

DRC Update

Search for Common Ground in the DRC - December, 2007

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Country Context

As it celebrate its first anniversary at the end of 2007, the new democratic government continues to face numerous challenges related to peace and security and service delivery. Overt war between numerous armed groups and the Congolese army (FARDC), the resultant massive displacement in North Kivu, continued instability in South Kivu, a complex and ongoing DDR process in Ituri are all elements of an incomplete Security Sector Reform (SSR) process of which the first step is the consolidation of the FARDC.

On the legislative front, a long list of legal reforms and new laws await the attention of the national assembly, in particular related to the decentralisation process and the structure of the judicial sector. While the new Congolese constitution sanctions a decentralised government structure, the legislature must

promulgated the legal mechanisms for implementing it. In the meantime, a lack of clarity around the precise roles and responsibilities of the different levels of elected and appointed power handicaps revenue distribution and service delivery.

Meanwhile, the repatriation process in Moba, north Katanga hit a snag in early August when rumours and manipulation led to a violent protest march during which Monuc military observers were attacked and their offices pillaged. The UNHCR evacuated the area and suspended the repatriation process. After three months of calm and restoration of trust, the UN authorities are beginning to return to the area and resume the repatriation process. Finally, in the areas of health, education and transport, the DRC has faced tough challenges: many provinces have been hard hit by epidemics, including cholera and Ebola in the central Kasai provinces; in the education sector, a prolonged teachers strike focused on salary increases; while the transport sector saw several train, boat and plane crashes, culminating in the President's firing of the Transport Minister.

Official Launch of the FARDC training project in Kinshasa

"We find ourselves here today because the army is in the process of rebuilding itself into a republican and citizen army. We should not position ourselves within a context of War. Now there needs to be cooperation between civilians and the military, which will guarantee security for both groups. There s a pitfall, a feeling of superiority toward civilians among the military, which is why, today, with SFCG, we are searching for this common ground so that the military carries out its work correctly."

-Colonel in the Land Forces of the FARDC, participant in the October training.



SFCG s FARDC trainer Léon Baroani training the FARDC HQ Steering Committee on how to use the multimedia training materials.



SFCG's trainers demonstrate one of the FARDC training exercises

FARDC Training continued:

SFCG made its partnership with the FARDC concrete at the highest level with the official launch of the “Tomorrow is a New Day” project in Kinshasa in early October. The multi-media and training project works with FARDC to enable in-force educators to carry out awareness-raising on human rights and conflict transformation, while committees at the battalion level undertake regular monitoring. During the activities, SFCG launched the steering committee at the level of the Etat Major General, comprised of representatives of all of the principle services within the Army headquarters: the marines, intelligence services, republican guard and air force. This committee will oversee the project’s ongoing awareness-raising and monitoring work and will set up similar committees within the Republican Guard in Kinshasa.

The Kinshasa launch was followed immediately by a two-day training of trainers (TOT) for the Kinshasa steering committee. SFCG’s unique training module combines a descriptive “image box” with audio sketches developed in SFCG’s Bukavu and Kinshasa radio studios, participatory theatre and other interactive tools to encourage broader respect for human rights among members of the FARDC, while promoting better relations between the military and civilian population. Each

committee member is provided with a teaching tool kit at the end of their participation in the TOT. In parallel to the trainings and sensitization efforts, the project will organize a series of sporting, cultural solidarity and community service activities, bringing soldiers together with the local civilian populations to improve relations and promote peaceful cohesion among the two groups. The project synergizes with SFCG’s other security SSR work and military-civilian activities, including its weekly soap opera, Tomorrow is a New Day, and a protection campaign including the distribution of 30,000 copies of a comic book promoting the protection role the new army is meant to play toward local communities, how civilians can work to combat impunity, as well as the importance of collaboration with the army in restoring confidence in the country’s judicial system.

This project, funded by DFID, follows on two years of SFCG engagement in Security Sector Reform in collaboration with Conader, the Structure Militaire d’Inegration (SMI), the FARDC and Monuc. SFCG has trained several hundred soldiers in integrated brigades as part of the Monuc training project. The “Tomorrow is a New Day” initiative seeks to integrate this into the army structures, through its main interlocutor, the Service d’Education Civique et Patriotique, now under the Ministry of Defense.

Rumour Management Training Follows North Katanga Violence

Following the violent demonstration in Moba, north Katanga in early August (see Context), SFCG conducted an urgent strategic assessment visit. The visit entailed meetings with the local radio station (RCMO) civil society, local and international NGOs and the local authorities. An analysis of the conflict context, the cycle of rumour mismanagement and the violence spark was conducted, and an Action Plan was elaborated with RCMO to restore their role as a responsible and impartial community radio station. A SFCG journalist worked with RCMO journalists immediately after the violence to produce programs

around rumour management, the manner in which to hold a peaceful demonstration, and launched a weekly program educating listeners of the role and activities of international NGOs in Moba.

The following week, SFCG participatory theatre for conflict transformation activities were deployed in Moba, addressing issues related to rumour management, manipulation and cohabitation between residents and returning refugees. In October, a SFCG trainer conducted rumour management sessions with the civil society, local leaders, and the RCMO journalists.

Rhythm of Peace Festival Unites Cultures

For seven days at the end of August, Fizi territory swayed to the rhythms and dances of the Great Lakes region. One of the territories most destroyed by the wars and insecurity in eastern DRC, Fizi territory needs not only physical reconstruction, but also the repair of its social fabric. Relations between diverse communities remain tense and filled with suspicion, serving as a pretext for a lack of collaboration in the territory's reconstruction. From August 25 to 31, SFCG convened 60 drummers and dancers from three DRC groups from Bukavu, Baraka and Bibokobo, as well as a Burundian drumming group from Bujumbura. Using an innovative arts-based approach to promote collaboration and communicate messages, the SFCG festival reached more than 16,000 community members. The groups represented diverse cultures in the province and region, including the Bashi, Bavira, Babembe, Banyamulenge and Barundi. Daily public performances and parades reached a mass audience in Baraka, Fizi and neighbouring village, celebrating the richness of diversity and inter-group collaboration. The groups worked in workshops for three days, with performances in the evening at SFCG's cultural space in Baraka. Joint performances between the group marked the

festival's 'grand finale.' The images of Babembe women beating on Burundian drums while Banyamulenge danced the Bembe and Vira movements remain engraved in people's memory as a symbol of the progress already achieved in restoring trust and of the power of collaboration in diversity.



Bukavu drumming troupe Tumaini la Kesho performing during the festival.

SFCG Launches National Governance Strategy 2007-2010

In September, SFCG launched a multi-year governance strategy with the goal to improve information access and dialogue among Congolese citizens, media, civil society and their elected leaders and guided by two key objectives:

1. Raise awareness amongst citizens on principles, practices, and structures of their new democracy, including their rights and responsibilities within it; and
2. Foster links between policy makers, civil society and the media on issues of civic participation, public policy, and governance.

This strategy is operationalised through complementary two and three year projects supported by the US Department of State and USAID, respectively. The USAID project includes four

weekly, nationally broadcast radio programs, as well as a television series, radio and television journalist trainings, and a series of outreach activities in 50 universities across the country in partnership with the Great Lakes Inter-university Forum for Peace. The State Department grant includes a fifth national governance program, as well as support and coordination of individual monthly radio magazines produced by 50 local partner radio stations across the country (total of 1000 radio programmes over a two-year period) in partnership with the national civil society network La Dynamique de la Société Civile, combined with monthly listening groups to discuss the programmes' themes, as well as the production and distribution of two comic books focused on governance, citizen's rights and responsibilities, and the rule of law. The complementary, mutually-enforcing projects will promote youth and rural engagement and understanding within the new democratic framework in the DRC, while helping to support decentralization and strengthen governance at both the national and local level.

Jirani ni Ndugu celebrates its 200th Episode

For five years, Congolese have been tuning into one of SFCG's most popular radio programs each week: *Jirani ni Ndugu* (My Neighbour is My Brother, in Swahili). This radio drama features conflicts Congolese face in their daily lives, from corruption to gender issues to witchcraft to inter-group conflicts. The programme uses a sitcom format, with each episode revolving around the same central group of characters but addressing a different subject each week. SFCG celebrated the 200th episode anniversary with the general public, local authorities and theatre troupes, while also producing a special episode where the radio drama writers found their way into the imaginary sitcom world and reminisced with the characters. During the celebration, *Jirani ni Ndugu* writers and actors shared their experiences and SFCG's Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator presented audience listenership results pointing to *Jirani* as amongst the top three most popular programs produced by SFCG in DRC. In Bukavu, *Jirani* is SFCG's most popular program, with 87 per cent listenership. In Beni and Butembo, *Jirani* is also popular with 59 and 72 percent listenership. In addition, recent monitoring visits to Goma, Rutshuru and Masisi in North Kivu show that an average of 78% of the youth respondents interviewed across the three locations affirmed that the program had either helped them

find a response to or informed their behavior faced with a conflict in their own lives. Listeners at the 200th episode anniversary testified to this, including an evangelical minister who said:

Jirani approaches people according to their lives and lived experiences, which contrasts with our approach. Thanks to Jirani, I handle many social problems differently, such as so-called child witches, and I understand that my sermons must be responsible. My children and I love Jirani and I feel that our entire family has been transformed by it."



SFCG's Serials Team, following the festivities. The Team has been responsible for the production of *Jirani ni Ndugu* since the soap opera began broadcasting in 2002.

Working with Women's Groups to Communicate around Sexual Violence

SFCG's radio drama team has partnered with two women's associations from South Kivu's Uvira and Fizi territories to improve communication around gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. With support from UNIFEM, SFCG trained members of the associations (SOFIBEF and SOFAD) in the design and production of soap operas for social change, a key component of SFCG's media strategy in the DRC. The training entailed the development of messages around gender-based violence, to be developed into characters and story lines, and finally recorded in SFCG's Bukavu studio. The 6-episode drama in Swahili, and complementary short spots, will be broadcast on local radio stations in Uvira and Fizi territories before the end of 2007.

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