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## SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND IN ANGOLA PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Search for Common Ground in Angola (SFCG) was established in August 1996. SFCG uses community peace-building, as well as Track I and II approaches, and media projects to support sustainable peace and national reconciliation during the country's post-conflict period and beyond. By working with Angolans to address the root causes that led to war and continuing conflict, SFCG is helping transform Angolan society from a culture of violence to one characterised by coexistence, security, social justice, and popular participation.

### Country Context

In 2002, the end of the civil war in Angola opened opportunities for national recovery and reconciliation. However, a cold peace remains, where widespread fighting has ceased but where positive moves toward reconciliation on the national level and noticeable progress in community development is rare. Sporadic political violence is still threatening the stability, and the media continues to need to professionalise in order to provide accurate and timely information to Angolans. Further, memories of Angola's 1992 elections, which plunged the country into civil war, as well as the country's limited progress on voter registration, have created anxieties surrounding the upcoming elections. Issues central to the Angolan transition to a peaceful society include elections; human security; land rights; reintegration; and, interwoven with the latter two, the return of refugees and ex-combatants.

### SFCG Approach in Angola

SFCG's approach in Angola focuses on opening space for dialogue and action between parties in conflict to engage in cooperative problem-solving processes. To do so, SFCG a) integrates media, Track I and II approaches, and community-based activities, b) provides opportunities to turn conceptual knowledge into demonstrated skills, and c) builds effective links between people, communities, and different sectors of society.

SFCG goes beyond strategies that target only one sector of society or one element of a conflict. SFCG's staff facilitates cooperative community-based activities, and reaches out to provide new skills to groups such as emerging civil society leaders, women, journalists, and youth who show strong leadership potential. SFCG then brings these diverse groups together, and helps them recognise commonalities and develop effective relationships. According to a 2004 external evaluation, SFCG uses an "excellent methodology, based on concrete examples that are normally taken from Angolan everyday life, which do not require a high level of education to understand, making it practical and within reach of everyone." The evaluation continues, "[w]ith over thirty evaluations conducted over the past ten years the team leader has not witnessed any other programme where results have been so rapidly positive and where change was induced immediately as a result of the training activities."<sup>1</sup>

### Programme Objectives

#### ▪ Strengthen Social Cohesion

SFCG works with local civil society partners in eight provinces in Angola to build their capacity to design and implement community peace-building projects. This initiative also aims to foster a stronger relationship between the government and civil society. Last year, SFCG partner women's group Ekolelo achieved success in facilitating community dialogues between opposing groups resulting in collaborative community development initiatives. Community workshops, focused on agriculture development, enabled practitioners, government officials, and locals to work together to plan context-appropriate programmes. SFCG organised various conflict resolution workshops, involving government and local leaders and specifically future generations of Angola's security forces. Further, SFCG sends out media correspondents to gather information on the concerns of those in rural communities, which is then integrated in the national dialogue via radio broadcasts on SFCG partner stations.

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<sup>1</sup> p. 37; Go to <http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/angola2004.pdf> for the full evaluation by C. Bugnion, D. Ntoni-Nzinga & J. Kambowala (February 3, 2005).

### ▪ Mitigate Conflict during Resettlement

There are many tensions in Angola involving returnees and communities that relate to land, property, tribalism, language, and political affiliation. SFCG seeks to ease these tensions through community dialogue, community development projects, conflict resolution workshops, media programmes, and cultural activities.

One aspect of SFCG's community development project aims to equip and empower local protection networks to reach out to recently returned Angolans with information on human rights and conflict resolution. To this end, SFCG holds community lectures and presentations in returnee communities and transit centres and organises Solidarity Festivals that emphasise common cultural heritage of residents and returnees, drawing audiences of thousands. SFCG utilises local theatre groups to perform dramas that provide information on returnee protection and peace building. After the performances, community dialogues are held between government officials, traditional authorities, residents and returnees on resettlement issues.

If the security situation for returnees and residents alike is to improve, Angola's security forces must learn to behave as a professional force. SFCG has had great success in some of the target areas in reaching out and training the security forces in non-violent dispute resolution and human rights. Feedback collected at the end of training sessions found that those trained have gone through significant changes in attitude. In the coming year, SFCG will continue to work with the security forces to ensure that changes in attitude become expressed as changes in behaviour.



SFCG and local partner visit a Malange community

### ▪ Empower Angolan Political Participation

As Angola gears up for elections, SFCG is undertaking several initiatives to mobilise and educate civil society on the electoral process. One example is the Regional Civil Society Forum, which brought together fifty representatives of community-based associations and organisations from eight provinces to discuss the role of civil society in post-conflict Angola resulting in a promising civil society network that crosses the rifts that many years of warfare have left in society. This is the first time that civil society from across the country has had the opportunity to discuss their activities and role in shaping the nation's future.

Media helps link grassroots efforts to the broader public dialogue, making information available to a wider audience including those normally excluded due to illiteracy or geographic isolation. To engage Angola's youth in the political process and give them a voice in the country's transformation, SFCG produces *Baza Madie*, a radio program produced in SFCG's *Studio N'Jango*. *Baza Madie* uses a variety of formats such as drama skits, spot messages, music and popular entertainment, news features, 'vox pops', and interviews to explore a broad array of issues. *Studio N'Jango*, prior to the elections, will utilise radio programmes to reinforce national civic participation campaigns as well as join several Angolan musicians to produce a CD, free for distribution, to promote civic education and peace building messages

### ▪ Promote Peaceful Elections Process

As official electoral regulations are finalised in preparation for the poll, SFCG's goal is to help susceptible groups like youth to recognise political manipulation and avoid any potentially violent conflict. To this end, SFCG is currently bringing youth leaders together with at-risk youth to form youth networks across Angola. SFCG is also committed to promoting awareness of citizen voting rights and responsibilities, election procedures, and potential sources of conflict.

*SFCG-Angola is a program of Search for Common Ground, an international NGO in the field of conflict transformation. For additional information, visit our website, <http://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](mailto:search@sfcg.org).*