries?
- What's needed?

**11:45-1:00 Plenary**

- Reporting Back

*Chair: Jessica Berns*

**11:45-1:00 Closing Remarks**

- Remarks by Jessica Berns of CI
- Remarks by Eric Boateng of CDD-Ghana

**1:00 Lunch and Departure**

## Appendix C

### What is your understanding of the term coexistence?<sup>3</sup>

- Coexistence refers to peaceful harmonious living together of various diverse identity groups.
- I understand this term to mean the need to know how to stay peacefully with others anytime and anywhere.
- Different people or groups living together in harmony.
- Living together in peace.
- Peaceful cohabitation or unity in diversity, collaborative tolerance.
- The ability of the people who had been hurt, traumatized by civil war to be able to live together in peace.
- Coexistence is the ability of different people from different ethnic, political, and linguistic backgrounds to live together.
- Coexistence relates to social, economic, and political tolerance necessary to encourage dialogue between and among groups without any one group or person feeling indispensable in relation to the other.
- Living together despite your diversities in language, culture, or socio-economic position.
- Different societies and groups adopting an inclusive, tolerant approach to promote peace and reconciliation among themselves.
- Inclusiveness, tolerance, living with and accommodating each other, shared values.
- In democracy-building, coexistence means inclusion of all participants, including those from minority groups, and respect for traditional values.
- Promotion of peaceful life among people of diversity.
- Peaceful collaboration and cohabitation.
- International relations in Cold War coexistence, community-level relations, and respect for each other's culture and the right to express their culture without obstruction.
- Mutual relationship of persons or groups of diverse backgrounds based on respect and awareness of the differences.
- From a post-conflict perspective, it means democracy and peacebuilding.
- Ability for people with different backgrounds, including ethnic, language, etc., to live together harmoniously and mutually.
- Inter-ethnic friendship, intercultural cohabitation, participatory democracy, democratic peacebuilding, peaceful coexistence, unity in diversity, and respect of differences.
- The ability of populations, communities, and states to find preventive mechanisms; management of conflicts in a lasting manner.

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<sup>3</sup> From *Democracy, Conflict, and Coexistence in West Africa Workshop, October 8-10, 2008: Initial Evaluation Report* by Patience Assem, workshop evaluation consultant.