
Children and Youth Division Operational Methods and Programme Highlights

The Children and Youth Programmes of Search for Common Ground (SFCG) seek to transform the role of young people in conflicts so that they have concrete alternatives to violence and can significantly contribute to building sustainable peace. Through projects in ten countries, SFCG is committed to fostering the participation of youth as leaders for protection, peacebuilding, dialogue, and reconciliation in their own communities and countries.

Young people have a significant impact on how national and local conflicts unfold. Not only are they victimized by direct abuses, but they are often direct participants in conflict as soldiers and ideologues. They are pulled into armies, rebel groups, militias, and gangs and are caught in cycles of violence that infiltrate their lives and outlast the wars of their parents. Yet many young people also clamour to avoid participating in violence by finding ways of contributing to their societies to play positive roles in their communities.

Young people are, therefore, key to the resolution of societal conflicts and need to be engaged as important stakeholders. SFCG's programs work to engage youth who are at-risk of involvement in violence and facilitate their participation in transforming the ways their societies deal with conflict. We do this through three operational methods: formal and non-formal *education*, platforms for them to have *voice* in society, and opportunities for them to take concrete *action* in their communities.

Education – SFCG's programmes seek to transform the attitudes of young people and equip them with the individual tools that they need to manage the impact of the conflict on their lives. Through formal and non-formal education, we provide information in entertaining ways that allows children to understand their rights, analyze ethnic differences, and transform their attitudes so that they can build cooperative relationships and act to protect themselves in situations of violence. Programmes include a peace education project in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, a television show in Macedonia, and in-school peer mediation programs in Ukraine.

Voice – SFCG's programming creates platforms for young people to participate in national dialogues on issues that affect them. Using a range of media tools, SFCG airs children's opinions and attitudes on issues such as child rights, demobilisation of ex-combatants, and inter-ethnic conflict. Our programs train young people in their rights, advocacy and dialogue strategies, and conflict resolution in order to allow them to determine editorial content and produce their own programming. Projects include five ongoing youth-run radio shows in Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone and the publication of comic books in Burundi and Indonesia.

Action – In order to facilitate the participation of young people in society, SFCG works to create opportunities for youth to take concrete actions to work for their own protection and to build bridges across divisions in society. We work directly with youth-led organisations to enhance their conflict-resolution skills, build networks with other similar institutions, and help them gain access to new resources to support their work. Projects have included forming youth election monitoring teams in Sierra Leone, running soccer tournaments in Burundi, and facilitating leadership development for youth organizations in Angola.

Programme Highlights

Angola – The Youth Project in Angola brings together youth who are affiliated with the former armed factions of the war to have dialogue about the issues that are affecting them and to create cooperative activities that promote peace and reconciliation. By participating in leadership development and conflict resolution activities, youth are able to create civil society organizations that carve out a concrete role for young people in the nation's peace process, particularly in the upcoming elections.

Burundi - SFCG in Burundi has a youth project that brings together young people from Hutu and Tutsi communities to conduct joint activities and to take leadership roles in their communities. In partnership with student and youth associations, we have run soccer tournaments for ethnically integrated teams, produced a comic book about the manipulation of youth by political elites, and run intergenerational dialogues with village elders and child soldiers. Recently, the project is seeking involve youth in civic education efforts surround the elections.

Democratic Republic of Congo – SFCG's programme in DRC seeks to facilitate space for children to discuss their risks and the impact of the war on their lives. Through radio programming in the East, *Sisi Watoto*, we are fostering a national dialogue on issues such as child soldiering, children accused of witchcraft, and sexual abuse.

Indonesia - SFCG in Indonesia seeks to facilitate the opportunity for adolescents and young adults to educate their peers about the uses of non-violence and conflict resolution strategies to avoid inter-ethnic strife. Through the publication of a comic book series and a peace education program in the Pesantren – Islamic boarding schools – we seek to transform the attitudes of young people and create concrete opportunities to promote peace.

Liberia – SFCG in Liberia seeks to empower children to address the impact of the war on their lives through a weekly children-run radio program, *Golden Kids News*. By educating children about their rights, we create opportunities for young people to talk on a national level about the issues affecting them in the immediate aftermath of the war. Through a recent partnership with the *Watchlist on Children in Armed Conflict*, youth participants led dialogue around a recent report on child rights.

Macedonia – SFCG in Macedonia runs educational programs that aim to transform children's attitudes on inter-ethnic relations. Through an in-school, kindergarten, *Mozaik*, and a popular children's television show, we expose kids to the different ethnic groups and languages of the country so they can build the necessary conflict-resolution skills to build friendships and links across linguistic lines.

Partners in Humanity – The youth project of Partners in Humanity, a global programme on relations between the West and the Muslim World through online dialogue and a global youth media initiative.

Sierra Leone – SFCG in Sierra Leone addresses children's issues by creating public dialogue, giving voice to young people and empowering youth to play active roles in their country's peace process. Through a popular children-produced radio program, *Golden Kids News*, and action-oriented projects, young people advocate for their own rights and communicate their priorities to adult decision makers.

Additional Programming –With USAID's Displaced Children and Orphan's fund SFCG co-leads the *Washington Network on Children and Armed Conflict*, a forum to exchange information and increase cooperation across sectors.

In a partnership with General Romeo Dallaire, SFCG is facilitating a global dialogue that aims to develop new tools to preventing the use of child soldiers.