
SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND IN GUINEA PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Guinea was 156th out of 177 countries in the United Nation's 2005 Human Development Index. The current situation within the country is marked by declining living standards and the erosion of government services. President Lansana Conte's ill health has engendered an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, due both to the potential for his death to further undermine regional stability and to the unresolved questions regarding the succession of the Guinean government. Despite this and other uncertainties over the years, Guinea has remained largely stable and peaceful, while several of its neighbours – Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire – have undergone extensive periods of political instability and violence. In addition, recent trends toward liberalization, including legislation passed to open up the radio airwaves, as well as peaceful local elections in December 2005 in which the opposition was able to campaign openly offer hope. Although the country has enjoyed a sustained period of stability and peace and shows some signs of positive change, the current reality is that sooner or later Guinea will need to manage a transition of power, which will create an opportunity either to continue building on the small democratic steps already made, or to promote further predation, exclusion and frustration. The latter option carries with it a significant risk of violent conflict and the destabilisation of the country, as well as the sub-region.

SFCG APPROACH IN GUINEA

SFCG's Guinea program works towards the overall goal of *building local capacities for peace*. The program's approach focuses on diversifying the media landscape, supporting existing democratic processes, and strengthening the capacity of targeted stakeholders to contribute to informed dialogue that promotes social cohesion and awareness. In order to achieve its goal, the program has outlined the following three objectives:

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

SFCG's unique two-pronged approach to peace building couples media work with on-the-ground community outreach through local capacity strengthening and networking. Since 2001, SFCG has employed a small field-based team in Guinea, which has developed strategic partnerships with representatives from the Ministries of Information and Communication, Radio Rural Guinée (RRG) radio stations, and civil society groups. Also in 2001, SFCG began airing programs produced in its Liberia and Sierra Leone radio studios on two RRG stations: a news and information program targeting Liberian refugees residing in the Forest Region on Nzérékoré FM, as well as a local language (Kissi) soap opera on Kissidougou FM. Drawing on these programs' successes and desiring to expand its operational capabilities, SFCG in Guinea launched a radio studio, *Talking Drum Studio (TDS)*, in Conakry in late 2005, modelled after SFCG's Talking Drum Studios in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

MEDIA

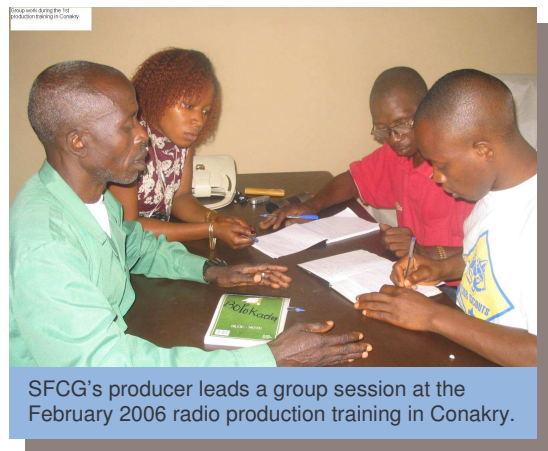
SFCG's media capacity has been used to support various activities in Guinea. With the launch of the Conakry studio, the program began developing spot messages on the protection and promotion of rights of women and girls in the prefecture of Kissidougou, which are broadcast on Radio Kissidougou. With support from the

American Embassy and UNICEF, SFCG has begun developing a radio soap opera focused on promoting awareness on HIV/AIDS and women's education, as well as the dangers of malaria, seeking to provide community members with accurate information and prevent the spread of rumours and misinformation. In order to publicise the soap opera and foster community buy-in of the concept, SFCG launched a script competition, choosing two local scriptwriters who, after being trained by SFCG's Regional Media Coordinator, developed storylines for the soap opera.

Soap opera is one of SFCG's most successful media initiatives and provides a platform to deal with important and divisive issues through the experiences of the characters. Through the storylines, the characters confront stereotypes and challenge commonly held perceptions. As audiences listen to the dramas, they see themselves in the stories and adapt some of the behavioural changes that the characters make. SFCG draws many of its storylines from real-life occurrences, sharing success stories from different communities with the nation as a whole and building individuals' confidence to take a chance on new approaches to situations.

OUTREACH

SFCG's Outreach Team is headed by its Officer in Charge, based in Kissidougou. The Team works primarily in the Forest Region, helping to promote tolerance and social cohesion. SFCG's outreach activities have included media and production trainings, as well as exchange sessions with community members, local authorities, and representatives from MARWOPNET (Mano River Women's Peace Network) to discuss land ownership disputes, including inheritance squabbles, as well as broader ethnic conflicts. Other exchange sessions have focused on developing community radio within the country. Another staple of SFCG's outreach efforts both in the Forest Region and in Conakry have been conflict transformation workshops for partners and local stakeholders. Such trainings aim to help participants develop the necessary tools to effectively convey the importance of dealing with complex issues in a peaceful manner and to transform conflict into an opportunity for positive change, rather than for violent action. The trainings are based on SFCG's 'Common Ground' methodology.¹



Other capacity building efforts have sought to support and expand Guinea's recent decision to open its media landscape and allow for the liberalisation of the radio airwaves. Producers and media trainers from SFCG's Talking Drum Studios in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have travelled to Guinea to help host training workshops for local RRG staff in radio production techniques and in 'Common Ground' journalism. SFCG has also sponsored exchange trips for its own studio staff, as well as Guinean journalists, to SFCG's production studio in Burundi, Studio Ijambo. There, participants benefit from the advice and ten-year experience of the Burundian staff. Drawing on the organisation's regional strategy in West Africa, media and outreach staff from SFCG in Guinea regularly attend workshops, trainings, and experience-sharing sessions in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

SFCG in Guinea is a programme of Search for Common Ground, an international NGO in the field of conflict transformation. For additional information on our work, go to www.sfcg.org, or e-mail: search@sfcg.org.

¹ Common Ground Methodology focuses on commonalities rather than differences and is designed to stimulate dialogue and discussion by providing a range of views about issues rather than by providing solutions. It uses techniques such as 'listen for yes;' question assumptions; challenge stereotyping; humanise and promote dignity; encourage flexibility, vision, and balance; and examine issues not personalities.