

2008 FINAL REPORT: MASS INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF PEACEFUL CONGOLESE AND BURUNDIAN REFUGEE REPATRIATION

In 2007, Search for Common Ground (SFCG), with financial support from the United States Department of State: Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), launched the twelve-month project, *Mass Information In Support of Congolese and Burundian Refugees*. The overarching goal of this project was to **foster peaceful reintegration of Congolese returnees in South Kivu and Katanga and Burundian returnees across the Democratic Republic of Congo**. This goal was supported by two specific objectives:

1. To provide information to refugee populations that would enable them to make informed decisions about return; and
2. To foster dialogue and collaborative approaches to conflict between returnees and residents in the zones of return.

The project used radio programming, training and participatory theater to meet both of these objectives, targeting Congolese and Burundian returnees and residents in Eastern DRC and Burundi respectively, as well as Congolese refugees in Burundi, Tanzania, and Zambia and Burundian refugees in Tanzania.

To assess the project's achievements in light of its objectives, the final report of the *Mass Information* project drew upon quantitative and qualitative data collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys. The SFCG DRC Design Monitoring & Evaluation (DM&E) Coordinator, assisted by eighteen additional researchers, carried out the evaluation, taking care to ensure gender and cultural sensitivity throughout the data collection process. Key findings from the report, presented here, indicate a number of positive outcomes from this project.

SFCG EMPOWERS REFUGEES TO MAKE INFORMED REPATRIATION DECISIONS ABOUT REPATRIATION

SFCG DRC, under the local name, Central Lokolé, produced innovative radio programs designed to support the peaceful return of refugees throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo. By informing refugees about the repatriation process and about possible conflicts they might encounter upon returning to their home communities, SFCG sought to empower refugees to make informed decisions about repatriation. Final evaluation data confirmed that SFCG had met this objective. By the end of the project:

- 56% of all refugees surveyed reported listening to SFCG programs.
- 74% of radio listeners listened to SFCG radio programs.
- From the baseline to the final study, the number of Congolese refugees who received information about repatriation from SFCG programs increased by 73%.
- 85% of women and 95% of men reported being well informed about repatriation.
- 79% of women and 89% of men reported being well informed about developments in their home country.

SFCG ENABLES CONGOLESE PEOPLE TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS PEACEFULLY

In addition to informing refugees about the repatriation process, SFCG also sought to equip Congolese refugees with the tools necessary to resolve conflicts without the use of violence. Through trainings and participatory theater, SFCG helped refugees to utilize strategies such as mediation and compromise to resolve conflicts peacefully, and reduced the number of participants who said they would use violence in conflict settings.

Final evaluation data showed:

- 91% of Congolese returnees, residents and refugees believe they have the information to resolve their conflicts collaboratively and nonviolently.
- 96% of resident and returnee and 97% of refugee theater spectators have increased knowledge about conflict transformation and nonviolent communication as a result of the activity.
- 22% of female refugees and 18% of male refugees said they would negotiate to resolve a conflict; this was the top response among refugee respondents. Only 2% of respondents said they would use violence.
- Among returnees who had faced a land or property conflict, 19% went to local authorities, 19% negotiated, and 17% mediated.

“When coming to Congo from Tanzania I thought that my neighbors and brothers would not accommodate me but I am surprised that we live together without a problem and they assist me in when I am sick.”

-Congolese Returnee

SFCG BUILDS COLLABORATIVE DIALOGUE THROUGHOUT COMMUNITIES

SFCG worked with refugees, returnees and local residents to promote collaborative dialogue and peacebuilding in communities throughout the DRC. Using participatory theater as a primary tool, SFCG provided a safe, open environment for community members to explore critical issues and practice conflict resolution strategies together. Over two-thirds (67%) of refugee respondents and approximately half (45%) of residents and returnees had attended a SFCG participatory theater performance by the time of the final evaluation. Those who had attended highlighted a number of positive impacts on the community. For example:

- 99% of resident and returnee and 98% of refugee theater spectators feel that SFCG has provided a forum for open, collaborative dialogue about the conflicts around them (returnees/residents) and the inevitable conflicts they will face at home (refugees).
- 95% of residents, 97% of returnees, and 99% of refugees feel better prepared to manage conflicts after attending participatory theater.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the final report did not make specific recommendations for future work, it did indicate a few areas that could be improved. For example:

- More men than women reported listening to SFCG radio programs. Some women noted being too busy working to listen to the radio. Thus, more research could be conducted to determine how to make information accessible across gender lines.
- More women than men noted that they would use negotiation to resolve conflicts. Further research could investigate how to modify conflict resolution trainings to appeal more broadly to men.
- Among refugees, some focus group participants noted that they could not return-- even if they received information about their home communities-- because their families face ongoing land disputes. Further strategies for supporting peaceful resolutions of land and property disputes could be useful in helping these groups.

Source: This document is a summary of the 2008 final report, “Mass Information In Support of Congolese and Burundian Refugee Repatriation”. A copy of this document can be acquired by contacting Nick Oatley, Director of Institutional Learning at Search for Common Ground, at noatley@sfcg.org

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