

Search for Common Ground - Sierra Leone Key Findings from 2004 External Evaluation



Emilia Taylor, a former child soldier, records a programme for *Golden Kids News*

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) began operations in Sierra Leone in June 2000 by creating Talking Drum Studio (TDS) and the Community Peace Building Unit (CPU). Using print, radio and video as tools, these interconnected programmes integrate multi-media programming and community outreach to target a diverse population on a broad range of issues central to the consolidation of peace. SFCG's goal in Sierra Leone is to *strengthen communities to participate in building a tolerant, inclusive society for sustainable peace*. SFCG's programme in Sierra Leone is primarily supported by USAID, the European Union, and the British, Dutch, Swedish, and Swiss governments. 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 Angola, Belgium, Burundi, DR Congo, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Liberia, Macedonia, Middle East, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Ukraine, and the United States, our "toolbox" includes mediation/ facilitation, shuttle diplomacy, training, radio/TV, journalism, sports, drama, and music.

EVALUATION SCOPE

Independent evaluators Paul Everett, Tennyson Williams, and Mary Myers conducted the evaluation of SFCG activities in July/August 2004. In December 2004 the report was updated and finalised. The objectives of this evaluation were to study:

1. The role of information in social change
2. The effectiveness, impact and ramifications of alliance-building.
3. How the work of SFCG contributed to four broad programme themes important to society (Corruption, Quality Education, Governance, and Women/Children/Youth)

The evaluators also put forth recommendations for future SFCG activities in Sierra Leone. As a complimentary process, CORD, a local NGO, assessed audience listening of TDS [SFCG] radio programmes in 2002 and 2004. From these surveys, Diane Lindsey, an independent consultant, produced a comparative analysis, the key findings of which are incorporated.

KEY FINDINGS

Of those surveyed in 2004, 89% have listened to Talking Drum [SFCG] programmes on the radio

The Role of Information in Social Change

On the whole, the SFCG programme was seen to have influenced the lives of many individuals and organisations in Sierra Leone, while contributing directly to SFCG's overall goal.

- The inter-connected nature of SFCG's programmes has significantly facilitated nation building by raising national consciousness and encouraging communities and various interest groups to discover a shared interest in common and national issues.
- SFCG has not only disseminated information, but has also put that information into a format people will understand and pay attention to because it is entertaining, independent, and trust-worthy.

*“TDS [SFCG] is seen as a prize to have on our team.”
Nick Webber, CARE Country Director.*

- Community radio stations have provided the platform through which individuals can respond to or comment on local and national issues. This mechanism has strengthened nation building, as those in more isolated regions begin to realise that their problems pertain to others as well. Further, being able to reach illiterate populations in rural communities is vital to achieving a sustainable peace.
- According to the Comparative Analysis, Talking Drum [SFCG] programmes have resulted in tangible changes for children, most notably regarding the rights and responsibilities of the child, child welfare, increased awareness among parents, and the support of quality and continuing education.
- Over one third of survey respondents in 2004 could point to tangible improvements in conflict resolution, community relations and reconciliation as a result of TDS [SFCG] programmes.

Forming Alliances

- SFCG is seen as a genuine player on the local development scene because it behaves as local NGOs would. Rooted in the nuances of local culture and language, SFCG’s alliance building has ensured that its programming is based on an agenda that comes from its constituencies.
- SFCG is ensuring the sustainability of its work by passing on skills and experience to local organisations and institutions that will remain in place when SFCG eventually leaves.
- Due to their association with SFCG, small local NGOs enjoy increased credibility and profile in carrying out their functions.

Recommendation: The alliance building approach allows SFCG to respond to issues as they arise in a flexible manner. Moreover, coalitions present a more credible and powerful front to government on policy matters. The process of skills transfer is a slow one and some of SFCG’s partners are not yet quite ready to stand on their own and will require a partnership with SFCG for another few years. For these reasons, SFCG will do well to continue the alliance building approach in the future and even to expand its partnerships, going into new geographic areas.



The Kanakay Youth Group. In the past, young men like these were hired by unscrupulous politicians to create violence and chaos during elections. With SFCG’s help, they set up this listening station in their slum and were trained as monitors for the 2002 election.

Programme Themes

1. Corruption

- Local radio is increasingly able to hold government officials and other public figures accountable. In several communities small-scale corrupt practices are being exposed, and in many cases such exposure can be linked directly to SFCG’s activities.
- SFCG has managed to maintain constructive relationships with chiefs in the areas in which it works, while managing to indirectly and diplomatically hold them accountable. The work of SFCG has therefore increased understanding and confidence amongst police, chiefdom authorities, and the wider community.
- 2004 survey respondents identified corruption as one of the areas TDS [SFCG] was most effective in covering.

Recommendation: SFCG is valued in introducing grassroots perspectives into the development of the national anti-corruption strategy. The organisation should seek a role in helping to publicise and roll out the government’s strategy once it is published. It would also be beneficial for SFCG to further explore the root causes of corruption, by making a link between what is regarded as acceptable at the personal level, and what is *unacceptable* at the societal level.



A Golden Kid interviews another boy about kids' issues

87% of listeners surveyed reported that Golden Kids News changed their attitudes toward the role of children by increasing their knowledge of issues that affect children.

"TDS [SFCG] helps the police in our new community policing role. We have partnership boards all over the country now. Before, we were masters over the people, but now one of the cardinal changes is that we're trying to come closer to people." Chris Charley, Sierra Leone Police, Freetown.

2. Quality Education

- SFCG radio programming has explored and publicised obstacles to quality education, which in combination with children speaking on air about the advantages of education have proved a powerful tool to promote changes in the culture of schooling.
- The work of the coalition¹ has exposed dubious practices in the payment of school subsidies by proprietors and head teachers, which has been a major disincentive to the teaching profession, leaving the future of thousands of children in the hands of untrained and unqualified teachers. As a result of the work done by SFCG and the coalition regarding the payment of school subsidies, the Ministries of Education and Finance, along with Parliament, have been reviewing payment procedures.

Recommendation: Concentration on this theme is wholly appropriate, given its obvious link with youth, and the fact that education is widely seen by SFCG's audience as the field most riddled with corruption.

3. Governance

- SFCG has contributed to improved governance by assisting in breaking down the old patronage system by increasing the representation of disadvantaged groups in local government and by informing people of their rights and responsibilities.
- Perhaps most importantly, SFCG has nurtured a climate of trust between previously belligerent factions while promoting the inclusion and participation of the whole community in local decision-making. The intensive media coverage of the electoral process resulted in distinct surprises in the election results, with independent and women candidates emerging victorious in political party strongholds and male dominated cultures.
- The dissemination of facts and knowledge through the radio has largely put an end to information supplied by rumour.
- According to the results from the Listenership Survey, 73% of respondents noted community actions that resulted from listening to SFCG radio programmes and participation in events. The responses are diverse and range from improving personal behavior to establishing community projects.

Recommendation: The emphasis within this theme should be on the promotion of accountability and transparency within the decentralisation process. SFCG should continue and strengthen its local language programming and support for local radio, thereby linking local voices into policy planning and promoting informed debate and participation at a local level.

4. Women, Children, and Youth

- SFCG has provided a space for women's voices to be heard on-air and on issues previously thought extremely inappropriate for public discussion.
- *Atunda Ayenda*, SFCG's popular radio soap opera reaching 90% of survey respondents, focuses on youth issues and the reintegration of ex-combatants. It is making a significant contribution to the improved relationship between youth and community leaders.

¹ The Coalition on Quality Education is comprised of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), OXFAM, Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU), and SFCG.



Liberian commercial sex workers in a Sierra Leonean refugee camp sing a song on the importance of using condoms to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

- The relationship between SFCG and youth groups has led to meaningful projects that give a sense of identity and recognition, and a voice that contributes to decision making in communities, while reducing the chance youths will be lured into violence or crime.
- *Golden Kids News* has made great strides in raising awareness around children's and educational issues. The programme is made by children, presented by children, and discusses issues that concern them.

Recommendation: The Youth theme requires particular emphasis, and SFCG should take further action to strengthen youth group participation on governance and livelihood issues.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- SFCG's move away from peacebuilding and towards building of accountability and good-governance is an entirely appropriate strategy at this stage of Sierra Leone's development.
- SFCG now needs to turn its attention to the process of decentralisation, as this will be the most pressing issue in Sierra Leone's development in the coming years. Particularly the need to manage public expectations and improve the capabilities of district councils to meet local needs should be the focus of SFCG's programmes in the near future.
- SFCG should begin developing an exit strategy.
- SFCG deserves ongoing donor support to continue its excellent and necessary work.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The Evaluation Team collected information in seven locations: Freetown, Makeni, Bo, Kenema, Gerihun (Bo District), Kailhun, and Mile 91. The team used an unstructured approach to interview stakeholder focus groups, representatives of organisations, and individuals. Throughout the evaluation, the team took particular care to ensure that a representative view was gained from women, youth, children, and other disadvantaged groups.

Paul Everett, MSc, was the evaluation team leader and is a rural development specialist with over fourteen years experience in overseas development; Tennyson Williams, MSc, is a Sierra Leonean with significant experience in programme design, implementation and management; and Dr. Mary Myers is a development communications consultant specialising in media, monitoring and evaluation, gender issues, communications training, facilitation skills, and participatory methods.

A separate and distinct listener survey was undertaken by CORD, a local NGO in both 2002 and 2004. In each survey, CORD questioned roughly 400 respondents from varied socio-economic background and geographical locations. The primary objective of the Listener Survey was to determine if listening to radio programmes leads to changes in attitudes or behavior, and to find out if there is a connection between particular programmes and listeners' actions.

Survey respondents' visions of TDS' [SFCG's] role in the future were extremely positive and supportive. The most common suggestion was to "keep up" and "continue the same work".

Source: The majority of this document was taken verbatim from the Evaluation of Search for Common Ground Activities in Sierra Leone, August 2004, and from the Comparative Analysis of Audience Listening Surveys in 2002 and 2004. For the full evaluation or listenership analysis, please refer to: www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/evaluations.html