

## Search for Common Ground

### Key Findings from the Media Sector Mapping, 2009

#### Nigeria's Niger Delta (Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers)

##### Methodology

The MSM study utilised purposive sampling to identify participants for 816 quantitative surveys, 33 focus groups and 67 key informant interviews from various sectors of society.

Survey instruments solicited information concerning communication channels, trust and credibility in media and government, government development policies, issues surrounding tension and conflict, and individual concerns.

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has been engaged in Nigeria since 2004, modelling innovative media products that encourage understanding across ethnic, religious and gender lines. These media products create an opportunity for dialogue and feedback around important issues such as accountability, corruption, transparency and peaceful conflict resolution.

SFCG established an office in Abuja in January 2008 with the goal of expanding its engagement on the ground in Nigeria. From this base, SFCG supports its ongoing media programming as well as its newer initiatives focused on youth leadership, women and conflict mediation.

In Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states, which together are home to over 15 million people, the local population continues to be marginalised and the impact of peacebuilding efforts is difficult to see. These tensions are rooted in deeply entrenched, self-perpetuating factors. To effectively address their causes, would require institutional and structural changes toward a new inclusive communication system at all levels of society.



## EVALUATION SCOPE



Members of the SFCG Media Sector Mapping team

From October to December 2008, SFCG conducted a Media Sector Mapping in three states in the Niger Delta (Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers) of Nigeria with funding from the British Department for International Development to gather baseline information on audience information and communication flow. The mapping evaluates how people and communities understand public information, and how they access it, with a focus on federal and state development agendas. SFCG has carried out similar exercises in six countries across Africa, including Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. These experiences informed the design and implementation of the Nigeria research.

Media mappings help underline, for different stakeholders, the importance of clear and effective communication. Strategically, it provides an idea of where and how development programmes could be most effective in Nigeria, specifically in the Niger Delta, with the ultimate goal of supporting enhanced transparency and accountability in governance and development.

The main research questions include:

1. What information is in circulation and available on the regional and national policies required for building peace?
2. What are people reading, watching and listening to?
3. What are the qualities that constitute a credible source?
4. What type of information is available?
5. Who has access to various levels of information?
6. How do people access information and make use of it?
7. Are there patterns/distinctions of accessing information for different populations — women / men, rural / urban, youth / older, literate / non-literate, and others?

## KEY FINDINGS

The Media Sector Mapping study found significant disconnects at all levels of society, both within and among stakeholder groups. This lack of communication and trust continues to divide communities and hinder reconciliation. Specific findings are detailed by theme as follows:

### **Access to information**

Access to certain forms of information does exist in the Niger Delta, but the information supplied differs from that which is

*“The media in a developing country like ours is very important and so their independence is very important. The media should expand their scope, their coverage, in the rural areas. They should also get information from these rural areas from credible sources like the Community Development Committee, women leaders, youth leaders, but especially the CDC which is in charge of development. That is very, very critical. Without the media, the government will not know what is happening in the rural communities and the people will not know what the government is doing.”*

*- Key informant interview,  
Government Representative*

demanded. This is creating frustration directed towards government and leadership. Citizens, regardless of demographics, in the region are asking for programmes that better address specific issues including leadership and governance, infrastructure, employment and education.

### **Leadership**

While government views on communication are primarily focused on information dissemination, this method varies from person to person. Although the government disseminates information to citizens, the latter still feel uninformed on key state and federal development agendas. A few leaders view two-way communication with constituents as key, but the majority interviewed see a one-way system as the status-quo.

Government efforts are misdirected given that only 56% of respondents believe that they are informed about the Peace Process. Participants in the research stated that leaders are part of the problem in the region with 70% selecting leadership, including corruption, and 67% selecting lack of political will as the top issues hindering development. The only other issue that rated within this range was unemployment, 67%.

### **Media**

Community members would like direct access to media to voice their opinions. Journalists stated that they frequently do not go to communities to investigate stories and/or fact check because of the fear of violence. This leads to media coverage that is often disjointed from the reality. While there are multiple platforms being used for disseminating information there is a lack of diverse voices from rural communities, youth and women.

The government reports keeping media informed through press conferences. Likewise, journalists state that they have access to the majority of government leaders. A number of participants stated that journalists and media outlets are perceived to be closely linked to either the government or the managing board members of the outlet. Thus, many believe journalists are easily manipulated to report specific views and opinions of those in control.

### **Community Structure**

Breakdown within communities is widespread. As with leadership in government, corruption is reported among all levels of society including elders, chiefs, youth, and local and religious leaders.



*A youth focus group discussion centred on access to information*

*"In Abonema, a lot of people were killed and some people taken away. Innocent people, who were not part of whatever was the cause of shooting between militants and the Joint Task Force, were killed as they went about their normal business. People have left their communities and abandoned their fishing and farming activities. If there was peace and security, people could come together to discuss their problems and find solutions. People are afraid of being killed, abducted, and raped. Most of women feel helpless and abandoned."*

*- Focus group discussion*

*“Our own suffering as a people in the Niger Delta is from within us. If we courageously expose this fact, it will be the beginning of the solution to our problems. The few good intentions and activities by the federal government are hijacked by a few hands and information is not reaching us.”*

*- Focus Group Discussion*

Women are caught in a situation where they do not know how to move forward and communicate their needs. Respondents repeatedly mentioned that they do not believe that when they do speak out they are heard, leading to confusion about how to and with whom to communicate. Women are left out of most discussions with leaders, and thus rely on second-hand information from men. This leaves women frustrated and marginalised.

The distrust between youth and elders continues to be a point of potential violence within communities. Youth, the majority of who are unemployed or underemployed, do not in general know where to address their needs. They often go to oil companies if they are in an oil producing community because the companies are sometimes more responsive than the government. Youth in many communities have taken leadership into their own hands because they believe the elders of the community have failed them.

## CONCLUSION

With the report findings in hand, SFCG is now engaging government, media, and civil society to examine and validate the findings and craft possible initiatives to address some of the communication gaps and concerns.

A reorientation toward the meaning of strategic communication and its role in democracy building is extremely important at all levels of society. A vibrant political discourse has the potential to reinforce and strengthen democratic foundations and build trust between leaders and individuals. Such a discourse can further defuse tensions and reinforce peace.

The issues in the Niger Delta are multi-layered and a sustainable lasting peace requires that citizens play a role in problem solving and the development process. Government similarly must commit to delivering promises to its citizens. Media should focus on reporting balanced information with diverse voices. Government, citizens, media, civil society organisations and businesses need to take responsibility for the future of the region and its development.



*Community members discuss media and peace building.*

*This document is a summary of a May 2009 Media Sector Mapping conducted in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. To receive a copy of the complete report, please contact Doreen Chi, SFCG Africa Programme Associate, [dchi@sfcg.org](mailto:dchi@sfcg.org). It is also posted on SFCG’s website at [http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/nigeria/pdf/Nigeria\\_MediaSectorMapping2009.pdf](http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/nigeria/pdf/Nigeria_MediaSectorMapping2009.pdf).*

*SFCG is grateful to the following partner for its support:*

*Search for Common Ground*

