

Organisational Capacity

Founded in 1982, Search for Common Ground works to transform the way the world deals with conflict – away from adversarial approaches, towards cooperative solutions. Working in Burundi since 1995, Angola since 1996 and DRC since 2001 with cross-border activities in Rwanda since 2006, SFCG works with local partners to find culturally appropriate means to strengthen societies' capacity to deal with conflicts constructively; to understand the differences and act on the commonalities. Using innovative tools and working at different levels of society, SFCG engages in a pragmatic, long-term process of conflict transformation. SFCG's toolbox includes media production – radio, TV, film and print – mediation and facilitation, training, community organising, sports, music and theatre. We promote both individual and institutional change and are committed to measuring the results of our work and increasing our effectiveness through monitoring and facilitated learning.

Regional Context in the Great Lakes & Angola

War has ravaged the region of the Great Lakes and Angola for decades, ranging from Angola's 30-year civil war to Rwanda's 1994 genocide and Burundi's 12-year *crise* to the recently concluded conflict in DRC and the ongoing insurgency driven by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. These civil wars have been inextricably linked, each drawing in neighbouring countries, whose support and desire for regional influence, domestic power, or mineral wealth fuelled the conflicts and frustrated peace efforts for years. Nowhere is this more flagrant than in the DRC, where the ten-year conflict brought at least six countries (including Burundi, DRC Rwanda and Uganda) into direct contact, both as allies and adversaries.

“The conflicts in the (Great Lakes) region have a dual character: even if most of the conflicts have a distinct local and/or national anchorage, they are at the same time fuelled by or fuelling regional conflicts. A regional approach is necessary, for both analysis and management of the conflicts.”

~“A Strategic Conflict Analysis for the Great Lakes Region.” Swedish International Development Agency. March 2004.

http://www.sida.se/?d=118&a=3140&language=en_US

At the same time recent events in the Great Lakes & Angola bear witness to a region trying to move forward. Elections in Burundi and DRC have ushered in the first real chances for peace in the two countries in over a decade; the ongoing transitional justice process in Rwanda is helping Rwandans deal with the genocide that plunged the entire region into violent chaos. Angola is experiencing its longest period of uninterrupted peace in its history as an independent state, while in Uganda recent negotiations between the government and LRA offer hope for an end to two decades of conflict.

At a recent Great Lakes summit in Nairobi, regional heads of state pledged to address security, stability and development, with a special focus on protection and assistance for the displaced and prevention of sexual violence. Considering the history of conflict and violence in Angola, Burundi, DRC, Rwanda and Uganda, and the regional implications, events such as this are a sign of improvement. Still myriad challenges remain, including continued clashes between the government and active militias in Eastern Congo, the continued existence of the LRA, human rights abuses by soldiers and police throughout the region, and increasing threat to citizens' freedom of expression. National efforts, such as the Gacaca process and a planned TRC in Burundi offer hope for the future, but initiatives such as the Great Lakes conference serve as reminders that the conflicts, both regional and national, require more than just national solutions.

Regional Strategy

SFCG's approach in the Great Lakes/Angola region seeks to inspire key people from diverse groups to become actors for social change and actively contribute to both peace and reconciliation in their communities. The strategy is operationalised through both regional and country-level interventions using a number of tools, including media programming, training, participatory theatre, community outreach and local partnerships.

The first phase in SFCG's regional strategy, already in place, uses media to empower marginalised populations to give them a voice in the changing regional context. Representing a new regional approach toward conflict transformation, SFCG produces a live, weekly interactive radio talk show simulcast in Burundi, DRC and Rwanda, focusing on youth in the region and their approaches to conflict and peacebuilding.

In February 2007, SFCG convened a regional strategic planning in order to foster cooperation and greater effectiveness of its programmes in the Great Lakes & Angola region. During the session, SFCG defined four critical factors fuelling conflict within countries and across borders that SFCG's regional strategy would address:

- Managing resources;
- Displacement and human security;
- Access to information and freedom of expression; and
- Identity

Within the framework of these themes and SFCG's mission, each national programme shapes its own goals, objectives and priorities according to its own context. At the same time, the regional strategy builds stronger linkages between the programmes, providing more opportunities for cross border collaboration, sharing of ideas, lessons learned and the efficient use of regional resources.

Integrating media and community outreach tools, SFCG expects to achieve the following **outcomes** through the application of its strategy:

- Credible and appropriate information is more generally available around the region, particularly for marginalised populations like refugees, women, and youth;
- Youth are constructively engaged in non-violent opportunities and have a growing voice in their communities;
- Inter-ethnic tolerance and cooperation has increased across the region, reducing incidences of ethnic violence and discrimination; and
- SFCG's approach and activities are effectively replicated across the region.

Looking at the current dynamic in Angola and each of the Great Lakes countries in a larger historical context, one is challenged to find national solutions to the past, present and potential conflicts. SFCG's

strategy links peace actors across the region, from theatre and media practitioners to civil society leaders and local authorities, and empowers marginalised groups such as youth, women and refugee/returnee populations, providing each with the information, tools and skills to promote cooperative solutions. Through this strategy, SFCG proposes regional solutions to both national and regional conflicts in the Great Lakes & Angola, while promoting greater cooperation and understanding across borders.

SFCG's regional resources:

- *Studio Ijambo: a well-established and regionally respected production studio and training center.*
- *Radio partners in Burundi, Rwanda, the DRC and Angola, reaching a large and diverse population.*
- *Over 10 years of experience in the region.*
- *Knowledgeable and experienced trainers, producers and coordinators throughout the region.*