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## Search for Common Ground – Burundi Key Findings from the “Promoting Freedom of Expression” Project Evaluation, 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**

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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

This document presents the key point of the “Supporting National Reconciliation,” project.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

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The project “Promoting of Freedom of Expression” has improved the capacity of members of various target groups to become key players in the dialogue for social change, peacebuilding and reconciliation in their communities. All activities planned under the project have been completed on time and have taken the identified target areas into account, especially the training provided for journalists.

The project produced the following results:

- Approximately 120 journalists ( 38% women) were trained in the ethics of professional journalism, investigative journalism, responsible journalism, the gathering and processing information, transitional justice, gender, good governance, and the design, development and management of projects;
- 77% of journalists who participated in the training organized by SFCG on freedom of expression were made aware of responsible journalism, characterized by impartiality and the dissemination of balanced and accurate information, according to those surveyed,;
- Approximately 130 people from marginalized groups increased their knowledge of their right to freedom of expression. Thanks to the project, these people have been able, , to express their opinion in the discussion sessions organized at listening clubs on issues relating to freedom of expression, reconciliation ,and good governance in Burundi;
- 76% of the Burundian population (audience older than 15 years, with 10% margin of error) was made aware of their right to freedom of expression through the radio programs broadcast by the partners of Studio Ijambo, a key project stakeholder.

In addition, although the project did not implement any activities specifically aimed at reducing violations of the press’ rights, the evaluation nevertheless collected some interesting information about acts of intimidation that targeted journalists. A quarter of the journalists polled have suffered violations of their freedom of expression in the last two years (mostly by police, according to respondents).

In terms of the specific project objectives , major changes were produced in several areas:

- a) Results related to the goal of strengthening the capacity of journalists’ and the media in terms of their professionalism, responsibility and autonomy.
  - 66% of journalists who attended the training believe they have a better idea on how to treat information and attribute the “above average” improvement in their journalistic abilities their participation in the project
  - 88% of journalist participants feel that they are able to show solidarity with their colleagues from other media and news organizations and promote the freedom of expression in Burundi to a “greater” extent after the training.;
  - 63% of participants feel more capable of taking a stand to fight against all forms of abuse against journalists than before the project.
- b) Results related to the objective of improving media coverage by giving a voice to marginalized groups.

- 79% of members of marginalized groups say that the project helped them better understand their right to freedom of expression;
- 79% of members of the population and marginalized groups(women, youth, ex-combatants, returning refugees, and war victims) think that the radio programs and the community activities organized as part of the project have allowed them to express themselves more freely as compared to the situation before the project;
- 93% of marginalized people [targeted by the project] claim to better know their right to freedom of expression now than 2 years ago;
- 95% of marginalized people [targeted by the project] felt able to speak in the microphone or to express their opinion in the media on matters affecting their interests when given the opportunity;
- 63% of marginalized people [targeted by the project] think that the radio programs involve and take the views of decision makers and marginalized groups equally into account after the implementation of the project.

Overall, the project has yielded some of the expected results for its direct and indirect beneficiaries. The effects of the project are more noticeable in terms of the freedom of the press than at the level of freedom of expression for the general population, especially marginalized groups. These improvements do not seem have an impact in the field because of perceived problems (intimidation, imprisonment, etc.) between the target groups (media professionals, marginalized populations) and the political, administrative and safety officials.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The recommendations below concern project programming. SFCG should:

- Continue journalist training and media support, especially training on production techniques and information processing;
- Organize on site (at station sites) training of media and media outlet.: This is less expensive and more effective because there the training can reach more people;
- Provide case studies during training;
- Involve all stakeholders in the media: broadcast media and print media;
- Increase the number of visits journalists make to the field during programs in order to take the views of people in remote areas into account;
- Increase the number and frequency of broadcasts on freedom of expression among radio partners;
- Involve more women and security forces in projects on governance.

General recommendations are summarized in document-related results of the program as a whole and available on the website, [www.sfcg.org](http://www.sfcg.org)

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## **EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

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The evaluation was based on a survey of journalists using a self-administered questionnaire. Of the 120 participating journalists, 92 were contacted, 71 of whom returned the questionnaire.

Members of listening clubs also responded to a questionnaire. The analysis is drawn from a sample of 113 people in 4 different communes.

The results for radio programs on freedom of expression were obtained by surveying a sample of the general population, combining the evaluation of the three projects and including marginalized groups. A total of 384 persons were interviewed. Respondents in each municipality were selected randomly. A stratified sampling was used to select 4 provinces (from 17) based on sorting by size of population. Fourteen towns (secondary governance units) from these 4 provinces were selected in the same way. Each survey carried a margin of error of 10%.

The assessment methodology also includes a score system attached to each indicator that measures impact. In addition to an analysis of the results based on the obtained statistics, the report proposes an analysis based on the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the project.

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## **PROJECT SUMMARY**

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The project aims to promote the effectiveness of freedom of expression in Burundi by including marginalized and isolated groups. To achieve this, the project has two specific objectives:

- To strengthen the capacities male and female journalists and the media to increase their professionalism, responsibility, and autonomy in order to strengthen the democratic process.
- To expand and improve media coverage by giving a voice to marginalized and isolated groups and improving their access to information

The project interventions that produced these results are focused on: training journalists in responsible journalism and management of projects; weekly roundtables and programs on freedom of expression; and discussion and feedback sessions with listeners in the listening clubs on radio programming (notably sessions on freedom of expression held by Studio Ijambo). The broadcasting of radio programs in markets, an activity that was planned initially, was not possible due to technical difficulties.

*This document summarized the results or quoted directly from the project's final evaluation. The report is available at: [www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/evaluations.html](http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/evaluations.html)*