



SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND IN BURUNDI

Program Overview

In early 1995, shortly following the genocide in Rwanda and in the midst of increasing ethnic tensions and violence in neighboring Burundi, Search for Common Ground launched a series of media and community projects in Burundi aimed at reducing ethnic violence and supporting peacemaking efforts. We believe that we can have the greatest impact with a multi-dimensional approach, and we currently run four in-country programs aimed at ethnic reconciliation and decreasing levels of distrust and violence: a radio studio, a women's peace center, a youth project, and an integration initiative.

RADIO (STUDIO IJAMBO)

Responding to the need for balanced and anti-inflammatory broadcasting to counter "hate radio" in the Great Lakes region, Studio Ijambo was established in Burundi in March 1995. Studio Ijambo is an ethnically balanced team of journalists producing radio programs to promote dialogue, peace, and reconciliation. Their programs examine all sides of the conflict and highlight the points that can unite, rather than divide Burundians. The Studio Ijambo slogan, "Dialogue is the future," captures the essence of this mission.

Studio Ijambo proved to be a very effective method of promoting dialogue and peacebuilding in a region where most of the population's only access to outside information is the radio. With programming that is jointly produced by journalists from both ethnic groups trained in common ground journalism techniques, Studio Ijambo has developed a reputation for credible, unbiased reporting. In addition to its current affairs and news programs, Studio Ijambo produces a wide mix of documentaries, soap opera, discussion, and youth programs.

Examples of these programs include *Heroes*, which is a documentary highlighting stories of cross-ethnic solidarity among Hutu, Tutsi, Batwa, and Ganwa people; *Iteka N'Ijambo*, a current-affairs program focusing on human rights issues; and *Our Neighbors, Our Family*, a soap opera depicting the complexities of conflict through the relationship of two neighboring families of different ethnic backgrounds. Most recently, the Studio launched two new programs: one deals with the complex issues of land and repatriation of hundreds of thousands of refugees; the other explores subjects related to justice in the quest for reconciliation. Current work includes setting up a new broadcasting facility for an independent radio, Radio Isanganiro (Crossroads Radio), the staff of which is comprised of Studio Ijambo journalists with years of conflict-resolution journalism experience.

WOMEN'S PEACE CENTER

The Women's Peace Center was established in January 1996 to support Burundian women's efforts in becoming key players in the peacebuilding and reconciliation process regardless of ethnic, regional, religious, and generational differences. The Center promotes dialogue between Burundian women of diverse backgrounds and provides access to tools for organizational development, providing support to women to play an active role in peacebuilding.

Toward the fulfillment of this goal, the Center organizes training sessions in organizational development and conflict resolution, addresses women's issues through radio programming, and facilitates communication among women's associations. Since its foundation in 1996, the Center has played a key role in developing and supporting a network of hundreds of women's associations that are involved in rebuilding the country, exemplifying positive inter-ethnic solidarity, and mobilizing their constituencies for peace. In 2002, the Women's Peace Center began working in conjunction with the Friends' Peace Teams to alleviate the social and personal problems associated with post-conflict trauma.

YOUTH PROJECT

The Youth Project was established in October 1999 as a natural extension of Search for Common Ground's commitment to working with at-risk populations who often take part in violent conflicts as a result of political manipulations. Shortly after its establishment, the Youth Project supported the *Gardons Contact* project in partnership with the local JAMAA association in order to reduce instances of ethnic violence perpetrated by young people.

Toward the fulfillment of its goal, the Youth Project organizes football tournaments with teams of youth from different ethnic and geographical backgrounds, workshops in conflict resolution techniques, facilitated dialogues, peace concerts, humanitarian relief work conducted by at-risk youth in cooperation with relief organizations, and retreats for former perpetrators of violence.

In 2001, the Youth Project began working with university students to reduce instances of extreme tension between the two main ethnic groups on campus that have fueled the national conflict for many years. This year, the project oversaw the production of a two-hour movie describing the descent of a group of urban youth into extreme intercommunal violence in the 1990s and their subsequent rehabilitation. Most recently, the youth team began a series of exchanges for the "guardians of peace," who are, in fact, civilian militias composed of armed youth obligated to patrol their communities at night and even join the military in direct combat.

INTEGRATION INITIATIVE

This initiative aims to maximize the synergies among SFCG projects as they expand both geographically and in scope. The most significant manifestation of the Integration Initiative has been the opening of new "antenna" offices in Kamenge, Ngozi, Ruyigi, and Makamba provinces. The antenna offices were initiated by the Women's Peace Center and have since moved to incorporate Studio Ijambo, Youth Project, and Integration Initiative branches.

As part of the Integration Initiative, SFCG has also taken the lead in forming a coordination structure for all local and international efforts in reconstruction and peacebuilding. After several meetings and dialogues, SFCG has now become the base for the "Consultative Committee for Peace and Reconciliation Activities," which meets twice a month to discuss ways for coordination among different actors working for peace in Burundi. And, in line with the adage "*pas de paix sans pain*" (no peace without bread), the Integration Initiative seeks to encourage targeting economic development aid towards communities of displaced people, residents, and returning refugees in the process of reintegration.

GREAT LAKES POLICY FORUM

In addition to our ongoing projects in Burundi, we also actively support the Burundian peace process by keeping the Great Lakes region on the agenda of policymakers and the NGO community in Washington, DC, and Brussels. With our partners, we organize "Great Lakes Policy Forums," where representatives of government and non-government agencies, diplomatic corps, and international organizations meet monthly to discuss issues pertaining to the Great Lakes region.

Since 1995, the Burundi program has received major funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development as well as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, UN Development Programme, the UK Department for International Development, the Government of Japan, and the Open Society Institute.

SCG in Burundi is a program of Search for Common Ground and the European Centre for Common Ground, international NGOs working as partners in the fields of conflict resolution and media production. For additional information, see our website, www.sfcg.org, or contact the Central & Southern Africa Program, 1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20009, USA; phone (202) 265-4300; fax (202)232-6718; email search@sfcg.org.

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