

DR Congo Update



Search for Common Ground

Situation Update

The Democratic Republic of Congo wrapped up its historic 2006 election year with the installation of a democratically elected president in December. Joseph Kabila won 58 per cent of the vote in the second round of the elections while his opponent, Jean Pierre Bemba, won 42 per cent. Kabila's support mainly coming from the eastern provinces, Bemba's in parts of the west, and the central Kasai provinces divided between the two candidates.

The elections process was characterized by overall security in most parts of the country, with the exception of Kinshasa, where violence erupted. This included the burning of a part of the Supreme Court building during deliberation on elections contestations filed by Jean Pierre Bemba.

The year also ended with significant progress in the demobilization and army integration processes, with more than 100,000 soldiers demobilized, and 50,000 others choosing to be integrated into the new army. However, there are still thousands of Congolese soldiers who have not gone through this process, notably in the Kivus, Ituri and northern Katanga province.

Repatriation continued during the latter part of the year, after suspensions during the second round of elections. Approximately 40,000 Congolese returned, primarily from camps in Tanzania to South Kivu province. A tri-partite agreement signed between the DRC government, UNHCR and the Zambian government opened up the diplomatic door for beginning the facilitated return of approximately 80,000 refugees from Zambia early this year.

Multiple issues face the new government, in particular on a provincial level where for the first time Congolese have elected provincial authorities. Consolidating these structures, as well as those of the new government, national assembly and senate are immediate challenges that need to be faced to make the government operational.

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SFCG DRC coverage of Thomas Lubanga Trial

In November, SFCG journalist Rycky Mapama covered the first appearance at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague of Thomas Lubanga, the leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) militia. Mapama was one of only a handful of Congolese journalists invited by the ICC to cover this historic case to inform the Congolese audience. Over three weeks, SFCG sent out daily dispatches, transcribed interviews and a weekly recorded overview from Rycky to our 90 partner radio stations. Mr. Lubanga is charged with three counts of war crimes stemming from his activities in the province of Ituri, including the abduction and exploitation of children for use as soldiers.

Search for Common Ground in DRC is a programme of Search for Common Ground, an international NGO working in the field of conflict transformation. For additional information on SFCG in DRC, go to the SFCG website, www.sfcg.org and the Centre Lokole website, www.centrelokole.org.

Artists as peacemakers

There is the town or village in the DRC without a theatre troupe. Drama and creative arts are a natural part of Congolese society. For this reason, SFCG has strongly invested in collaborating with theatre professionals to enable them to become 'peace actors'. Using a methodology called "Participatory Theatre for Conflict Transformation", this approach builds on various participatory techniques and links it with a conflict transformation analysis. To share these methodologies, and create regional solidarity amongst socially engaged actors in the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi, SFCG organised an 8-day regional festival in Bukavu in September, entitled *Pamoja Tucheze* (swahili for 'Let's play together.')

The festival welcomed 38 actors and comedians from 18 theatre troupes from Rwanda, Burundi and throughout the DRC and featured training workshops and performances. Trainings included conflict transformation, as well as the use of various techniques of participatory theatre, including 'forum theatre', 'playback', 'invisible', 'debate', and 'theatre of the oppressed'. Participants from Kigali, Kinshasa, Bujumbura, Lubumbashi, Kisangani and other towns and cities worked in groups, going out to learn about conflicts from the public in Bukavu. On the basis of these real-life conflicts, the actors developed three different participatory acts which were all performed in 4 neighborhoods of Bukavu during the last two days of the festival.



An audience member participating in a theatre performance during the September festival.

"When we told people in Rwanda that we were going to spend ten days in Congo, everyone shouted at us, saying that we were taking unreasonable risks and even risking death. But with our stay in Bukavu, I realize that all of that was a stream of lies, and that between artists, there are no borders."

~ Aimable Twahirwa, a Rwandan participant in *Pamoja Tucheze*

The festival enabled artists who had held negative stereotypes of each other, due to the war, to unite around their common identity as artists seeking lasting peace in the region. For Rwandan, Burundian and Congolese alike, the experience broke down prejudices and stereotypes and reinforced their common, heart-felt identity as actors committed to working for peace in the Great Lakes.

SFCG is taking on a pioneering role in developing appropriate theatre tools for peacebuilding. In November, Theatre Coordinator Don Tshibanda was invited by the 'In Place of War' project of the University of Manchester's Applied Theatre department,

to share experiences on SFCG's use of theatre in conflict and post conflict zones. In early 2007, Search for Common Ground will be launching a print and video training manual on *Participatory Theatre for Conflict Transformation* in English and French that will be available on the web at www.sfcg.org.

See http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/drcongo/drcongo_participatory.html for a video of SFCG-DRC's participatory theatre work for conflict transformation.

SFCG launches training program for Congolese army

In December SFCG launched its first training for members of the newly Integrated Brigades of the Congolese army (FARDC). This training aims to equip soldiers and officers with knowledge about human rights and conflict transformation to enable them to better protect and collaborate with civilians. With support from the UNHCR, SFCG developed a highly innovative and interactive curriculum, comprised of pre-recorded audio sketches in Lingala and Swahili, and posters. Actors trained in participatory theatre techniques make up the 8-person team of SFCG trainers, as well as a demobilized officer and a military magistrate. The training was made possible through a collaboration with the UN peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUC), who invited SFCG as one of the civilian partners in its ongoing pilot training for the new integrated brigades. At the same time, SFCG is developing a training project in direct collaboration with the FARDC to reinforce their own capacity to raise awareness of the troops on human rights and conflict transformation, and have the skills to better collaborate with civilians. As the Congolese army are the number one perpetrators of human rights abuse, according to the MONUC Human Rights Section's reports, this training is a critical and strategic part of SFCG's work to build lasting peace in the DRC.



SFCG's Leon Baroani leading the training for 750 members of a Integrated Brigade in Ituri.

Radio soap opera addresses issues of army integration and protection of civilians

SFCG updated the messages for the second 6-month season of its popular soap opera *Tomorrow is a New Day*, incorporating information and messages related to the army integration process and the importance of improved collaboration between civilians and the military. This programme is produced in Lingala and Swahili and is broadcast on all of SFCG's 90 partner radio stations. In preparation for the second six-month series, SFCG writers undertook research through field visits and telephonic interviews.

During a visit to Kaziba (between Bukavu and Uvira in South Kivu), the *Tomorrow is a New Day* team interviewed 60 people and learned that :

- 74% said they listened to the soap opera;
- 78% were able to name at least one of the characters in the soap opera;
- 56% held a point of view on how the characters in the soap opera should evolve in relation to the challenges they are facing;
- One male interviewee said that he identified personally with the character of Grace, who is a young girl long-associated with armed groups and now facing stigma and rejection as she tries to rebuild her life. "Since following this program, I try and make more efforts to come out and show my talents to help others to overcome stereotypes they have of me"; and
- One interviewee was proud to share the same name as the lead character, Olivier, an demobilized adult who heads a training centre for demobilized soldiers. The real life Olivier is in the same position, and testified to the support he feels by listening to the soap opera.

New Regional Live Youth Radio program

Every Saturday afternoon, youth of Rwanda, Burundi and eastern DRC are tuning in to a new live youth radio programme, broadcast simultaneously on four radio stations in the three countries. Entitled *Génération Grands Lacs*, or GGL for short, this innovative new regional dialogue uses ICT technology including webstreaming, FM transmitters and cell phones, to create a weekly encounter through radios, across borders, with the youth of the three countries.

Launched by SFCG in October with the support of USAID Rwanda, this radio program addresses issues of conflict facing youth in the region, through an hour-long phone-in programme which includes pre-produced drama and magazine segments. The programme is a collaboration between four popular radio stations in the region (Contact FM-Kigali, Radio Salus-Butare, Radio Maendeleo-Bukavu, and Radio Isanganiro-Bujumbura, with production and monitoring collaboration by the Dutch NGO La Benevolencija. Listener clubs in the three countries are used for monitoring and an outreach component is to be launched in early 2007. The programme is also broadcast by internet, reaching out to thousands from the Great Lakes diaspora.



Laurent KASSINDI, a journalist from Radio Maendeleo in Bukavu, hosting the first program in the Kigali studios of Contact FM.

Subjects addressed so far include: how to address stereotypes and prejudice; understanding the role of history in perpetrating conflict; and dialogue between youth and political authorities. Youth participate live in the programme by telephone, email and sms, like Alice from Butare who wrote in to the first program: "Bravo Génération Grands Lacs. It's about time that the youth of this region get over all these negative stereotypes and build a better future for the region!"



Tune in to *Generation Grands Lacs*
each Saturday at 14h00 GMT+2
via the internet at:
<http://www.contactfm.rw>

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