

 *Search for Common Ground***Situation Update**

After a month-long electoral campaign period that saw 33 presidential and nearly 10,000 parliamentary candidates competing for the presidency and 500 parliamentary spots, Congolese citizens voted in the country's first democratic election in over 40 years. The campaign period and voting day were generally peaceful, with isolated incidents of violence, particularly in the Kasai provinces. Media coverage of the campaign was characterised as partisan, despite efforts by the High Media Authority to ensure that the media respected proper ethical standards. This partisanship became even more serious during the three weeks between voting day and the announcement of the results, with manipulation, rumours and divisive language being broadcast by media favoring either Joseph Kabila or Jean-Pierre Bemba. Following the announcement of the elections results (Kabila: 45%, Bemba: 20%), and that there would be a second round, violence broke out in Kinshasa between members of the Presidential Guard loyal to Kabila and soldiers loyal to Bemba, leaving 23 persons dead and 43 injured. The political climate remains tense, as the two candidates swap accusations, particularly provoking the notion of an east-west divide, via their private television and media outlets in preparation for second round voting on October 29.

Meanwhile, the security situation in the East remains fragile, with continued rapes, killings, and abductions by roaming militia groups in North and South Kivu, Ituri and Northern Katanga. However, the process of forming a new army has advanced in recent months, with a total of 14 integrated brigades now created and deployed around the country. Yet tens of thousands of soldiers still remain outside of this process, particularly in the two Kivus.

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Sisi Watoto Reporters Handle Sexual Violence Scoop with Responsibility

In August, SFCG's team of *Sisi Watoto* journalists uncovered shocking evidence of rape and sexual exploitation of a group of 20 underage girls by both FARDC and MONUC soldiers deployed 45 minutes outside of Bukavu. Rather than sending the programme immediately to the radio stations for broadcast, the journalists communicated the information to MONUC, who launched an internal investigation within days of receiving this information. The young *Sisi Watoto* reporters worked intensely for two weeks to ensure that before finalising the story, they had a balanced version in which all sides were represented, including the local authorities, the families of the girls, and MONUC. The story is being followed up, and local associations are working to ensure the safety and protection of the minors to protect them from further exploitation.



Sisi Watoto journalist Elly Mukyungu editing a program in August

SFCG Launches Multimedia Elections Initiative

"They correspond with the actual situation... We use them in our debate programmes... they are informative, especially in this very politicised city." – Radio Moanda staff member on SFCG's elections spot messages.

Full description of activities on Page 2.

SFCG Launches Multimedia Elections Initiative

Aimed at giving accurate and impartial information to address and prevent potential conflicts linked with the electoral process, SFCG launched a multi-media elections initiative. This entailed:

- ◆ **Radio programming:** weekly sketches and roundtables with informed resource people, including those of the Electoral Commission, to clarify and inform listeners on key aspects of the elections process;
- ◆ **Information distribution:** Centre Lokolé (as SFCG is known locally) distributed elections information documents to its 90 radio partners around the country each week during the three months leading up to the election. These included booklets, copies of relevant laws, comic books, posters and stickers.
- ◆ **Audio spots:** A series of seven spots in five languages was produced, aimed at clarifying key messages, (i.e. your vote is secret), guarding against manipulation and fraud, and encouraging active and informed participation.
- ◆ **Comic books, CD and tape distribution:** In collaboration with the Dynamique de la Société Civile, a national civil society network, 500 educators were equipped with 90,000 copies of SFCG comic books (*Votons avec Mopila*—see December 2005 Update), portable radios and 2,000 copies of SFCG radio programmes and spots. These educators distributed these materials to local radio stations and partner associations and played the programmes as part of their nationwide civic education programme.
- ◆ **Regional initiative:** During the elections campaign, in partnership with Panos Paris, SFCG coordinated a week-long reporting trip to Kinshasa by 15 journalists from Burundi, Rwanda, and DRC. The journalists were guided by SFCG to interview ordinary people, authorities, experts and government officials, and produced three joint radio programmes in SFCG’s Kinshasa studio. These programmes addressed pertinent issues related to media coverage, gender and security during the elections period and were broadcast on the journalists’ radio stations in their countries, as well as on many of SFCG’s partner radios stations in DRC.
- ◆ **Conflict prevention in universities:** In collaboration with Congolese and Rwandan members of the Inter-University and Youth Forum for Peace in the Great Lakes, SFCG organised two workshops for 100 university leaders in Goma and Bukavu, just prior to elections, aimed at identifying potential elections-related conflicts and encouraging responsible leadership amongst student leaders (more on p.3).
- ◆ **Post-vote TV spot for peace:** In response to the post-vote divisionism and hate media being broadcast by politically-aligned media, SFCG collaborated with La Dynamique de la Société Civile to produce a 2’30” television spot. The spot consisted of interviews with Kinshasa residents, women and men, young and old, in

“I use them in my programmes, and the NGOs in town use them in their civic education campaigns.” – Quote from Radio Pheonix Université, Lububumbashi, on SFCG’s elections and civic education materials.

“it’s normal that people have voted for different candidates, but that shouldn’t be a source of division or violence between us.”

– Quote from a Kinshasa resident during the television spot.

which people said, in different ways and in Lingala and French: “*it’s normal that we didn’t all choose the same candidate. That doesn’t mean we become enemies...*” and “*if someone tries to use violence against someone that voted differently, that can never be a solution. Violence never works. We need peace.*” The spot was broadcast on five of the most partisan television stations, negotiated by La Dynamique. A Tshiluba version was then produced and broadcast in the Kasais later in the month.

- ◆ **Correspondents network:** Before, during and after the voting day, SFCG put in place a network of 18 correspondents around the country to feed information to its 90 partner radio stations. Correspondents gave daily updates to more than 50 radio stations around the country, including the various ‘radio synergies’ grouping together as many as five radio stations in each locality: Bukavu, Kisangani, Lubumbashi, Mbuji Mayi and Moanda. SFCG journalists, themselves, participated in the Media Synergy in Bukavu, fanning out across the province to report accurately on the conditions within the province together with independent and state-run Bukavu radio stations.

Coming Soon! Participatory Theatre for Conflict Transformation: Manual and Video

SFCG has developed a training manual and video that outline its approach of using participatory theatre for conflict transformation. The manual and accompanying video will be available in English and French for use as training tools throughout the organization and in the fields of conflict transformation and applied theatre.

SFCG IN THE GREAT LAKES

CROSS-BORDER INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE REGIONAL TRANSFORMATION

SFCG: Cross-Border Information around Repatriation

In partnership with the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), SFCG has made arrangements with Burundian and Tanzanian radio stations who will soon begin broadcasting its repatriation radio programme, *Tukutane Tena* (We all meet again). This development expands the existing collaboration with radio stations run by Congolese refugees themselves in the refugee camps in Tanzania. This regional collaboration has a triple advantage, as these radio stations reach well into the primary zone of return in south South Kivu, into Congolese refugee camps in Tanzania, and enjoy the loyal listenership of countless Congolese refugees and residents in Burundi and Southern Rwanda. *Tukutane Tena* provides accurate information on the situation in Eastern Congo and in the settlement communities, addresses the obstacles returnees face, as well as the fears remainees have, while encouraging individuals to make informed decisions about their repatriation. SFCG journalists have begun to further expand the cross-border strategy by feeding information on elections to radio station partners within the Tanzanian refugee camps. As one example, SFCG incorporated Tanzanian refugees' reactions and impressions, as part of its elections coverage, into its weekly *vox pop* program in Lingala. Such developments will continue to help SFCG expand its overall regional strategy.

Youth Leaders Promote Regional Cooperation and Solidarity

In collaboration with SFCG-Burundi, SFCG-DRC sponsored a four-day meeting of the Inter-University and Youth Forum for Peace in the Great Lakes in May in Bujumbura. University and youth leaders from Burundi, DRC, and Rwanda came together to adopt the Forum's guiding rules, a founding charter, as well as to elect a governing committee. Recognizing the sensitivity of the elections context in Congo, the newly elected Forum leadership organized a two-day workshop with students in Bukavu and Goma in July aimed at highlighting conflicts related to elections and the need for responsible leadership among the student communities. Future plans for the forum include an inter-university review, activities aimed at conflict prevention around the remaining elections in the DRC, and other collaboration with media outlets in the three countries. The Forum represents a significant step forward as SFCG develops a youth strategy in the Great Lakes.



Newly elected officers of the Inter-University and Youth Forum at the strategic planning in May

In the Next Issue: Live Regional Youth Radio Programme

SFCG is working with four partner radio stations in Burundi, DRC, and Rwanda (Contact FM-Kigali, Radio Salus-Butare, Radio Maendeleo-Bukavu, and Radio Isanganiro-Bujumbura) in collaboration with the Dutch NGO La Benevolencija to produce a weekly, interactive radio program focusing on youth and their views on and experiences with conflict. The program will be broadcast live in all three countries.

SFCG in DRC is grateful for the support of these donors:



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