



2009 COMMUNITY RADIO AND DEVELOPMENT IN SIERRA LEONE AND LIBERIA REPORT

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has been working in Liberia since 1997 and in Sierra Leone since 2000. SFCG's Talking Drum Studio (TDS), with offices in Monrovia and Freetown, has established its brand across the region as a leader in peacebuilding through community radio programming and related activities. The overall goal of SFCG and Talking Drum Studio in the region is ***to strengthen sustainable peace by educating and empowering communities through community radio.*** SFCG and TDS have been achieving this through a variety of radio projects, including news shows, soap operas, and community outreach projects.

In June 2009, Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studios undertook a learning evaluation of four community radio stations in rural Sierra Leone and Liberia. The evaluation, which was designed to assess the relationships between drivers of development and community radio stations, specifically focused on the following areas:

- Still struggling to achieve meaningful development in a post-conflict setting and
- Current radio programming for its impact on local development processes
- Perceptions and uses of local radio.
- Radio stations were evaluated in their capacity as independent development agents with an eye towards ongoing peacebuilding functions.

This evaluation drew on four weeks of field-based data collected and was conducted through programming and schedule analyses, individual stakeholder interviews, broad-based listener surveys, focus group discussions, and close analyses of radio stations' management, staff, and operations.

COMMUNITY RADIO PROGRAMMING PROVIDES AVENUES OF DIALOGUE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Evidence from all four locations considered in this study revealed meaningful relationships between radio and civil society organizations (CSOs). Trade unions, women's groups, youth groups, religious associations, teachers unions, and special interest groups all use radio to communicate important messages to respective memberships, improve their organizational profiles, voice their concerns to the community, and mobilize community-members to change attitudes and behaviors. Through their use of radio, CSOs experience improved efficiency and development outcomes relative to their own goals. In addition, many CSOs see radio as their primary tool for raising community awareness on issues important to them and influencing the public dialogue.

COMMUNITY RADIO PROGRAMMING IS AN AGENT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Overall, it was determined that locally-produced, community-issues based programming, particularly serving as a platform for community voices, is exceedingly popular with audiences of community radio stations. Sensitization and awareness programs, also popular, have shown a demonstrable impact on attitudes in behaviors among listeners. In addition, local language programming is highly appreciated..

COMMUNITY RADIO PROGRAMMING IS AN AGENT FOR PEACEBUILDING

Community perceptions at all locations indicated that community radio plays a major role in reducing violent crime in communities. Specifically, community members at all locations noted a reduction in

rapes and gender-based violence due to radio programming. Similarly, in three of four locations strong evidence suggested radio has had a significant impact in changing attitudes towards GBV and rape.

Music, storytelling, and dramatic programming (entertainment) was specifically cited in all communities as yielding a significant positive outcome with regard to peace. Micro-communities around farms and rubber plantations, for example, noted that entertainment programming provides a needed release from daily tensions and distraction from hardships.

Furthermore, community radio stations in all locations were described as active participants in diffusing potential violent crises. For example, in Kambia, Radio Kolenten works with local farmers and herders as well as governmental leaders to prevent violent conflict regarding disputes over rice production and cattle grazing. Such conflicts were once a common source of bloodshed in the late rainy season but no longer escalate. Similarly, at Radio Life in Zorzor, radio staff and locally-produced programming is credited by many (including the local Police Commander) with actively diffusing previously violent tensions between Mandingo and Lorma ethnic groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increased station awareness of development projects across the broadcasting area;
2. Dedicated monitoring and reporting activities related to announced, ongoing, and completed government-led and INGO/NGO development projects;
3. Heightened role in aggregating and communicating community development needs to governmental and NGO development agents, with the aim of influencing the process of development and ultimately increasing community ownership;
4. Regular (daily) unique local news broadcasts in English, Local English, and Local Languages including pre-produced elements (i.e. interviews from the field, phone interviews with drivers of development etc);
5. Working professional relationships with drivers of development in the region, particularly with national, county, and local government;
6. Greater political independence, particularly in Sierra Leone; and
7. Increased activities dedicated specifically to fostering and maintaining sustainable peace.

Source: This document is a summary of, and taken directly from “Community and Radio and Development in Sierra Leone and Liberia” by Simone Grant, Cyrus Ahalt, Lisa Inks, and Immanuel Wolff. A copy of this document can be acquired at <http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/sierra.html>, or by contacting Nick Oatley, Director Institutional Learning at Search for Common Ground at noatley@sfcg.org

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