

# DR Congo Update

## Search for Common Ground

### Situation Update

The transition to peace and democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains precarious. While progress has been made with the electoral process, resulting in more than 20 million registered voters, logistical challenges have led to delays. The constitutional referendum planned for 18 December will be a test of the Independent Electoral Commission's organisational capacity, and a measure of the degree of confidence in the process underway.

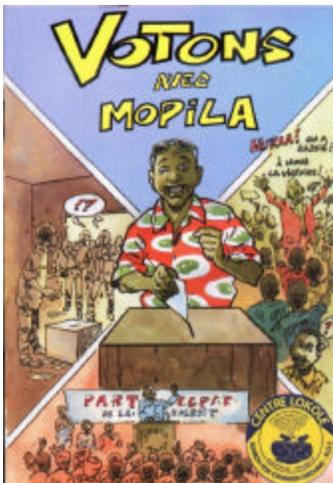
The unification of a national army remains hampered by obstacles, including a resistance to the brassage process, and the continued failure to pay soldiers, resulting in looting and raping by members of the Congolese Armed Forces. The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process has been slow and poorly managed in recent months. The reintegration of returning refugees from Tanzania into impoverished communities in South Kivu presents potential conflicts related to land and property ownership. With just over six months to go before the end of the transitional government, political interests within and outside of the government who see elections as a threat to their power base are further undermining the transition.

**Two years and more than 100 programmes after initiating the children's radio programme *Sisi Watoto* ('We, The Children'), SFCG's youth production team was reinforced with the training of five new young journalists, all less than 18 years old. An evaluation conducted by a team of Columbia University graduate students led to the following findings (among others)**

- 14% of ex-child combatant listeners surveyed indicated that *Sisi Watoto* had directly motivated them to leave armed groups and demobilise;
- 95% of all respondents became more interested in children's rights after hearing a subject on *Sisi Watoto*;
- 93% of listeners have learned that ex-combatants can restart their life;
- 56% have learned to approach child soldiers.

### Supporting the Electoral Process with Comics

SFCG produced 15,000 copies of a comic book in French and Swahili, explaining the electoral process and the need for citizens' vigilance to combat fraud. The comic book is based on SFCG's popular weekly dramatised radio sketch, *Mopila*, produced in five languages and broadcast on SFCG's 80 stations around the country. The comic book was distributed through a network of local civic-education partners, aimed at reaching zones with minimal access to FM radio. SFCG also contributed, in collaboration with the Independent Electoral Commission, to the publication of an abridged guide to the proposed constitution. 500,000 copies of this manual were produced and distributed countrywide, as well as being posted on the website of the Electoral Commission. In the lead-up to the constitutional referendum, SFCG produced three radio spots in five languages calling upon Congolese voters to participate in the referendum, and reminding them of the anonymity and individual choice of their vote.



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- Reuniting Estranged Neighbours through Football
- Theatre transforms how Communities in Eastern DRC deal with Conflict

## Football Tournament in Minova Reunites Estranged Neighbours

Following the June 2004 takeover of Bukavu by dissident Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese soldiers, relationships between Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese and other tribes degenerated into exclusion and violence. In Kalehe, South Kivu, this meant the virtual cessation of relations between the two communities, impacting on the trade and livelihood of the plateau and coastal communities.

*"[SFCG's support] is exactly what we need to bring the community together again" – the local Administrator in Minova*

A series of visits and meetings organised by Search for Common Ground (SFCG) with small groups from both sides was followed by a meeting of delegates of both sides at a neutral venue. The meeting was the first chance for the two sides to share concerns

about their broken relationship, and to map out a strategy to restore relations. One month later SFCG organised a football tournament with teams from both communities, accompanied by tons of fans, in an historic reunion. The football tournament was received well by both the population and authorities. "This is exactly what we need to bring the community together again," commented the local Administrator, clearly moved by the reunion. "Your support is so important and we are fully behind this work. We hope that it will go on and on."

## Theatre transforms how Communities deal with Conflict

August witnessed the introduction of Search for Common Ground's (SFCG's) latest conflict transformation tool in the DRC: participatory theatre. This innovative, culturally appropriate tool entails training actors with basic conflict analysis and transformation skills, enabling them to identify, understand and address a conflict through interactive theatre. Based on the real-life conflicts that the actors discover through exchanges with the community, a short play is developed. It is acted out scene by scene, following which the audience members are invited to join the actors on 'stage' and 'replay' the scene, this time correcting the attitudes and behaviours that foment the conflict. "Your theatre is what is happening in our lives every day," commented one woman after one of the SFCG performances. "Afterwards, I was able to go to the person with whom I have a conflict and talk to her. Thanks." The Administrator of war-torn Walungu, South Kivu province said: "These actors know how to find out our problems and then present them so that we can find solutions. I haven't seen this before. They should come here more often."

SFCG trained three South Kivu theatre troupes, who presented their acts more than twenty-five times in four territories of South Kivu province. Themes addressed in the participatory theatre included: corruption, rumours, land conflicts, accusations of sorcery, female oppression and refugee reintegration.



One of the participatory theatre troupes at work in Kalehe.

Participatory theatre is an initiative under the banner of SFCG's most popular soap opera radio programme, *Jirani ni Ndugu* ('My Neighbour is My Brother'), broadcast in all the zones covered by SFCG's theatre troupe. A 12-minute video in French illustrating this technique is available on request.

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