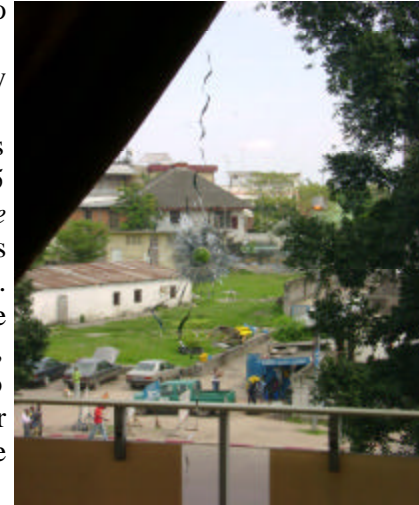


DR Congo Update

Search for Common Ground

The democratically elected government has faced numerous challenges since its inauguration in December, 2006. As it approached its “100-day” anniversary, disagreement over the maintenance of armed bodyguards in Kinshasa for former Vice-President Jean Pierre Bemba exploded in a 48-hour shoot-out between forces loyal to President Kabila and those loyal to Bemba. The ‘2-day war’ symbolized the inability of political opponents to peacefully negotiate their way through a conflict, instead of resorting to force. It also highlighted the incomplete army integration process (*brassage*), in Kinshasa and in the east. While the creation of 15 integrated brigades is a sign of good progress, the *Garde Republicaine* remains largely unreformed, along with various units of soldiers in the Kivus who are resisting integration. Security problems remain elsewhere: the FARDC continues to be the main perpetrators of human rights violations in the country, while foreign militia groups in the Kivus and Ituri continue to murder, rape and kidnap civilians, causing thousands to flee their homes. Nevertheless, the *brassage* process and the demobilization of 100,000 combatants means that most of the country is no longer in the hands of warring factions.



Kinshasa's 'Two Day War' leaves a bullet hole in SFCG's office window, but staff unharmed.

The installation of a new democracy faces numerous challenges. Bemba's departure for Portugal after the ‘two-day war’ in March was followed by a crackdown on leaders of the Bemba-led Union pour La Nation (UN), as well as MLC-run TV and radio stations. In the indirect senatorial and gubernatorial elections, provincial parliamentarians were accused of having been ‘bought off’ to vote for AMP senators and governors in provinces otherwise partisan to the UN. This escalated into violent protests, particularly in Bas-Congo province. How the new government will decentralize its power as stated in the Constitution is rapidly becoming the subject of heated debate and controversy between Kinshasa and the provinces. These tensions illustrate the need for considerable reinforcement of newly elected leaders, civil

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society and media in order to entrench this young democracy. Search's projects in the country continue to work towards this aim, while fostering a climate of cooperation over confrontation, among the wider population.

In the East, the repatriation process continues to gather momentum, with UNHCR planning to assist some of the 98,000 Congolese refugees from Tanzania and Zambia to return in 2007. Since 2004, some 103,000 Congolese refugees have returned home, but an estimated 340,000 still remain in neighbouring countries.

SFCG Gets Katanga Acting

The signature of the Tri-Partite agreement between the DRC and Zambian governments and the UNHCR has opened the way for the repatriation of 80,000 Congolese refugees, mostly to Katanga province. SFCG has begun deploying its radio and theatre activities in the primary return zone, Moba territory, to facilitate the peaceful return and reintegration of these refugees. In March, SFCG's Theatre Coordinator trained 20 theatre practitioners in participatory theatre for conflict transformation techniques. These newly trained actors performed prior to and during the official launch of the repatriation program in June, and will continue their activities, using participatory techniques to address conflict issues connected to the return and reintegration of refugees. Between January and May, SFCG theatre troupes in South Kivu and Katanga held 134 performances, reaching a total of 132,000 people. In Moba, SFCG's Media Coordinator led a training for Moba Community Radio station journalists, and identified a SFCG correspondent who will contribute to SFCG's weekly repatriation radio program, now broadcast on two radio stations in Katanga.

"The number of complaints brought to my attention are less now, with the visits by Centre Lokole's theatre troupes" commented the Mutambala sector chief in Fizi territory. "People are understanding how to resolve their conflicts without violence. That's why I'm authorising you to come here every day. Do your work in peace, and without fear."

Football for Peace

They call it the *beautiful game*... but can it contribute to peace? In the Uvira and Fizi territories of South Kivu, SFCG has organized football tournaments in over a dozen towns and villages, bringing diverse and often opposing groups together. SFCG ensures it attracts a crowd by adding innovative 'twists' to the opposing teams, such as inviting a football team made up of wives of FARDC soldiers to battle it out with female returnees, or the police team to face up to local authorities and traditional leaders. These events bring out a crowd, but does it contribute to trust and relationship building?

To help measure the impact of these kind of events in bringing communities closer together, SFCG's Assistant DME Coordinator travelled to Kalehe territory of South Kivu province, where SFCG organized a similar "peace tournament" in December, to interview participants and spectators. Almost two thirds of the people interviewed testified that the tournament had improved cohabitation between the communities and that there was continued contact between the Rwandophone and coastal communities.

During the tournament, Amani from Numbi remarked, *"It's my first time to arrive in Kalehe town because, back where I'm from, we were convinced that to come here meant to be killed. But here in Kalehe, we've shared the same food with our brothers from the Kalehe coast, and we've played together. When I go back home, I'm going to tell others, especially the youth, that there's no more problems for us (Rwandophones) here in Kalehe. And I'm sure that next time I'll even come back here with some of them to see for themselves!"*



Female football teams in Misisi, mixing residents and returnees, battle it out during SFCG-organised football match.

Others commented that future activities should include the marginalized Pygmy community, while others said that these initiatives required follow up to have a lasting impact.

SFCG Partners With Top national private Radio Station

In an effort to reach the largest possible number of listeners, SFCG has begun a partnership with the independent media group Radio Télé Groupe Avenir (RTG@). RTG@ is rated amongst the top five stations for Kinshasa listeners for news, music and other programming, and has 13 relay stations in major cities around the DRC. RTG@'s addition brings the number of SFCG's radio partners well over the 100 mark. In April, RTG@ began broadcasting *Tomorrow is a New Day*, *Mopila* and *Sisi Watoto*, and is preparing to join in on the live regional programme *Generation Grands Lacs* within a few months. *Watch this space!*



SFCG Actors recording *Tomorrow is a New Day*, one of the programmes now being broadcast on RTG@

Launch of mobile Common Ground Journalism Trainings

SFCG partner radio stations will be benefiting from a mobile 'Common Ground' journalism trainer. In April, Aloys Niyoyita, with ten years of "Common Ground Journalism" experience with SFCG-Burundi's Studio Ijambo and other international media, joined

the SFCG team in DRC. The trainings will target journalists from partner radio stations operating in conflict-prone zones, reinforcing their journalistic skills to be able to do their work with accuracy, impartiality and responsibility. The trainings will take place in the environment in which the journalists work, based on their needs, rather than operating in a detached seminar environment. Monitoring of the journalists' performance will follow. Already radio stations in Moba, Kalemie, Aru, Bunia and Mahagi have benefited from this training programme.

Building Peace, One Goat At A Time

Finding 'common ground' around a goat may not appear to be an obvious peace building strategy. But on the Ruzizi plain of South Kivu province, SFCG is supporting an innovative 'goat credit' scheme whereby people of diverse groups find common purpose in the raising and distribution of goats. In collaboration with local partner, Groupe d'Action Socio-Agro Pastoral (GASAP), local committees are established comprised of residents, returnees and members of diverse tribal groups. These committees identify vulnerable people to receive the first batch of goats, and train them to raise them and care for them. The kids of these goats are then distributed to a new group of people, still considering the diverse vulnerabilities of the community. In this way, each person has an interest in protecting the goats of their neighbors, and are communally involved in identifying the neediest in their community. What is more, meetings around goats have blossomed into radio program listening sessions, cultural activities, and other positive solidarity activities in villages all along the Ruzizi plain bordering Burundi.



Neighbours learn how to look after their goats in a village in South - Kivu

GREAT LAKES PAGE

Talking About Their Generation

University students from Rwanda, Burundi and Bukavu are bringing together hundreds of students each week for public listening sessions of the SFCG-produced live weekly youth program Great Lakes Generation. In collaboration with Great Lakes Inter-University and Youth Forum, youth facilitators rotate around key universities and secondary schools in the three countries, listening to the live regional program simulcast in the three countries. The listeners phone in, and then continue debating the subject of the program afterwards with special guests invited to the university by the forum facilitators. The partnership with the forums is designed to improve access to regional university and secondary school students, who are a key target audience.

Search Teams Collaborate in Great Lakes Refugee Camps

In a bid to reach out to the Congolese refugee population in two refugee camps in Burundi, SFCG Burundi and DRC organised two weeks of conflict transformation and participatory theatre activities in these camps in March. In collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the UNHCR, the trainings in the two camps aimed to strengthen the capacity of 93 refugees in conflict transformation and rumour management. Simultaneously, a joint Congolese-Burundian participatory theatre troupe performed eight times to an estimated audience totalling more than 23,000 refugees. The participatory performances enabled the refugees to visualise their conflicts and participate in the active search for collaborative rather than adversarial solutions to the conflicts they face in their daily lives in the camps.



Audience members invited to participate in the theatre performance, held by a joint Congolese-Burundian troupe of SFCG

SFCG Trusted by Listeners – Survey Reveals

Following a television survey in December, SFCG contracted a listenership survey with 600 residents in Bukavu in March. The results from both surveys revealed overwhelmingly that the information from SFCG's radio programs is accurate, balanced, trusted by listeners and not provided by other sources. In Bukavu, the programs received very high scores for credibility/accuracy (92% of respondents), originality (79%), impartiality (77%) and exclusivity i.e. providing information that other programs/media outlets do not (62%). According to those interviewed, this SFCG's impartiality comes from its supply of objective information about all ethnic, religious and social groups, directed at all people in the Great Lakes. Notably SFCG news did not promote any one

'COMING SOON'

- *Generation Grands Lacs* launches a competition for youth peace building initiatives –
Watch this space for more information!

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