

SFCG-Côte d'Ivoire

Information Letter, April 2007

Mobilization of Ivoirian Women in Leadership and Governance

SFCG launched activities for a new program for women's leadership, supported by UNIFEM, with a workshop held in Abidjan at the beginning of March. The workshop brought together twenty prominent Ivoirian women including representatives from civil society institutions; political parties; journalists and women's rights associations from the North, Southeast and West of the country. It was a three-day program led by Floride Ahitungiye from SFCG Burundi with the assistance of Spes Manirakiza, the Country Director of SFCG in Cote d'Ivoire. The sessions aimed to improve the skills of women in leadership roles and introduce them to good governance practices by defining the concept and nature of being a leader and of leadership, identifying bases of power and exploring the relationship between leadership and power, identifying styles of leadership, analysing these styles through the perspective of gender and finally, by developing strategies that would strengthen their capacities for leadership.



Floride Ahitungiye leading the leadership training session

The expectations from the outset expressed by the women participating in this workshop were to acquire necessary tools to be a good leader, differentiate between leadership and governance, attain the attitudes and competencies to be able to work with the State

Secretary of Good Governance in the CI government and learn how a good leader conducts oneself. As expressed at the end of the program in evaluations and personal testimonies, some of the women were sceptical at the beginning, but as the training progressed so did their acceptance and enthusiasm that they were accomplishing their goals and expectations. The training provided them with the tools and capacities they felt they needed. By analysing current realities faced by women in Côte d'Ivoire, devising strategies to overcome unique challenges, assessing strengths and weaknesses, bases of power and styles of power, the women gained a new awareness of their situation and how to move forward as leaders.

Solidarity Events around Football

Soccer tournaments sponsored and organized by SFCG facilitators were recently held in three towns in Côte d'Ivoire: Duékoué, Sassandra and Bouaké. These events, leveraging the enormous popularity of football in Côte d'Ivoire, brought together 2000 participants from different communities in

"It was really beautiful. You couldn't imagine that 12 teams would play without scuffles and stone throwing. In town friends who were once afraid of us approached us.... to support us and talk with us."
~youth participant interviewed after the event in Duékoué.

each area, offering opportunities for dialogue and unity between groups that have become separated by conflict. Of the participants interviewed after the tournaments, all seemed to be of the same mind: that the spirit of fair play was present throughout the event and that old friendships with other groups were renewed.

During the tournament in Sassandra, a SFCG trained facilitator formed a student club for peace, "Ahirko" ("We are together" in the local language of Godié). During the football games, Ahirko was instrumental in leading chants emphasizing peacemaking. The event also provided a forum for participants such as Ahirko

to meet with other associations and groups. The event inspired these groups to be involved in the planning of similar events in the future. Here, too, the participants interviewed remarked upon the opportunity to make new friends.



The football players and traditional leaders assisting the solidarity event in Bouaké

In Bouaké, there was a very strong mistrust between the two ethnic groups represented, the Baoulé and the Dioula, before the soccer event took place. Many considered it risky for a team from one community to participate in an event with the other. SFCG organizers worked hard prior to the match to visit with the families from the communities of the participants to assure that security and safety would prevail. The event allowed the communities from Brobo, a neighbouring village, to break down their fears of coming into the zone of confidence. At this tournament people interviewed were enthusiastic about being able to challenge the preconceived notions about other groups. They remarked how the tournament had made coming together peacefully possible and how teams were formed with players from different backgrounds.

Results from case studies on SFCG's outreach work in the 18 Montagnes region

Since 2005, Search for Common Ground has established and maintained a program that gives support to the divided communities of the 18 Montagnes region. The goal of the program is to strengthen the abilities of local actors to peacefully resolve their conflicts through trainings on conflict management techniques as well as through the use of media. At the end of 2006, SFCG-CIV conducted three case studies that provided concrete examples of the positive effect of Search's work. The communities covered by these studies had all experienced

recent conflicts that were local in nature but also reflected the issues effecting much of the country today. The studies showed that SFCG's impact is to not only help people in these communities gain the tools to help groups that are in open conflict come together, but that SFCG's work has also created independent conflict management structures that will allow future conflicts to be resolved peacefully.

One example of this from the case studies was Trogui, A town close to Man, where violent conflict broke out in July 2005. The conflict had its beginning in a domestic dispute between two families of different ethnic groups, the Yacoubas and the Burkinabés, that resulted in the death of a Yacouba woman and the wounding of her husband at the hands of a Burkinabé. The incident caused a violent reaction on the part of the Yacouba community, who burned and looted the homes of the Burkinabés and chased out many from the village.

In response to these events, SFCG established training sessions in conflict management techniques preparing locals to become facilitators and organizing them into a network, or peace committee. The committee began the process of reestablishing dialogue between the different parties and eventually paving the way for the return of the displaced Burkinabés.

This case study found that the content of the training endowed the facilitators with the competencies needed to overcome stereotyping and rumours and to utilize both traditional and modern methods of conflict resolution. The trained facilitators were able to bring about a rapprochement between the two sides, eventually resulting in a joint project to rebuild the houses of the Burkinabés and a peace ceremony that affirmed the resolution of the conflict. Other peace committees have been formed and trained in peace building techniques by these facilitators who remain active in their role of mediating conflicts throughout the district.

Theatre Tour for Liberian Refugees

SFCG is currently in the midst of a regional project that aims to both provide Liberian refugees with information of recent developments back in their home country so that they will be able to make informed decisions

about their return. It will also facilitate dialogue between refugee populations and their home communities toward the goal of supporting repatriation and reintegration of refugees in safety and dignity. Liberian refugees have been traumatized through years of civil war and many of them have fled their country a number of times. Many continue to be mistrustful of the security situation back home and therefore, fearful of returning home.

Toward this end, in January SFCG conducted a theatre tour in three locations with the largest Liberian refugee populations: Tabou, Toulepleu, and Guiglo. SFCG staff and a 12-person Liberian theatre troupe conducted the performances. These performances for large and enthusiastic gatherings in the refugee camps sought to both inform and entertain.

The crowds were engaged using participatory theatre techniques, where the audience is invited to interact with the actors. The presentations sought to represent the issues facing refugees and calm their fears about repatriation and they were very well received, both by the refugees and the traditional and religious leaders who took part. Accompanying these performances were Liberian dance and music as well as interviews of the refugees that would be incorporated into radio programming in Liberia.

Spreading the common ground approach to radio partners in Côte d'Ivoire

In Daloa in the beginning of February, SFCG's media team held the second of a series of trainings to raise the capacity SFCG's 14 radio partners to produce broadcast moderate voices and programming dedicated to conflict resolution. Led by Quentin Kanyatsi, the country director of SFCG Guinea and experienced trainer, the sessions helped build the participant's understanding of the origins of conflict, reconcile theoretical knowledge of the conflicts and adapt them to their programming, and begin to use their powerful platform as broadcasters to develop a new culture of peace.

The sessions included a discussion about the definition and sources of conflict, how to analyse conflict and the role of reporters during conflicts in either their escalation or de-escalation. The participants shared their own local experience about media's role in conflict,

such as the incitement of three days of violence against the UN and NGOs in Guiglo, including the burning and plundering of the UN base. These examples showed that radio had a unique power that could have rapid and violent consequences during a conflict.

The final session included a discussion of the possibility of a radio magazine program co-produced and broadcast by SFCG and all of the partners. The themes, language and objectives of this collaboration were debated and the preliminary decision to continue progress toward a bimonthly program was agreed upon. Such discussions show the progress of the training sessions, as the participants were eager to apply the common ground journalism techniques they learned to their own local situation.



Representatives from SFCG-Cote d'Ivoire's radio partners during the training in Daloa