

# West Africa Update



## Search for Common Ground

### Situation Update

With the inauguration of Africa's first elected female President in January, accompanied by the country's first democratically elected Congress post-transition, **Liberia** has opened the New Year with the budding hope for a peaceful and democratic future. The same month, however, nearby **Côte d'Ivoire** was rocked by youth uprisings following the International Working Group's recommendation that the parliament be dissolved. While tensions have subsided, both the government and rebel forces remain entrenched, offering little hope of reconciliation. In **Sierra Leone**, the decentralisation process with its establishment and consolidation of local councils is ongoing. But continued economic malaise, widespread poverty, government corruption and mismanagement, along with high rates of unemployment and discrimination against women, undermine the consolidation of peace. Rising tensions around the 2007 elections and politicisation of all government services further threaten the country's fragile stability. Uncertainties with regards to the presidential succession, worsening economic conditions and increased ethnic and military tension remain the reality on the ground in **Guinea**. Small instances of liberalising politics, including the alleged success of the local elections held in December, offer some small hope for democratic change. The recent arrest and upcoming trial of Charles Taylor reinforces efforts at international justice but threatens to embarrass numerous sitting legislators and other actors in Liberia. His incarceration serves to underscore how far Liberia and Sierra Leone have come, but will also resurface tensions and memories from two of the world's bloodiest civil wars. As the trial gets underway, both the price and fragility of peace in the sub-region are ever apparent.

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### Fangamadou: One Step Closer to Community Radio

The Fangamadou community in Guinea currently listens to Radio Moa broadcasts from across the border in Kailahun, Sierra Leone – a community radio that SFCG helped launch in 2005. However, community members are seeking to establish their own radio station where they can address issues that affect the community. SFCG, in partnership with Plan Guinée, has been working to support this endeavour, sending a team of Fangamadou residents to Sierra Leone to visit Radio Moa, as well as Radio Modcar, a children's radio station established by Plan in Moyamba, in February. The delegation met and held discussions with radio staff and management, board members, community stakeholders and local authorities. At the end of the visit the delegation held a roundtable discussion to talk about the visit, their achievements and experiences, as well as the future plans for the Fangamadou community radio.

#### Talking Drum Studio in Conakry Launched

SFCG opened its newest radio studio in the Kipé-Ratoma area of Conakry, Guinea in December and began developing spot messages on the protection and promotion of women's and girls' rights. The first set of messages was aired in late February and throughout March on Radio Kissidougou.

The discussion was broadcast on Radio Moa, which enabled the Fangamadou community to also listen. The roundtable broadcast served both to inform Fangamadou's residents about the prospects for establishing their own radio station and to convey to the district residents in Kailahun that their radio station is admired in other communities.



## United in Our Differences: New Ivorian Radio Program Launched

In February, SFCG in Côte d'Ivoire launched its newest program, *Unis dans Nos Différences* (United in Our Differences), a news and features program that deals with life in communities throughout Côte d'Ivoire. To date, coverage has focused on conflict management and peaceful coexistence in the towns of Trogui and Danané, the aftermath of the January youth uprisings in Guiglo, and explanation of the World Bank's selection of target zones for its work in western Côte d'Ivoire. Episodes have featured community reconciliation efforts in Yamassoukro, updates from UNHCR on its information campaign, including interviews with Liberian refugees in Danané, and SFCG's conflict resolution trainings for its partners in Trogui.



SFCG Correspondent conducts an interview for *Unis dans Nos Différences*

SFCG received calls from individuals in Korhogo, Bouaké, and San Pedro who expressed appreciation for the newest Talking Drum Studio program. Several people have requested that *Unis dans Nos Différences* be re-broadcast, particularly the segment focusing on the January events in Guiglo. In this segment, SFCG gave voice to all actors, including the government authorities and the head of the Jeunes Patriotes. Radio ONUCI (UN radio in Côte d'Ivoire) used this particular segment in one of its February news programs, and OCHA has requested that the segment be incorporated into episodes of *Main dans la Main*, a weekly thirty-minute program co-produced with OCHA informing the audience on the humanitarian situation in their localities, as well as local efforts toward social cohesion.

## SFCG Supports UNHCR's Mass Information Campaign

Expanding its regional programming on Liberian refugee repatriation issues, SFCG-Côte d'Ivoire began working to support UNHCR's Mass Information Campaign in late February. *Situation Report*, a weekly 20-minute program devoted to refugee issues and produced in SFCG-Liberia's Talking Drum Studio in Monrovia, began broadcasting on five stations in Côte d'Ivoire in March. Incorporated into the program are short drama skits in local languages (Krahn, Gio, and Mano as well as Liberian English) about the repatriation process as well as potential conflict issues that refugees may experience when they return home. SFCG-Côte d'Ivoire staff collected interviews with refugees living in Danané, Tabou, and Guiglo and sent them to Liberia for use in the program.

SFCG's media work with refugees is complemented by outreach activities. In March, a regional team of SFCG staff organised a "Go and See Visit" for four refugee representatives from Niela Camp in Guiglo. During their three-day visit, the delegation visited towns and villages in Grand Gedeh and Nimba Counties, assessing the security situation as well as services available. Their impressions were captured on video, and a 10-minute video of their trip, including interviews with the representatives and with Liberian residents, will be produced and released to UNHCR in April. SFCG-Liberia's drama group immediately followed up this visit with a tour of five Ivorian towns. The group performed live in refugee communities, providing information about the repatriation process as well as conditions in home communities.

### *SFCG/IA/ICG Partnership Explored in Guinea*

From January 18-28, a consortium team comprising representatives from SFCG, International Alert (IA), and International Crisis Group (ICG) undertook an exploratory mission in Guinea to look at how the three organizations might work together in developing a safe space and promoting social dialogue in Guinea. The team met with international community members, Guinean politicians and government ministers, civil society members, radio station staff, and heads of NGOs in Conakry and Kindia.



## Peace Festivals Help Reconcile Communities in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire

**S**FCG-Liberia and its partners have helped eight communities in Bong, Grand Gedeh and Nimba Counties, three areas particularly polarised by Liberia's civil conflicts, to establish Peace Committees that work to restore community stability, and cooperation. Through exchanges and conflict resolution interventions, the Peace Committees build communication, understanding, and trust among Liberians, including between the Krahn and Mano/Gio as well as between the Mandingo and Mano/Gio.



Members of the Gblor-Dialah Peace Committee participate in the Ganta Peace Festival.

On December 22 and 23, 2005, SFCG, its partners and the Peace Committees organised a peace festival in Ganta to promote collabora-

tion and strengthen social relationships. The event welcomed Gio, Mano, Krahn, and Mandingo residents from the three counties, bringing former adversaries together to celebrate peace. The festival featured local musicians, cultural groups, and drama groups from all three counties, pairing local Gio, Mano, Krahn, and Mandingo artists together with other artists from around the country, including Monrovia. The Krahn musicians who performed were touched and impressed by the welcome they received, remarking that they had had reservations about performing in a mostly Mano/Gio part of the country.

*One Gio woman remarked during the festival, "For a Krahn woman to dance on stage in Nimba County without fear, it means the war is really over."*

As part of its community outreach project in Côte d'Ivoire, SFCG has been providing trainings for local peace activists and committees to help them effectively intervene in conflicts in their communities. Two communities particularly at risk are the Yacouba and Burkinabé. On March 8, 2006, SFCG and the Trogui Peace Committee organised a peace festival to celebrate the progress made towards reconciling the Yacouba and Burkinabé. The event brought together the Yacouba and Burkinabé communities, as well as representatives from 18 villages in the surrounding area, the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI), Licorne forces, and the World Bank, as well as the mayor of Danané and more than ten traditional chiefs. Marked by speeches, traditional dancing, and a communal meal, the day reaffirmed the groups' commitment to reconciling their past wrongs and recognized the tremendous efforts made by the Trogui Peace Committee.

The success of the Peace Festivals has created new prospects for peace for the Gio/Mano, Krahn, and Mandingo, and for the Burkinabé and Yacouba by:

- Breaking down prejudices, stereotypes, and stigma;
- Encouraging solidarity and cooperation and fostering trust among diverse groups, including ex-combatants, security personnel, local authorities, and community members; and
- Celebrating peace through the arts and enhancing cooperation among artists.

## The Democracy and Governance Program: A New Strategic Approach

In December 2004 SFCG-Sierra Leone launched its two-year Democracy and Governance Program with support from USAID intended to *strengthen democratic governance in Sierra Leone*, targetting the areas of Kono, Kailahun, Koinadugu, and Tongo Fields. SFCG staff working on the project held a review meeting in Freetown from February 10-13 to discuss the progress made to date, identify challenges that arose during the year, develop approaches to overcome these challenges and take advantage of new opportunities in the year ahead. One of the major challenges identified at the meeting was the crisis in confidence between communities and their leaders. This lack of confidence in political leaders on the part of local community members, as well as a general disconnect between them, potentially undermines the country's political, social and democratic reforms. As the second year of implementation begins, SFCG will address this crisis through confidence-building measures such as radio dialogues and weekly discussion programs involving councillors, youth and women, as well as continued community outreach.





Listen to SFCG/Talking Drum Studios' radio programs  
on the Internet at [www.talkingdrumstudio.org](http://www.talkingdrumstudio.org)



## Building Solidarity among Women: Africa's First Elected Female President

In order to build solidarity among women in the sub-region, SFCG staff and partners from Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire mobilised for the inauguration of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on January 16. SFCG's partner MARWOPNET (The Manor River Women's Peace Network) organised a caravan of women leaders in the MRU, which began in Conakry and wound its way through Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, arriving in Monrovia to celebrate with women from across the sub-region. SFCG invited its strategic partners, including OFACI (Organisation of Active Women in Côte d'Ivoire), Women's Forum (from Bo, Sierra Leone), and CONAG-DCF (Guinea National Committee for Women's Rights and Citizenship) to participate. In support of the inauguration events, SFCG hosted a live public screening of the ceremony at the Ministry of Gender and helped to broadcast the ceremony on three television stations, which were viewed by Liberians in restaurants and bars throughout the capital. As part of the agreement, the broadcast scrolled SFCG-produced messages of hope and support for Liberia's democratic future. SFCG filmed the ceremony and incorporated the footage into videos produced for UNHCR to air in refugee camps. Leveraging the historic significance of the inauguration for women everywhere, the video footage was also developed for use in the International Women's Day celebrations that took place on March 16 in Sierra Leone and Liberia.



SFCG's Talking Drum Studio staff film the Presidential Inauguration on January 16, 2006

### ***Strengthening Participation and Inclusion: Liberia Strategic Planning***

On January 31 and February 1, SFCG-Liberia staff met in Gbarnga for a strategic planning session to review the program's overall goal and identify new strategic priorities in the country's post-elections environment. The participants agreed on a new goal for the overall program: *To strengthen participation and inclusion to consolidate peace in Liberia.*

***We've moved! Our new location is: 16th Street Sinkor, Cheeseman Avenue, Monrovia, Liberia***

## Bike Riders Association: A Case Study of SFCG's Interventions

Since the end of the war in Sierra Leone, many ex-combatants have been sustaining themselves by transporting people on motorbikes in areas where public transportation is limited; many have banded together to form the Bike Riders Association (BRA). The BRA performs a useful service, but the riders have experienced opposition from other drivers and local authorities. SFCG has been working with the BRA and local stakeholders since 2003 to help reduce tensions and help the riders integrate into their communities. In January, SFCG commissioned an assessment of its activities. The study found that SFCG interventions had been critical both in reducing tensions and in leading to observable behavioural changes among the bike riders: they dress and behave better due to a sense of professionalism, and accident rates have decreased. In order to address the bike riders' feelings of marginalization and discrimination by local authorities, SFCG has facilitated the creation of taskforces and stakeholder committees through which bike riders and other affected parties can address their grievances and disagreements productively and peacefully. The case study is available upon request.



A meeting of the BRA in Kailahun

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