

Search for Common Ground - Angola Key Findings from 2004 External Evaluation

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

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) in Angola uses conflict resolution training, community dialogue, joint action projects, and media to support sustainable peace and national reconciliation during the country’s transition period and beyond. By working with Angolans to address the root causes that led to war, SFCG aims to help transform Angolan society from a culture of violence to one characterised by coexistence, security, social justice, and popular participation.

SFCG’s programme in Angola was established in 1996 and is currently supported by USAID, the United States Department of State, UNHCR, the National Endowment for Democracy, Golfrate, and the British, Dutch, and Swiss governments.

People’s knowledge has not only increased, but people’s attitudes and behaviour have made a change—for the better. Every participant interviewed indicated that s/he experienced a change after attending an SFCG activity.

EVALUATION SCOPE

In November/December 2004, independent evaluators Christian Bugnion, Rev. Dr. Daniel Ntoni-Nzinga, and João Kambowela conducted a formative evaluation of SFCG’s activities in Angola; this was followed by a report in February 2005. The evaluation focused primarily on the 2003-2004 period, and studied the following:

1. Programme Performance
 - a. Results—Progress toward programme objectives; and positive or negative unintended results.
 - b. Assessment of Process—How well projects are operationalised; whether international standards of practice are followed; and effectiveness of incorporating the SFCG approach throughout its work in Angola.
2. Strategy
 - a. Programme Appropriateness—Relevance of programme goals and objectives to the current country situation; and appropriateness of programme’s target sectors and populations.
 - b. Looking to the future—Opportunities and threats to the future of the programme; and appropriateness of programme strategy for the next year.

The evaluators also put forth recommendations for future SFCG activities in Angola.

KEY FINDINGS

Programme Performance

1. Results

- SFCG’s results in terms of attitudinal change and impact are impressive. Whereas training has become in some cases a trendy and fashionable activity with little or no impact, in Angola SFCG is making a change regarding people’s attitudes.

“With over thirty evaluations conducted over the past ten years the team leader has not witnessed any other programme where results have been so rapidly positive and where change was induced immediately as a result of the training activities.”

Lengutos Pedro Hamado is the Commander of the Civil Defence Force in Mbanza Congo, Zaire province. He was trained by SFCG on conflict resolution techniques. He considers “this training to have opened his people’s minds and that it should be continued and repeated.”



Members of EKOLELO, 2004.

- Diminishing conflicts and violence have been reported by the administrator and/or political party leadership in areas where SFCG has concentrated its work.
- The development of a network of journalists with improved skills and the production of programmatic media material is contributing to the objectives and overall goal of SFCG’s programme. *The following is an example of this.*

Journalist Achieved Community Results through Radio Programmes—Antonio Mendes is a Radio Huambo journalist living in Huambo who was trained under the SFCG Media Project. As a result, in 2003 he received two 10-day sessions, with the objective to train him on conflict resolution activities through radio programmes. He held several radio debates as part of the training on topics of specific interest to the population, receiving very strong shows of participation from the public.

By identifying public concerns, such as the poor state of road infrastructure, or information on AIDS, the journalist has been able to play a role between the authorities and the public, by bringing some explanation to the public on the role of government in regards to its duties and responsibilities. However, this has also shown that sensitive issues require a careful handling, as journalists may have a natural tendency to be more critical than constructive in their approach. Antonio claims to have learned this lesson. One week after the radio debates on road works were aired, the government started the repairs. And just last week as a result of the HIV/AIDS debate, a public promise to have a testing center in Huambo was made.

- Response from stakeholder interviews evidence that a great area of success for SFCG has been its capacity to bring to the same table participants from all sectors of civil society, government, authorities, political parties, traditional authorities, and national non-governmental organisations within a constructive dialogue.
- There is evidence that in some cases SFCG activities have directly contributed to the birth of local organisations involved in conflict resolution. *The following provides an example.*

Women’s Group in Huambo Bringing Together Diverse Women for Concrete Projects—“EKOLELO” (patience) is the name of a women’s organisation in Bailundo [Huambo province]. A focus group with 10 of the 23 members was held with the following findings: the membership is mixed, with women belonging to the two political parties (MPLA and UNITA) represented locally, and from a variety of churches, which is a first as all other women associations are one-sided. In the past year they received SFCG training, and there is much interest and enthusiasm among them. They work in communities around Bailundo, at this stage trying to end conflicts between churches and political parties.

On a practical side, EKOLELO is starting to have positive results even among the parties. SFCG training was useful as it helped them unite. These women never worked together before, and now by working jointly on a common cause, their physical unity is starting to foment friendship. Currently their main project is to establish four Njangos (round thatched-roof constructions traditionally used for dialogue by communities), as the lack of their existence does not allow having a space even for dialogue when conflicts arise.

- As compared to the programme’s 2004-2006 logical framework, the majority of training activities are below programme targets. It is important to note, however, that the overall framework was used by SFCG as a pre-funding guide to prepare individual project proposals to its donors. While some actual outputs may be under planned figures, this does not imply that individual project targets for donors were not met.
- Contrary to the typical type of assistance projects that have long endured in Angola because of the war situation, SFCG is not creating any dependency nor fomenting any adverse or negative effects.

Among local politicians interviewed, there were cases of MPLA and UNITA members who had never spoken in a friendly manner until participating in a SFCG-promoted activity.

Recommendation: A major improvement would be the development of a full-fledged monitoring system for the entire programme and for SFCG to be able to track participants, register changes and their impact on individual people and their respective communities.

2. Assessment of Process

- After having triangulated evidence regarding SFCG's activities, the evaluation concludes that training methodologies and conflict resolution techniques taught are of the best possible quality as they are well tailored to the needs of SFCG's target audience.
- A success factor for SFCG has to do with the quality of its staff and capacity to communicate (and sometimes mediate). All interviewees were unanimously positive about the training and facilitating skills of SFCG staff.
- SFCG must be more rigorous, however, in ensuring that participants are able to obtain the full cycle of training sessions, as the length of training sessions was in some cases shortened.

Recommendation: SFCG should strive to update all its training material and integrate it into a new single training manual, which should encompass the different types of activities and provide support for each type of activity.

Also, because human resources are key to the success of its work, SFCG should provide training to programme staff to give them further skills in the areas of coding, monitoring, project cycle management, project proposal identification and development, and project financial management.

Strategy

1. Programme Appropriateness

- The evaluation team endorses the overall goal and the four specific objectives of SFCG's strategy over the next three years. These remain both relevant and entirely justified in the current context as well as in the foreseeable future, at least until elections are held.
- SFCG's work in Angola is responding to a critical and real need. All interviewees agreed on the importance of conflict resolution work at present in Angola.

2. Looking to the Future

- The Peace and Security Project is probably the most important of SFCG's projects at this time, and yet also the least funded. Interviews conducted among members of the armed forces confirmed that those who should be upholding the rule of law are still using violence. As a result, continued training for this specific group is particularly critical and will remain so over the next three years.

Recommendation: SFCG has known how to keep to its particular field of expertise, and has not tried to obtain additional resources solely on the basis of existing windows of opportunities. This has given SFCG great credibility and a consistent line of action that people recognise and commend. SFCG should remain focused and keep doing what it has the skills to do best.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Programme Structure and Scope

- SFCG should transform its project-based strategy into a holistic and integrated programme, with a single programme strategy. Within this overall programme (which keeps the same overall goal and objectives) the specific activities can be



Break-out session during a training with members of the military in Namibe province, 2003.

- divided into three types: community-based, civil society, and armed forces.
- It is necessary to establish a “critical mass” for each of the target areas where SFCG is undertaking activities. The critical mass notion is essentially used to determine “an amount or level needed for a specific result or new action to occur.” In the case of SFCG’s programme, the critical mass must be the quantity and quality of the people who are exposed to SFCG activities and who are applying this knowledge gained to generate change.
- All activities should be undertaken in the same geographical areas in order to maximise the impact of SFCG work and to take advantage of synergies between different activities.
- SFCG should open field offices in the provinces from which it chooses to operate—two at least are recommended, in Mbanza Congo and Huambo. This added workload would require the presence of at least one person, a programme manager, to manage operations and co-ordinate fieldwork and monitoring.



SFCG Civil Society Capacity Building Project Co-ordinator (center) working with members of a local partner network in Lobito, Benguela province, 2004.

2. Sustainability

- There are numerous conflict resolution actors in Angola who still work in an unco-ordinated manner, much to the detriment of the overall effort. SFCG should reinforce its co-ordination with these actors, utilise potential synergies with them, and avoid duplication. SFCG is well-placed to do this, as virtually all the organisations met that are active in conflict resolution were either trained by SFCG, reviewed or adapted their training materials after participating in SFCG workshops, or simply use its methodology and materials.
- A responsible partnership strategy needs to be developed in order to ensure as consistent as possible a coverage of activities.
- To support sustainability, one option for SFCG is to create a local association to guarantee the highly skilled Angolan staff remain active in the field of conflict resolution and continue to contribute to national reconciliation. It should be noted, however, as part of SFCG’s accomplishment that some associations have already been created as a result of their activities.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation team used a multi-methods approach. Documentary review was undertaken on a bibliography supplied by SFCG and further documentary review was undertaken in country. Key informant interviews and SFCG participant interviews were held in three provinces (Huambo, Zaïre, Malange) and in Luanda. The number of interviewees was 154 for the team leader, of which 66 were individual interviews and 88 were focused or structured groups. A questionnaire survey was also undertaken amongst donors and NGOs to obtain an external perception of SFCG. Observational evidence was also collected during field visits, and extensive use of triangulation was made.

Christian Bugnion, team leader, is an expatriate fluent in Portuguese and French, and was thus able to conduct all interviews but one without translation. With extensive evaluation experience, he has conducted over 30 evaluations in the past ten years. Rev. Dr. Daniel Ntoni-Nzinga is the Executive Secretary of COEIPA (Inter-Ecclesial Committee for Peace). He is a respected member of Angolan civil society and is an expert on Angola’s history and civil society sector. João Kambowela is a national consultant with extensive experience in Angola with different donors and United Nations agencies.

Source: The majority of this document was taken verbatim from the 2004 Evaluation, entitled Bringing about Positive Change in a Dysfunctionally Functional Country: The Work of Search for Common Ground/Center for Common Ground in Angola. For the full evaluation, please refer to: www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/evaluations.html