

Search for Common Ground in the Democratic Republic of Congo Programme Overview

COUNTRY CONTEXT

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is struggling to implement a transition process that was initiated in mid-2003, seeking to end years of violent conflict. While progress has been made towards the necessary political, security, and social reforms, much remains to be done and numerous challenges stand in the way. Laws on nationality, elections, and others still need to be passed. Sporadic fighting in eastern DRC, most notably in the Kivus and Ituri, continues. Although MONUC, the UN peacekeeping operation in DRC, is over 10,000 troops strong, many areas in the East remain insecure, including along the Rwanda and Burundi borders. The fragile transition process is at a critical juncture. If it fails, the potential for regional conflict to re-ignite seems high; if it succeeds, however, it could help resolve some of the deep-rooted mistrust and tension among groups and communities throughout the country and contribute to regional stability.

SFCG APPROACH IN DRC

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) in the DRC, known locally as *Centre Lokole*, was established in 2001 to support communications around the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, the cornerstone of the peace process that began in Lusaka, Zambia in 1999. *Centre Lokole* (a *Lokole* is the Congolese drum used in the jungle to gather people together) has since expanded so as to enhance the prospects for a more inclusive and viable transition process and contribute to the development of a sustainable peace in the DRC. SFCG approaches programme development in the DRC with flexibility in order to respond to emerging problems and needs, with the understanding that programmatic focuses may change in the fluid and uncertain political environment of the DRC. Through a variety of mutually enhancing methods, including radio and other media programming, theatre, capacity building and training of local media, local peace actors and others, and the sponsoring of various cultural activities, *Centre Lokole* plays an integral role in strengthening and expanding the efforts to build and sustain peace in the DRC. SFCG has found that the media can have an especially important role as a channel of communication between groups in such a vast country lacking basic infrastructure.



SFCG aims to improve the population's knowledge of the transition, as well as to encourage informed participation in local, regional and national decision-making that affects the future of the country. SFCG also seeks to reduce conflict in the East by equipping residents to better manage their differences and build relationships between groups that have been in opposition for years. With offices in Kinshasa and Bukavu, *Centre Lokole* works closely with local partners as well as other international organisations throughout the country to implement its various programmes and to link local grassroots efforts with the national transition process.

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

Enhancing informative and participative communication around the transition process. *Centre Lokole* works to accomplish this objective through radio production, other media activities, and the training of media personnel. *Centre Lokole* produces three radio programmes to support this information campaign. The radio programmes are broadcast by a variety of stations across the country, including community radio stations, as well as government stations and the UN station. *Arbre à Palabre* ("Dialogue Tree") is a 30-minute weekly magazine/roundtable programme, aired in French, and designed to inform and educate the Congolese population on the transition process. The show features discussions among government officials, parliamentarians, analysts, and NGO representatives around topics such as the transitional constitution, the presence of former armed groups in DRC, impunity and reconciliation, and elections. *Mopila* is an educational soap opera that deals with the same themes as *Arbre à Palabre* and is produced in Kiswahili, Tshiluba,

Lingala, and French. Finally, *Boyoka pe biso* (“Listen to us as well”) is a weekly programme produced in Lingala that provides opportunities for people to express their opinions on specific issues related to the transition process. By providing viewpoints from residents in various areas in the DRC, the programme reinforces linkages between the different parts of the country to support development of national identity.

To complement its radio messaging around the transition process, *Centre Lokole* uses a variety of other media outlets such as its production and dissemination of the Mijas information bulletin in South Kivu; distribution of significant UN and government documents on the web and to NGOs and partner groups; the use of posters and leaflets to reinforce radio messaging; and creation of comic books and participatory theatre activities.



During this sensitive period when the political process can be derailed by sensational or inaccurate media reports *Centre Lokole* also organises workshops and trainings that engage media professionals in common ground journalism techniques, peace journalism skills, and other creative techniques to cover critical issues.

Contributing to the reduction of tensions and the development of sustainable peace in Eastern Congo. Through its office in Bukavu, *Centre Lokole* uses radio programming, cross-border dialogues, awareness raising campaigns, and capacity building for local peace actors to help consolidate peace in the East. This work helps to ensure a population that is better equipped to resolve local tensions and promotes communities to act in more harmonious ways, including preparing children for demobilisation and reintegration and local peace actors to become more able to diffuse local conflict.

Jirani Ni Ndugu (“My Neighbour, My Brother”), which is broadcast in Swahili, is a widely popular conflict resolution soap opera that encourages constructive relations among communities in the East. Other radio programmes targeting the East focus on: highlighting contributions to peace made by organisations, groups, or individuals (*Bâtisseurs de la Paix*—“Peacebuilders”); tensions in the Kivus (*En Parler, C’est Agir*—“To Speak About it is to Act”); demobilisation and reintegration of former child soldiers (*Sisi Watoto*—“Giving Voice to Congo’s Children”); and other pressing, relevant local issues. *Sisi Watoto*, a weekly magazine produced by children and for children, recently won first prize in the features category for the UNICEF and One World Radio competition on radio programmes for children.

To help further raise awareness in the East, *Centre Lokole* uses comic books, theatre, and cultural and sporting events to increase social harmony through cultural activities. *Centre Lokole* also develops capacities of local peace actors through conflict resolution trainings and providing networking opportunities with other peace leaders. Finally, to address Congolese refugees living in neighbouring countries, *Centre Lokole* works to promote cross-border dialogue among refugees and those who remain in the East, accomplishing this through radio programmes and listening groups that encourage dialogue amongst the refugees and their communities of origin.

GREAT LAKES POLICY FORUM (GLPF)

In addition to SFCG’s ongoing projects in DRC, SFCG actively supports the Congolese transition by keeping the Great Lakes region on the agenda of policy makers and the NGO community. SFCG, with assistance from partner organisations, organises the Great Lakes Policy Forum in Washington, DC and the Forum Européen pour les Grands Lacs in Brussels. The forums provide an opportunity for representatives of government and non-government agencies, diplomatic corps, and international organisations to focus on issues pertaining to the Great Lakes region.

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, see the Centre Lokole website, www.centrelokole.org, or the SFCG website, www.sfcg.org, or contact the Sub-Saharan Africa Programme, 1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20009, USA; phone (+1)(202) 265-4300; fax (+1)(202) 232-6718; e-mail search@sfcg.org.

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