

Burundi Update

Search for Common Ground

SFCG FACILITATES THE VERY FIRST MEETINGS BETWEEN THE POPULATION OF BURUNDI AND THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON LAND AND OTHER GOODS (CNTB)

February 13 and 14, 2007, SFCG in partnership with the CNTB (National Commission on Land and Other Goods) and with financial support from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) facilitated two exchanges in Rumonge and Nyanza-Lac between the CNTB and the population. **The two activities were the first time the CNTB had directly met with the Burundian population in this way.** SFCG would like to thank the CNTB for its spirit of collaboration during both activities.



Floride Ahitungiye, Head of SFCG's Community Outreach Department, introduces the first meeting in Nyanza-Lac on February 13.

These exchanges focused on the role and challenges of the CNTB and the expectations and concerns of the population regarding its establishment in order to promote a greater collaboration in resolving the communities' land conflicts. The two days saw the participation of 113 individuals, including 85 men and 28 women. These participants represented returnees, those occupying the lands, community leaders, local elected officials, administrators and the members of the CNTB. The two days gave the members of each community the opportunity to express themselves and ask their questions directly to the Commission. In the same way, the exchanges allowed the CNTB to explain its mandate and clarify the details of its work.

The two activities succeeded on multiple levels. Not only did they create a direct link between the two populations and the CNTB at the provincial and national levels, but the activities succeeded in linking the Commission at the national level with its newly chosen members at the provincial level. These members had been named the month before, but they had not had an orientation, had yet to really begin their posts. These activities represented the first time that they were able to discuss the details of their roles with the population and, more importantly, with their representatives at the national level. Furthermore, the activities provided key opportunities

"I didn't realise SFCG had the influence to invite such high-level personalities as the Governor's advisors and the members of the CNTB and get them to come. When I was informed of the meeting, I didn't think the meeting would succeed."

-Administrator from Rumonge

to request an advancement in the process of naming the community collaborators. In fact, during their opening presentations, the Presidents of the Commission from both provinces asked the governors, in collaboration with the administrators, to name these hill level collaborators as soon as possible in order to follow up the meetings. SFCG agreed to train some 125 collaborators in conflict transformation as soon as they are nominated.

The two meetings helped overcome several communal-level obstacles toward the Commission's establishment, as well as manage the populations' expectations. Before the exchanges, the administration from the two communes had stopped intervening in land conflicts, waiting for the Commission to be in place. They expected the commission to handle the problems itself and preferred to wait rather than continue their mediation efforts and other previous interventions. After their participation in the SFCG-facilitated meetings, the two administrators and the other local authorities present were able to understand that their work resolving land conflicts should continue and that the Commission existed more to complement and strengthen the systems already in place.

In both Rumonge and Nyanza-Lac, community members had the opportunity to express their expectations of the Commission. Often, such expectations were not only exaggerated, but unrealistic. Indeed, one of the most important results of the meetings was the realisation among the population that they, too, have a very important role to play in ensuring the continuation of the process and ultimately, the CNTB's success. Moreover, the populations left the two meetings with a better understanding of the CNTB's capacities and mandate. The speaker at the Nyanza-Lac meeting explained, *"The solution to these conflicts will not come from the Commission on Land and Other Goods, but rather from the population itself in collaboration with this Commission."* The population understood and appreciated this fact.



In Nyanza-Lac, Mr Boniface Minani expresses his satisfaction with the Commission's methodology, compared to previous commissions

In parallel to its community outreach activities with the CTNB, returnees and residents, SFCG continues to produce its weekly programme *Icibare Cacu* (Our Land, Our Heritage), which provides a framework for dialogue around land issues in Burundi with a view to preventing and transforming the conflicts associated with them. The programme on February 25th, for example, focused on the CNTB's advancement, highlighting the exchanges in Rumonge and Nyanza-Lac. The programme helped Burundian populations across the country and even in Tanzania and DRC to hear about the activities' success, the Commission's progress, and their role in supporting it.

"I would like to thank SFCG for organising this activity, which has been so important in informing the population on the Commission's work. I would ask SFCG to multiply these sorts of capacity-building activities for the population."

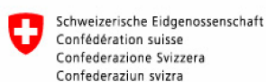
-Socio-cultural Advisor to the Governor of Bururi

CONTEXT

Burundi experienced two mass exoduses, first in 1972, sparked by interethnic violence between the minority Tutsi and majority Hutu communities, and later, in 1993, when civil war broke out after the assassination of the country's first democratically elected Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye. Burundi's last active rebel group, the Forces Nationales de Libération (FNL-PALIFE HUTU), agreed to a ceasefire in late 2006, bringing hope of a return home to an estimated 400,000 refugees who fled ethnic violence. According to UNHCR, about 319,000 refugees have been repatriated to Burundi since the agency started assisting their return in 2002. The return of these refugees from Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has already led to serious disagreements between the returnees and the current occupiers of the land. The foreseeable dissatisfaction among a large number of refugees unable to reclaim their livelihoods could provide the ideal ground for political mobilisation by certain parties, whatever their alliances.

In a bid to avert a land crisis—land being the only resource for the majority of Burundians—that could potentially plunge the country back into civil war, the government set up the National Commission on Land and Other Goods (CNTB) in July to deal with land and property issues resulting from the years of upheaval. The commission is the fourth of its kind in the history of post-independence Burundi; unlike previous land commissions that have addressed land issues with force, the CNTB has been committed to dialogue and mediation.

SFCG in Burundi is grateful for the support of these donors:



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