

Search for Common Ground – Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Mid-Term Evaluation “Supporting Congo’s Transition Towards Sustainable Peace” Program

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) is an international non-governmental organization that works to transform the way the world deals with conflict: away from adversarial approaches, toward co-operative solutions. With programs in or with seventeen countries, its “toolbox” includes mediation/ facilitation, shuttle diplomacy, training, radio/TV, journalism, sports, drama, and music.

“CL is a dynamic organization [...] a strong sense of mission which is constantly looking for ways to optimise peace-building impact”

The starting point of the ‘common ground’ approach to conflict transformation is that conflicts of interest can be transformed into shared interests if the protagonists are willing to recognize the legitimacy of differing viewpoints and to explore mutually beneficial solutions. Turning conflict into collaboration is something that takes practice, and people emerging from years of bitter war may have little experience with it.

Search for Common Ground in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is known locally as *Centre Lokole (CL)*, was established in 2001 to support communications around the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD), the cornerstone of a peace process that began in 1999 to put an end to DRC's civil war. SFCG-CL has since expanded its goal to enhancing the prospects for a more inclusive and viable transition process and contributing to the development of a sustainable peace in DRC.

With offices in the capital of Kinshasa and eastern DRC in Bukavu, SFCG-CL uses media programming, capacity building and outreach activities to enhance communication about the political transition process; and contribute towards reduction of tensions and development of lasting peace in the East.

The report documents the mid-term output-to-purpose review of SFCG’s “Supporting Congo’s Transition towards Sustainable Peace” program, funded by the Department for International Development (DfID). DfID has been supporting CL’s 3-year program since October 2004. Triple Line Consulting Ltd. was contracted by DfID to provide two consultants, Mary Myers and Judy El Bushra, specialists in media and peace-building respectively, to undertake the review. The fieldwork for this evaluation was carried out between 20 January and 5 February 2006.



PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Search for Common Ground’s Centre Lokole produces radio programs as well as other media (such as comic books) to inform Congolese about the key elements of the ongoing transition, particularly those subject to manipulation, divisionism or conflict. The radio programs are produced in various Congolese national languages, as well as French, and broadcast on 80 partner radio stations in all provinces around the country. The program also helps consolidate peace in the East through radio programming, cross-border dialogues, and awareness-raising campaigns, and mediation between communities divided because of the war. These initiatives aim to enable the population to transform conflict without resorting to violence, by clarifying issues and modeling positive examples of peacebuilding. The program objectives in summary are to:

1. **Enhance informative and participative communication around the transition process** through:

- a. Radio broadcasts on the transition process and institutions,
- b. Other media activities,
- c. Training of media

2. **Contribute to the reduction of tensions and the development of sustainable peace in Eastern Congo** through:

- a. Reduction of tension through radio programming,
- b. Cross-border dialogue
- c. Community awareness –raising on children’s rights and the demobilization process in the East,
- d. Training and capacity building for local peace leaders,
- e. Increased social harmony through cultural activities.



EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The methods used for this evaluation were key informant interviews, observation and desk review of the project documents. The two evaluators, Mary Myers and Judy El-Bushra, spent 15 days in the DRC. Both visited Uvira, Bukavu and Kinshasa. To get a full understanding of the context for the project, the evaluators interviewed a number of donor agencies, local government representatives, a cross-section of SFCG-CL’s partner organizations, as well as community groups, and SFCG-CL’s competitors. The evaluators also interviewed many radio station directors; 14 were interviewed from all around the country, either in person or by telephone. They also watched three participatory theatre performances, and listened to radio programs. Visits to two marketplaces were undertaken in order to do some informal interviews with ‘ordinary’ listeners. The evaluators also spent many sessions in discussion with SFCG-CL staff.

KEY FINDINGS

The review found that, in general the program is on the right track to achieve its purpose (laying the foundations for sustainable peace by enhancing informative and participative communication around the transition process and by contributing to the reduction of tensions in Eastern Congo)

Main Findings:

- 1. SFCG-CL is the only organization in DRC that is advocating conflict transformation to a mass-audience. It combines practical peace building with the power of the mass media to inform and encourage Congolese participation in the ongoing peace process, as well as influencing knowledge, attitudes and behavior of the audience in ways that can facilitate peace. In particular, ‘Jirani ni Ndigi’ (a soap opera) and ‘Sisi Watoto’ (magazine program on children’s rights prepared and produced by children) both attract large audience owing to their entertainment value and capacity to reflect the language and outlook of ordinary people in eastern DRC
- 2. SFCG-CL has promoted conflict transformation communication through its radio outputs as well as through participatory theatre, and to a less evident degree through on-the-ground community

work. There is some evidence that SFCG-CL's outputs have helped reduce general levels of tension, as well as contributing to specific instances where violence has been prevented, including most notably child demobilization resulting from 'Sisi Watoto'.

3. The key achievement of SFCG-CL's radio output is that it produces informative, relevant and stimulating material, which is disseminated to mass audience in parts of the country where few other sources of information or discussion reach. Programs have contributed to transition processes by enabling people to become better informed about the transition and better able to assess and act on information, and by providing outlets for popular opinions and commentary.
4. SFCG-CL has contributed to media development through the training of professionals –including the young 'Sisi Watoto' reporters – and by setting high standards in its own programs. It is the only organization in DRC tackling elections from the standpoint of covering positive stories while being alert to the potential for conflict to result from the language or choice of stories chosen.
5. When compared to other media organizations in the country SFCG-CL's program includes a wide range of activities which are not being attempted by other organizations. These include developing creative radio formats, and developing program formats which allow ordinary people from all over the country to have their say.
6. Community-level reconciliation activities work through local peace organizations operating strategically important locations and contexts. However, this work has been given limited attention to-date, owing to a combination of human and financial resource constraints and a conscious decision to focus resources on media work, which is where SFCG-CL considers it can make most difference.

"In 2004 CL held peace song competition, publishing the 11 best entries in the form of a CD. The CD has been distributed to partner radio stations, which often play music from it."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above key findings, the evaluation team outlined the following recommendations to strengthen SFCG's DRC program.

Recommendations to SFCG-Centre Lokole

- SFCG-CL should consider identifying a series of priority subjects for which it will develop longer and more in-depth treatment.
- It should also consider the possibility of extending coverage of 'Sisi Watoto' throughout the country, developing the scope and range of its participatory theatre troupes, and expansion into TV.
- The team should undertake an assessment of its experience with on-the-ground community reconciliation work with a view to deciding what level of resources to invest in this work.
- SFCG-CL should look for ways to enhance synergies between community reconciliation work and media work
- In the long term SFCG-CL will need to consider undertaking a broader analysis of the conflict, to include the roles of marginalized groups.
- Some revisions to the project lo-frame need to be made.
- SFCG-CL should commit to paper an agreed work-plan for the remaining 18 months of the project as soon as possible.
- SFCG-CL should strengthen its plans, and internal capacity, for monitoring and evaluation.
- SFCG-CL should continue to look for ways to collaborate with Radio Okapi, Panos and other peace-building and development agencies.

- SFCG-CL should review and possibly reorient its program of training for journalists.
- SFCG-CL should start to consider themes for a post-conflict scenario.
- SFCG-CL should consider whether, and how, its community work could be strengthened through joint programming with other peacebuilding organizations.

Recommendations to DfID

- The outputs and the purpose of the project are largely being achieved – or are well on the way to being so. DfID should have no hesitation in funding the second half of the 3-year grant foreseen for Search for Common Ground.

2007 DFID FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION

Between April 17th and 20th 2007, DfID has conducted its own follow-up evaluation of “**Supporting Congo’s Transition Towards Sustainable Peace**” Program. The review was done on the basis of desk research and interviews with Search for Common Ground-Centre Lokolé staff in Kinshasa. Views were also sought informally from DfID staff, Panos Institute staff, RTNC staff and other donors.

LESSONS LEARNED & KEY FINDINGS

“It is clear from the project's own monitoring systems (e.g. audience phone-in responses, surveys and qualitative assessments) that the project outputs clearly enhanced informative and participative communication around the elections. Now, by the same measures, they are still contributing to a greater public understanding of the democratic process; and are certainly contributing something to the reduction of tensions in Eastern Congo.”

1. Search's work in DRC depends heavily on the cooperation of a large network of radio stations (now numbering 100). Since the last review, more has been done to build capacity within many of these stations, and to change broadcasting partners where necessary to keep up with the changing audience patterns in the country (i.e. a new partnership with popular commercial station RTGA).
2. Search's work in conflict resolution - notably radio and participatory theatre - is very innovative, and therefore deserves thorough documentation, and possibly replication across other conflict and fragile-state contexts.
3. Search's work is exceptionally challenging, and they do a lot with little - i.e. a small staff and relatively modest resources produce 10 weekly radio programs, and ensure the theatre and training work reaching thousands of people. This is largely due to strong and inspirational project management by country director, Lena Slachmuiljer.

Source: This document is a summary of the 2006 Evaluation of the Search for Common Ground Programming in Democratic Republic of Congo, and 2007 DfID’s follow-up review. The full evaluation is available upon request- please contact rtcherif@sfcg.org for a copy.