

Guinea Newsletter

SFCG in Guinea - September, 2007

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Country Update

The President's appointment of diplomat Lansana Kouyaté's to the post of prime minister in March represents a positive step for a country undergoing a slow but uncertain transformation to democracy. Kouyaté's subsequent changes to the whole cabinet and key personnel right down to the local level, sparked some hope among the people of the country, calmed a dangerous crisis, and led to substantial new commitments from the international community, which have been absent for years. In other respects, Guinea is also changing for the better: The media is liberalizing as promised, with at

least two new private stations established in Conakry, and gaining audiences and participation by government officials. The government has recently repaired some roads and is installing new streetlights, and NGOs are beginning to operate through the country more freely. However, many of the problems which sparked the strikes and riots in January and February remain. Government corruption is among the highest in Africa, electricity and other basic services are infrequent and unreliable, and the aging President remains opposed to significant political reforms which might bring this mineral rich country more rapid development. The people's honeymoon with the Prime Minister also show signs of ending, as the premier comes under increas-

ing criticism for failing to begin key reforms as expected. Instead, it appears that his relationship with President Conté has deteriorated significantly over personnel changes, leading to a frustrating paralysis of the state. Ominously, the Army is also dissatisfied, going on strike in May to call for better pay conditions, which sparked disturbances around the country and resulted in a number of deaths. A timely poll might go some way to easing the concerns of the people; however the scheduled December parliamentary election seem unlikely given the total lack of preparation for such an event, and perhaps unhelpful if it means the elections are not the kind of transparent and well organised polls as seen recently in Sierra Leone.

Deputy Minister for Communications, with the Prefet of Koundara behind him, cuts the ribbon to officially open the new community radio station.

Building New Partnerships... ...and Partners

On July 26, SFCG completed its collaboration with the Canadian and Guinean Governments reopen a derelict rural radio station in Koundara, near the border with Senegal. At the official celebration to mark the occasion, speakers spoke warmly of the contributions each party had made, with the Deputy Minister of Communications especially thanking SFCG for its efforts implementing the technical and training side of the project. After the opening, SFCG produced a special magazine program on citizenship and good governance for the people of Koundara, who

thanks to a new transmitter funded by the project, can now also receive broadcasts of national radio.

Such was the success of the project that Radio Rurale Guinée and the Canadian government asked SFCG to play a similar role in the creation of a brand new station in the remote area of Tougué to the north of the centre of the country. Cut off from the world by no telephones, electricity or running water, Tougué has never had a local radio station before, and has united in its efforts to bring radio to their area at long last. Community leaders have

donated a plot of land, and wealthy émigré in Conakry have committed to paying for the construction of a building to the specifics required to house the radio station. In turn the National Director of Rural Radio has promised to



Tougué national assembly member SFCG's technical consultant and SFCG country director Quentin Kinyatsi before an exploratory mission to Tougué

supply staff and pay their salaries, while for its part SFCG will install modern digital equipment and train the staff on its use in producing radio programmes that provide information and foster dialogue on issues of importance to the community. SFCG's work rebuilding and expanding the communications infrastructure of Guinea moves towards two of its key objectives in the country, namely enhancing communication on key social and political issues and increasing the capacity of Guinean citizens to participate in local and national policy debates.



Liberian refugee students in Conakry watching the SFCG produced video clips.

SFCG helps Liberian refugees decide if the time is right to go home

With facilitated repatriation of Liberian refugees ending on June 30, SFCG concentrated on collaborating with the Liberian country team to inform refugees living in the Forest Region and Conakry on the current conditions inside Liberia to help them decide if they wished to return. In April a live drama

troupe from Liberia toured the Lainé and Kouankan refugee camps in N'Zerekore to perform skits about the repatriation process and conditions in communities of return.

These performances were complemented by screenings of video clips on the current conditions in post-war Liberia, including the state of education, health and security, and built on the weekly broadcasts of the radio programme *New Life New Hope*, which features testimony from recently repatriated refugees who spoke of the state of peace there. The SFCG team collected audience reactions to the performances and films, with the response overwhelmingly positive. Based on these achievements, when the repatriation programme ended, SFCG secured funding from UNHCR to focus on assisting with the integration of Liberians who have chosen to remain in Guinea. Activities will target both the Liberians and also the communities they live in with ways to alleviate the tensions that come with integration. As in the first phase, the project will involve video, radio and drama elements in both the Forest Region and Conakry.

"With the drama troupe and the video clips shown in this camp (Lainé), I was able to make my decision along with my family to go home on Tuesday 12 June in the next organized convoy of UNHCR".

-Mr. Jackson Kamara,

"I am very happy to know about my country after many years. I am also thanking Search for Common Ground for this kind information; I hope to go back to my beloved country when school closes"

-Mr. Alieu Mansary, a senior at the Conakry Refugee School.



SFCG team brainstorming session on the new Soap Opera

SFCG Launches a New Good Governance Soap

With support from DFID, SFCG is launching a new soap opera in mid-September called 'Wontanara', a Sousou word commonly used by people from all backgrounds to mean 'We are on the same side' or 'We are United'. The soap is part of a collaborative project with International Alert and the International Crisis Group to support emerging democracy and good governance. Alongside the Kissidougou-focused *Feu N'est Pas Un Incendie*, the fifteen minute weekly soap will address human rights, corruption, governance, and HIV/AIDS. SFCG has negotiated broadcast on the state national radio station as well as private stations in Conakry and rural radio stations in six locations

around the country. As elections preparations progress, SFCG will extend its governance-related activities to produce voter education spots and jingles as well as joint efforts with CRS to enhance public participation in local and national debates.



SFCG Country Director Quentin Kanyatsi and a representative of Guinea National Radio

SFCG Goes National

SFCG has signed agreements with two major new radio station partners, bringing its programmes to a national audience for the first time. An agreement with the Guinean National Radio will see SFCG's new soap opera 'Wontanara' broadcast weekly, along with its shorter drama 'spots' in Guerzé, Sousou and French that highlight different aspects of good governance and human rights. To better target its Conakry audience, SFCG has entered into a partnership with Radio Familia, a new community radio station targeted at women, children and families. Since launching broadcast in December 2006, the station has gained a wide audience in Conakry, fueled by the credible cover-

age it provided of events and developments during the January and February strikes. While another private station, Radio Liberté, was ransacked and looted, Familia FM survived unscathed and emerged from the crisis with strong credibility and a growing audience. Along with broadcasting the soap opera and drama spots, SFCG will collaborate with Familia to produce spots in two more local languages, Peuhl and Malinke, which will further enhance the reach of the messages.

Guinea Programme Objectives

- To promote citizens participation in developing an accountable and representative democracy in Guinea;
- To enhance communication on key social and political issues in a non-adversarial manner;
- To increase the capacity of Guinean citizens and civil society to participate in local and national policy debates

SFCG's projects in Guinea are made possible with the financial support of the U.S. State Department, UNHCR, UNICEF and DFID.

