

## Search for Common Ground in Guinea

Information Letter, June 2005

### Supporting Dialogue between Civil Society and Media

In March 2005, Search for Common Ground in Guinea (SFCG) facilitated an exchange day between Radio Kindia and its partners including representatives from MARWOPNET and local youth and women's networks. The purpose of the meeting was twofold: share ideas and experiences on relations between civil society and media and discuss opportunities for increased cooperation.

The twenty participants had a lively and stimulating debate on the relations between civil society and radio, as well as mutual expectations about their respective roles. There was a general agreement on the need for civil society and radio to engage in constructive and well-informed relationships, even though civil society groups and radio stations still have a long way to go. Corporate-driven priorities, as well as the lack of civil society ownership were identified as some of the most significant challenges facing improved collaboration between civil society actors and media.

Participants recognised that radio, and community radio in particular, is a practical and cost-effective means of reaching and connecting the poorest communities. As a collective platform for community empowerment, it should be integrated into the practices of community life and offer space for information, public participation and dialogue on a wide range of issues.

Specific proposals emerged from the discussions on the need to develop more collaborative approaches to radio programming. Community sensitisation, joint content development on issues related to poverty, civic participation and culture, as well as programme evaluation, were seen as crucial to strengthen and stimulate cooperation.



*Journalists from Radio Kindia and their partners*

At the end of the meeting, both Radio Kindia and its partners committed to drafting a partnership strategy to chart the way forward and ensure that increased collaboration between media and civil society groups benefits communities.

As one participant commented: *"By becoming more professionalised, let's be more aware of trying to serve communities better."*

### Feedback from Liberian Refugees on TDS/SFCG Programme *SITUATION REPORT*

A series of interviews conducted by SFCG's partners in Guinea with Liberian refugees residing in the Nzerekore area revealed the considerable success *Situation Report* programmes enjoy in the camps involved. *Situation Report* is a SFCG's Talking Drum Studio (TDS) programme designed to help Liberian refugees living in urban and rural settlements in Guinea make informed decisions on repatriation. The programme, which airs on Radio Nzerekore, provides details of the latest developments inside Liberia; including updates on UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme and UNMIL operations.

*"I appreciate *Situation Report* because it makes me feel like being home."*

**Refugee interviewed in Nzerekore**

Liberian refugees are informed about progress in the peace process, as well as the current state in the sectors of health, education, water, shelter and the road network. The information is provided in a simple and straightforward language all groups of refugees can understand.

The programme has become quite popular among refugees because it echoes developments in Liberia and provides up-to-date and accurate information on the repatriation process, so refugees can decide voluntarily when to return to their country.

## Linking Women's Groups for Peace and Solidarity in West Africa

In April, SFCG in Guinea and SFCG's partner in Côte d'Ivoire, Organisation des Femmes Actives de Côte d'Ivoire (OFACI), joined in celebrations for MARWOPNET's fifth anniversary in Kambia, on the Sierra Leonean border. Women from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea along with government officials and representatives from UN agencies and civil society took part in week-long festivities honouring women's courage and accomplishments in advancing peace in the Mano River Union (MRU).

"I am thrilled to be part of these activities and delighted to see women working hard for peace. I hope that Ivorian women too have a chance to build a better future for them."

**Representative from OFACI, a women's network in Côte d'Ivoire**

Celebrations were presided by Alhaji Dr. S. B. Saccoh, former Sierra Leone Ambassador to Guinea who praised women's commitment to working towards sustainable peace in the region despite extreme suffering during the war.

MARWOPNET members from the three MRU countries gave inspiring and thought-provoking testimonies on solidarity and peace. They also paid tribute to women's efforts to sustain peace in Gbalamuya, a border community in Kambia, despite lingering violence and insecurity.

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*Celebrating peace and friendship in Kambia*

The event was a unique occasion for generating new impetus in regional peacebuilding efforts and mobilise both women and men for the transformation of societies away from expressions of war and violence towards a culture of peace and solidarity.

SFCG took the opportunity to reaffirm its support to MARWOPNET's peace efforts and to share information on common experiences and concerns. MARWOPNET, as well as women's contributions to peace in the MRU needed to be strengthened and highlighted so other women's groups in West Africa would be energised to participate in decision-making processes and create new spaces for non-violent conflict resolution in their communities.

### In Guinea, SFCG is engaged in:

- Contributing to strengthening participation of the population within the local, national, and sub-regional decision-making process through the reinforcement of social dialogue; and
- Supporting existing peace initiatives and contributing to reinforcing the links between media and civil society, and supporting social cohesion and sustainable development.

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