

Search for Common Ground - Burundi Key Findings from 2006 “Women and Governance” Project Evaluation

The dominant mission of Search for Common Ground in Burundi is to build the capacity of all the groups of the Burundian society to manage their conflicts in collaborative ways, engage in dialogue, coexist in peace and restore the damaged relationships. Search works this way within the framework of 4 projects (Studio Ijambo, Peace centre for the Women, Youth project and Project for the Victims of Torture) which serve as organizational and operational units, each bringing a particular dimension to the program. SFCG’s programme in Burundi is primarily supported by USAID, the British, Swedish, and Belgian governments. Search for Common Ground is an international non-governmental organization that works to transform the way the world deals with conflict: away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions. With programs in or with Angola, Belgium, Burundi, DR Congo, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Liberia, Macedonia, Middle East, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Ukraine, and the United States, our “toolbox” includes mediation/ facilitation, shuttle diplomacy, training, radio/TV, journalism, sports, drama, and music.

EVALUATION SCOPE

Independent evaluators Véronique Parqué and René-Claude Niyonkuru conducted the evaluation of SFCG “Women and Governance” Project in January/February 2006. The objectives of this evaluation were to determine the pertinence of the objectives and their degree of implementation, efficiency, impact and viability in accordance with what was formulated in the proposal.

The evaluators also put forth recommendations in order to:

- Improve project ownership by Burundian actors
- Improve the structure of the project management regarding human resource
- Create a link between public actors and non state actors for an integrated local governance
- Strengthen the education of schooled young people in the long term

KEY FINDINGS

Pertinence of the project

In Burundi, women had not been associated with any level of power previously, from the village level (the hill) up to the government. Thus the general objective of the project to build the capacities of women so that they can take part in political decision making processes is essential for the future of Burundi. Several women explained that they are more at ease when, in a conflict, other women are able to play the role of mediators.

The specific objectives were pertinent with real needs, to build the capacities of 140 associations so that they can defend the interest of women at the municipality level, the province and the whole country; to improve women and girls’ access and their participation quality to the governance process.

Nonetheless, the objectives were not fully met because of the followings:

- The project helped a certain number of women to become aware of the importance of electoral rights and their role in participating in power.
- The trainings on civic education emphasized on fundamental rights, including the electoral rights. Participation was analyzed only in relation with the elections, leading the majority of the participants to think that the next participation to the political life of the Country will happen at the elections.
- There was a problem of targeting the beneficiaries: organizations were targeted at the exceptions of political party members and election candidates. Human targeting was challenged by the problem of definition of youth (young adults up to 35 years of age, or unmarried persons). Geographically speaking, Search chose to do the trainings nationwide with a big number of beneficiaries. This had damaging consequences on building capacity for organizational management.

Furthermore, the concept of governance had not been well assimilated by the project team because of lack a specific training in that domain. As a result, there were recurrent confusions of governance and government. This way women's participation was understood as participation to the state's institutions through the elections, without mentioning participation to public action in the capacity of non-state development actors.

Efficiency of the project

The evaluation mission warned of the risks related to financial dependency linked to the fact of having all the funds for the project coming from one and only source, the Belgian cooperation for this case. The whole project would be in jeopardy if the donor did not sustain the provision. The evaluators praised the project execution team for being a very harmonious unit and well-coordinated group, dynamic and well motivated. In spite of the managerial excellence on the part of program officers and specific experience in governance (understood as work with the parliament), the mission noted some discrepancies between their field of study/experience and the lack of special trainings. While the team had an adequate training in conflict management, leadership and civic rights related to the elections, it was lacking in sufficient training in governance. Moreover, the lack of a professional with proper qualifications in political and legal notions pertaining to governance was considered a negative factor. The report indicated that Search encountered follow up and management difficulties with its main partner, CAFOB, a local NGO which suffered from lack of management transparency.

Effectiveness of the project

After exploring the final project report, conducting field visits and discussions with beneficiaries, the evaluators came to the conclusions that all the activities described in the final report have been effectively executed in spite of, for some of the activities, targeting and distribution problems. 13 different series of activities were executed and engendered the following remarks:

- It is too early to undertake organizing women in a national lobby group. One good way would be to organize them within smaller organizations with public interest objectives, then organize them in lobby groups at municipality level. From there on, a national lobby objective can then be developed.
- For activities related to capacity building of women's organizations, there were disparities between trainings provided by SFCG and the ones provided by CAFOB, Search's partner. The latter organization limited their trainings to cover only techniques for transparent management of organization while SFCG expanded to more well-done modules, including:
 - o Transparent management of organizations.
 - o Conflict management
 - o Leadership
 - o Civic electoral rights
- The evaluation report points out that there is need for Search to train in adequate tools for follow up of projects, for instance by distributing pre and post test models, templates of homogenous monthly reports with mentions of indicators.
- The activities aiming at youth organizations improved their capacities but did not specifically target girls as was written in the specific objectives. Given the little participation of girls in youth organizations, this activity should be changed in the future. Young girls who are not part of the school system are more likely to be reached through women's organizations rather than youth organizations. The evaluation suggests jointly building the capacity of both women organizations and youth organization because of the problem posed by the definition of "youth" and the small number of effective organizations.
- The school parliaments, an on-going activity through unique role-plays, will eventually act as a "school of democracy" for participating youth.
- Weekly radio programs on women and governance contributed in improving women and girls' access to one of the aspects of the governance process, namely the participation to the elections. More radio programs are needed in order to cover participation to governance process through other forms.

Impact and viability of the project

Considering the different criteria of evaluation summarized in this document, the assessment of the project's impact is mitigated but has interesting promises for the future in order to better reach the beneficiaries. The many activities of the project had an objective on national scale, thus making it to have an impact in depth on a real organizational change within women

organizations. The project had a real impact in term of sensitization, especially during the electoral period, on the participation of the women in the elections. Activities executed led some women to participate in the village (hill) elections and exercise their rights to vote. Nevertheless, in order to increase the impact and push organizations to get involved in objectives of public interest, Search should get more involved at municipality level by working with leaders newly elected at the local level and selected organizations that are apt to work for the public interest of the municipality. In the future if the same project is undertaken, its viability will be locally assessed through partnerships in municipalities and provinces.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Search should improve local ownership for projects that were conceived by actors in the North: in a future project, consider taking into account needs of the beneficiaries, by emphasizing on the fact that a project is subject to constant evaluations against its objectives. The elaboration of quantitative indicators for real follow-up (not only in the logical frame) could allow thinking better of the internal evaluation which is indispensable to the continuation of the project and could arouse a competition among the staff.
- Search should improve the project management structure regarding human resource: this implies for example having on the managing team professionals in the specific fields that the project is focusing on. In the case of the current project, this would mean having on board a person with political science and/or legal qualifications, such as a jurist knowledgeable about public action. In addition, it would be great that the personnel be trained (trainers included) in adults' pedagogy.
- Search should create a link between public actors and organizations for real local governance, that is a real public action integrated at the local level. The evaluation mission thus recommends putting an end to the separation between women and youth and the separation between civil society and public actors.
- The mission recommends centering on local governance before undertaking the process of strengthening participation to the national government. Therefore, the support to the network created as an instrument of national advocacy should stop and the created contacts used to better know the organizations.
- The mission recommends reducing the geographic targeting to a maximum number of three provinces with work more focused on municipalities rather than the provinces' headquarters.
- Search should strengthen the education of the schooled young people on the long term: the activities of the school parliaments should be continued and enhanced by introducing a pilot project in less favored schools.

RESPONSES TO THE EVALUATION

The Women and Governance Project is about to enter into its second phase. As a result of this evaluation as well as the project staff 's own lessons learned, a number of measures have been taken to strengthen the project. These measures include the following:

- Merge the Youth and Women's activities as part of a restructuring of the entire Burundi programme which will greatly facilitate internal collaboration.
- Bring in a consultant for three months to strengthen our staff's capacity in training and good governance
- Broaden our work on good governance beyond the electoral process as the new political context doesn't call for such prioritization anymore.
- Introduce a more rigorous monitoring system that will better allow us to track and capture the results of our interventions.
- Further develop our work with the school parliaments, focusing on the less privileged schools
- Concentrate on strengthening existing associations and delay until later the creation of a national network.
- Refocus the project on three provinces only, to allow for more in-depth work on the ground.

EVALUATION TEAM AND METHODOLOGY

The Evaluation Team collected information through individual interviews, focus group discussions (7 to 11 people per homogeneous group of youth organization, women organization, local elected leaders) and a printed questionnaire. The evaluation mission visited the following provinces in Burundi: Muramvya, Gitega, Bujumbura mairie, Ngozi, Makamba, Bururi. Those provinces were chosen randomly. In each province, key people were interviewed.

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*Source: The majority of this document was taken verbatim from the Evaluation of Search for Common Ground Activities in Burundi, January/February 2006. For the full evaluation, please refer to:
www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/evaluations.html*