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Search for Common Ground

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SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND IN BURUNDI – PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Shortly following the genocide in Rwanda and in the midst of increasing ethnic tensions and violence in Burundi, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) launched a series of media and community projects in Burundi. Over the past 12 years, throughout the *Crise* and through the transition period, elections and the first two years of democracy, SFCG has sought to strengthen the capacities of all segments of Burundian society to manage their conflicts collaboratively, promote dialogue within diversity, and facilitate coexistence and reconciliation. SFCG has a vision for Burundi: In 2015, Burundi is a fair and equal society grounded in citizens' inclusive, effective and responsible participation in national and local management and decision-making processes.

SFCG's goal toward this vision is *to promote inclusive, effective and responsible participation in a process of social transformation toward a fair and equal society* through three main program areas: **reintegration**, **governance** and **transitional justice**. Under these three themes and in support of the overall programmatic goal, SFCG works toward five key objectives and 10 sub-objectives:

Program Areas:		
Reinsertion	***Governance***	***Transitional Justice***
▪ Demobilization; ▪ Repatriation; ▪ Land Conflicts.	▪ Inclusive Participation; ▪ Responsible Freedom of Expression.	▪ Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC); ▪ Special Tribunal; ▪ Popular Consultation.
Specific Objectives:		
1.1 Facilitate the reintegration and inclusion of marginalized social groups in Burundian society, namely demobilized combatants, returnees, displaced persons, victims, ex-prisoners, and members of the Batwa ethnicity. **1.2** Reduce the instances of violence in response to land conflicts linked to the *crises* in 1972 and 1993.	**2.1** Foster effective participation among women, men and youth within the democratic governance framework in Burundi. **2.2** Encourage effective and responsible freedom of expression in all aspects of Burundian society.	**3.1** Promote ownership of the transitional justice process among all Burundians.

Our approach links grassroots activities with national dialogue, while promoting peace and reconciliation through sensitization, dialogue and capacity building. Using complementary and mutually reinforcing tools of community outreach and media with targeted stakeholder groups, SFCG multiplies the individual effects of its projects, ensuring that a broad cross-section of Burundian society is engaged in and affected by the program's activities. Furthermore, the Burundi program is a vital component of SFCG's overall regional strategy in the Great Lakes & Angola, launched in 2007.

Media has been one of SFCG's main conflict transformation tools since the Burundi program opened more than a decade ago to prevent *hate radio* from having the disastrous effect it had in neighboring Rwanda. SFCG's Studio Ijambo is a radio-production studio that employs an ethnically balanced team of journalists to produce high-quality radio programs that promote reconciliation, dialogue, and collaboration. The Studio is known for its credible, unbiased programming, which includes news, special features, round-tables, telephone call-ins, music, and a highly popular soap-opera series. In total, it supplies **six different original programs, as well as spots and sketches** to four of Burundi's principal radio stations, including the state radio, every week. These programs examine different sides of various conflicts and highlight the concerns that unite, rather than divide. The Studio Ijambo slogan, "Dialogue is the future," captures the essence of SFCG's radio work in Burundi.

Youth journalists preparing a radio magazine on former child soldiers.

In addition to providing a quality standard for broadcasters and producers, Studio Ijambo plays a central role in the capacity building of radio professionals through trainings and exchanges. Studio Ijambo's workshops have trained journalists in conflict-sensitive reporting, technicians in using the latest equipment, and producers in creating entertaining, transformative programs. The Studio's approach has set a standard, which many radio stations and media professionals continue to aspire to and replicate.

***Community Outreach Team**:* In 2006, SFCG's Women's Peace Centre and the Youth Project merged to become the Community Outreach Team (COT). The COT carries out community interventions and supports efforts by local individuals to promote reconciliation, dialogue and collaboration. The COT aims to capitalize on the possibilities Burundi's new constitution offers; for all people, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, economic standing, religion, or age. SFCG has been a leader in bringing together youth from different ethnic and geographic backgrounds. Through **trainings and exchanges, local school parliaments, support to local associations and structures, cultural and sports events, solidarity festivals, interactive theatre and community projects**, the COT strengthens the capacity of returnees, ex-combatants, the poor, and other marginalized groups. In addition, SFCG organizes community dialogues and cultural activities that promote reconciliation among divided communities and foster understanding between groups in conflict. Studio Ijambo reinforces the messages and lessons of the COT and expands SFCG's reach to virtually the entire population.

Transfer of Capacities: While the conflict was underway, SFCG took a leading role as an outside facilitator, fostering dialogue and promoting reconciliation among different groups. As Burundi moves forward in its post-conflict transition, SFCG no longer envisions its niche as leading in this effort. Burundi's nascent civil society and growing media have the numbers and the will to work for a lasting peace and democracy, and their strong role is essential to the long-term stability of the process. Hence, SFCG is transitioning from a *provider* of peace building and conflict resolution in Burundi to a *supporter* of local initiatives, working to systematically transfer capacities to local partners and associations. Many of the approaches used and themes currently addressed in Radio Isanganiro's programs have been borrowed from Studio Ijambo's past and current programs. As an indicator of SFCG's transition, more and more of its funding goes towards local partners and sub-grants. Indeed, 67% of VOT funding in 2007 will go towards partner groups. Within this process, SFCG makes particular effort not to duplicate indigenous programs, and seeks to focus on its own added value.

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. 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

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.

Search for Common Ground is an international NGO in the field of conflict transformation. For additional information on our work go to www.sfcg.org, or contact the Sub-Saharan Africa Programme, 1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20009, USA; phone (+1)(202) 265-4300; fax (+1) 202 232-6718; e-mail search@sfcg.org.