

SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND IS TRANSFORMING ATTITUDES AND BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY IN LEADERSHIP AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN COASTAL ANGOLAN COMMUNITIES WITH A HISTORY OF CONFLICT. THE INNOVATIVE WORK HAS OPENED THE DOOR TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, A CULTURE OF DIALOGUE AND STRONGER CIVIL SOCIETY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT.



A community elder and cooperative member preparing community land for planting



Community women at work at their new venture

ENGAGING IMPOVERISHED COMMUNITIES ON ANGOLA'S OIL-RICH COAST

REDUCING CONFLICT, PROMOTING DEVELOPMENT

Search for Common Ground, an organization dedicated to conflict transformation, has been working in Angola's oil-rich enclave of Cabinda since October 2006. In a private-public partnership co-funded by USAID and Chevron's local oil subsidiary, SFCG has collaborated with nine impoverished fishing communities that require development assistance to meet basic needs such as drinkable water, health services and primary schools. The coastal communities have been torn by conflict, first by the war between the government and a separatist group and then between fishermen and the oil companies over degraded fish habitats and expectations of development support. SFCG's project has two primary objectives to address these problems:

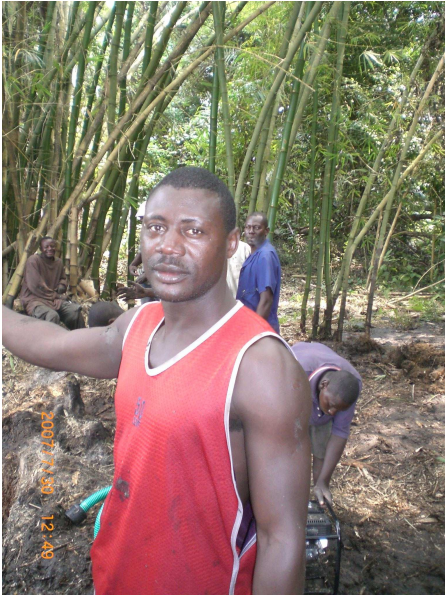
- To empower Cabindans to more fully participate in Angola's political, economic, and social development;
- To strengthen social cohesion within and among different sectors of Angolan society.

Years of conflict combined with handouts from the government and oil companies had fostered a sense of entitlement on the part of the communities. Rather than taking ownership and responsibility for their own development priorities, they awaited assistance from the outside; assistance that rarely came. Internal disputes among the villages further hampered development. Government and private sector assistance was unpredictable while NGOs hesitated to engage in such a fractured, low-capacity environment. The communities' relationship with Chevron was confrontational.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Given these challenges, SFCG spent the first year of the project building local capacity in leadership and conflict resolution. SFCG also led community members through a participatory process to identify development priorities and worked closely with local government authorities. Gradually, the communities began to see tangible improvements. Conflicts in the villages dropped, leading to increased cooperation and reduced violence on the soccer fields, in homes and between different families.

People became more open to getting involved and looking for ways to work together to help themselves. Communities organized a volunteer work campaign "We are the Change" which resulted in over 1,000 person-hours of community service to achieve the development goals villagers themselves had set. The project catalyzed a spirit of volunteerism and ownership that had been long absent in the communities.



A community member in Mandarin village cleaning a water source during a community workday

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The turnaround caught the attention of development NGOs that previously had declined to work in the communities. On Search for Common Ground's urging, an NGO specializing in agricultural development, CLUSA, began working in three communities. The towns now have functioning agricultural cooperatives. Villagers are learning how to farm with an eye towards the markets provided by Chevron's camp and the Angolan army base in Cabinda.

GOVERNMENT CAPACITY

Local government has been a central actor in this transformation. Municipal officials now co-lead workshops with Search for Common Ground about leadership, conflict resolution and participatory development. More than 150 government officials and employees have gone through the training. Local officials are spending more time in the communities, are becoming more accountable and are more active in community development. Local government is increasingly taking on its role as the primary provider of social services and development assistance. At the same time, Chevron has agreed to finance infrastructure and road improvements to build on the communities' volunteer work.

CIVIL SOCIETY

SFCG is also supporting the region's artisanal fishing association, AVOPECSA (The Voice of the Fishermen), helping it to develop responsible advocacy and management skills. AVOPECSA today conducts activities they never dreamed possible, such as training their own members in conflict resolution and negotiation with a focus on local leadership, effective community engagement and productive win-win style advocacy and communication. They are also supporting fishing and agricultural cooperatives at the community level. The process has transformed the way AVOPECSA engages with Chevron. Once aggressive and confrontational, AVOPECSA has moderated its tone and today approaches problems in a way that opens up the possibility for dialogue. Chevron and AVOPECSA have met an unprecedented three times over the past year.

Overall, a culture of dialogue is taking hold in the communities, creating the conditions for sustainable peace and development. *"SFCG has made significant progress in addressing the problems within these communities,"* says CLUSA's Coordinator for Credit and Training. *"Now we need to keep the process moving forward, and help people see the tangible benefits of this kind of cooperation."*



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