
Search for Common Ground – Burundi

Key Findings from the Project Evaluation of “Promotion of Democratic Governance in Burundi” 2006-2008

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has been working in Burundi since 1995. In recent years, SFCG Burundi’s primary objective has been to improve the participation of all citizens in the democratic process and in reconciliation focusing on three issues:

- Reintegration of marginalized groups: citizens returning to Burundi; ex-combatants; women; youth; and war victims
- Good governance through increased participation in local decision making
- Transitional justice, especially supporting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

EVALUATION SCOPE

Hervé Kouandé (Kobadev Consulting), an independent consultant, was hired to conduct the evaluation, which took place from late May to August 2009; the final report was made and approved in late September 2009.

The evaluation covered the program in Burundi as a whole over the period from 2006 to 2008, during which three projects were implemented:

- “Promoting Freedom of Expression in Burundi ,” funded by the European Commission
- "Supporting National Reconciliation in Burundi,” funded by USAID
- "Promoting Democratic Governance in Burundi,” funded by the Belgian Technical Cooperation

The strategies adopted under the program are based primarily on two approaches:

- A *Media Approach*, based on the production of radio programming and the training of professional media and news organizations on topics related to freedom of expression, community reconciliation and democratic governance;
- A *Community Approach* to a) strengthen the capacities of different sectors of communities on their rights and knowledge of good governance, b) creating conditions for negotiation, dialogue and a lasting reconciliation between these groups and finally (iii) increasing their initiative in and commitment to participate in the management and processes of public decision making.

KEY FINDINGS

Program Management

The key findings below present the lessons taken from the program evaluation. Results based on the specific objectives of each of the three projects, can be found in the various summaries of each project that are available.

Strengths:

- The SFCG staff proved itself to be dynamic and experienced in matters relating to freedom of expression and media relations. Several staff members have extensive experience in journalism and have made major contributions to the success of media activities.
- SFCG is well known to the population because of Radio Isanganiro.
- SFCG maintains permanent contacts with donors, which strengthens donor support of the program.

Weaknesses:

- The program design had methodological weaknesses due to the relative complexity of themes promoted and insufficient involvement of key stakeholders involved in the issues addressed.
- Monitoring and Evaluation efforts suffered from gaps in collection and management of data, and the identification of specific program (planning) outcomes. Grouping activities performed on each project in the same report, made it difficult to separate individual project effects
- Although SFCG collaborates with government and local authorities, the majority of activities focus on the individual, SFCG could further their relationship with the Government, administrative authorities, and security forces to ensure greater sustainability of the program;

Project Implementation

Strengths:

- SFCG has extensive experience with peaceful resolution of conflict and support for democratic governance in Burundi. It is one of the most experienced humanitarian organizations working in the Burundi territory;
- SFCG ensures well-coordinated relationships with its target groups through reports from representatives in each community where a project is implemented, and the local coordinator, or focal point for beneficiaries. These local coordinators are part of the SFCG staff (trainers and journalists).
- As part of the implementation of projects, the office of SFCG Burundi enjoys the continued support of local partners who share its same vision, notably the Ijambo Association and the league ITEKA;
- The programming approach used (media actions coupled with community action) is proving to be an important asset for SFCG insofar as it is innovative and unique compared to other organizations involved in the same area;
- The organization of tasks and activities among staff is conducted in a collegial and effective manner.



Weaknesses:

- The post of Monitoring and Evaluation has been vacant, so there was no monitoring and collecting data on indicators. In addition, there was inconsistency in data and information collection.

Project Results

Strengths:

- Survey data in Burundi confirms the conflict in the country is not a conflict over identity or ethnicity. The majority of respondents did not stress ethnic conflict, as much as they did conflicts involving land (land disputes) and the redistribution of wealth;
- Survey data also confirms that the media, particularly radio, has more impact on the population than other channels of information dissemination. SFCG ought to repeat this approach for other projects on similar themes;
- Education stakeholders are particularly satisfied with the school boards
- The experience of SFCG staff added to the efficiency of programs, especially those involving the media, because most staff members were formerly journalists working for radio project partners;
- The involvement of local and national media (local and elected radio, and radio associations) has been very positive for the implementation of programs and the establishment of partnerships. This approach is excellent for project sustainability.

Weaknesses:

- Radio Assessments are not done routinely.
- Journalists move from one newspaper to another and people interested in the business can enter the industry without much difficulty. Thus, it is necessary to find a strategy to train new journalists;
- Broadcasting radio programs in markets did not work. There was no follow up on the part of local actors and communities to repair equipment; technical difficulties went unaddressed. SFCG did repairs in the beginning, but then handed responsibility to the community. However, this strategy (markets broadcasts) seems to be an interesting idea because it allows people with no radio to access information.
- The "National Reconciliation" and "Democratic Governance" projects have affected a small part of the territory: 3 provinces
- Training of journalists has reduced discrepancies in information provided by journalists, but the written press has not been included.
- Radio shows broadcast by the media focus exclusively on conflicts, violations and political issues while the country's situation has changed for the better in these areas. It would be more interesting to see how to combine issues of governance and freedom of expression with economic development at the local level, including the rural population, which has the greatest need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall recommendations for this project are:

1. Recommendations for Program Management

Set the strategic direction of SFCG in terms of intervention:

- Conduct discussions to include more support for institutional actors.
- Organize strategic planning sessions around the method used in the results and around the logical framework approach before project design.

Improve the definition and the design of projects

- Improve the definition of concepts and themes related to projects in the design stage. This will allow SFCG to better target important aspects during project implementation. (eg. Government, Democracy, Transitional Justice, etc...)

- Identify and ensure the precise definition of objectives and/or SMART results (Specific, Measurable, Appropriate, Achievable and Temporal) for projects using appropriate indicators.

Improve the coordination of the program

- Assign Monitoring –Evaluation responsibilities to the program or project coordinator.
- Perform a systematic transfer of responsibilities between incoming and outgoing staff.

Strengthen the capacity of program leaders

- Train SFCG Burundi program’s leaders in results-driven project planning methodology ;
- Give technical support to regional offices on the use of methods, tools, and standards of the organization, especially regarding Monitoring and Evaluation;
- Train staff members in the collection and storage of data for continuous monitoring.

Improve internal communication

- Systematically release reports of studies and evaluations to staff and stakeholders so they can implement recommendations on the ground.

Establish an Information System for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Projects

- Conduct a baseline (ex ante) before planning any project or SFCG program
- Develop (whenever possible) a computer application for projects that archives general information about the project and data collected on indicators overtime.

2. Programmatic Recommendations

Develop Project ownership by beneficiaries

- Support the government development of school boards through financial and technical support.
- Provide radio programs for school parliaments through Radio Nderagakura, focused on student issues.
- Provide incentives (e.g. transportation stipends, snack or per diem) to the target population, especially marginalized groups and people living in rural communities to facilitate their active participation in community activities and the Monitoring and Evaluation conducted of projects.

Adapt activities based on socio-demographic profiles of target groups

- Adapt the approach and content of training and other activities to the level of education and socio-cultural traits of target groups (e.g. members of an association, people in rural areas)

Increase the impact of results for beneficiaries

- Continue the training of journalists and media professionals in general as the media sector is growing;
- Systematically incorporate media strategy into all projects implemented in Burundi in the areas of governance and reconciliation;
- Initiate (to the extent possible) development activities to support humanitarian operations even if it not your organizational mission (e.g. support associations of women in creating small business plans or cooperatives with training on the creation, project management, and funding)

Relevant suggestions from projects’ target groups

- Continue the training of journalists and media support: training on production technique and information processing;
- Organize media training on site (in local stations): it is less costly and more effective because it involves more people
- Include case studies in training
- Increase journalists' coverage from the field to take into account the views of people in remote areas.
- Increase the number and frequency of broadcasts on freedom of expression through radio partners.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the program was based on an approach combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data measured changes in the knowledge, attitudes and practices of beneficiaries, as well as their perception of context related to the themes of the program. Qualitative evaluations targeted key program participants. The methodology included:

- Impact surveys based on questionnaires administered to five target groups: journalists, the general public and members of Listeners' clubs, participants in the roundtables and panels, members of associations and local authorities, students, and members of school boards. The margin of error for the results of different groups was between 10% and 13%.
- Of the individual interviews conducted, seventeen were conducted with program managers, media executives and administrative authorities of the media.
- The methodology of the evaluation also included a system that measured the impact of the program for each indicator. Outside of an analysis of results based on statistics obtained, the report proposes a multi-criteria analysis of the project (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability)

This document has summarized the results or quoted directly from the project's final evaluation. The report is available at: www.sfcq.org/sfcq/evaluations/evaluations.html