



**SFCG-DRC**

# **YOUTH STRATEGY**

## 1. CONTEXT

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a youthful country, with 65% of the population under the age of 25.<sup>1</sup> These young citizens grow up in a context of conflict, where they are often seen as agitators or victims. However, most young people in the country do not engage in violence, but rather lead peaceful lives that provide the best hope for transforming conflict. For instance, the *Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding*<sup>2</sup> state that “young people’s leadership and roles in preventing and resolving conflict, violence and extremism are rich resources essential to achieving sustainable peace. Young men and women are valuable innovators and agents of change, and their contributions should be actively supported, solicited and regarded as essential to building peaceful communities.” Recent efforts by civil society organizations, including youth-led organizations, international NGOs and the United Nations have helped raise awareness of this issue and increased coordination and collaboration of actors actively engaged on youth and peacebuilding issues. However, efforts remain incipient to date: while youth development is a topic of growing attention in international and national dialogues, peacebuilding and the role youth play in this process often remains disconnected from these discussions.

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) therefore intends to follow the guiding principles on young people’s participation in peacebuilding, and place youth-led initiatives at the forefront of our programming, and empower young people to be influential peacebuilders in their communities. We are uniquely placed to do this as we have a longstanding engagement in the DRC, and operate across the country with a reputation for employing an effective and creative approach to peacebuilding that holds particular appeal for young people. It should be stated from the outset that SFCG takes great care to respect the diversity of young people. They should not be seen as one homogenous bloc, but rather must be recognized as varying in terms of age, gender and socio-economic background among other categories. The approach we outline in this strategy takes great care to consider the differing needs and desires of among others young men and women, teenagers and young adults, urban and rural communities, and those with differing levels of education or opportunity.

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1 USAID DRC Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2015 – 2019

2 These were issued in 2014 by the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development’s (IANYD) Working Group on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding, co-chaired by the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and Search for Common Ground (SFCG). They are available here: [www.sfcg.org/guidingprinciples](http://www.sfcg.org/guidingprinciples)

## 2. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

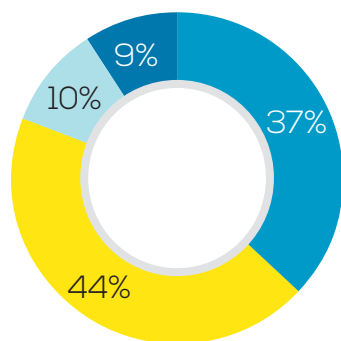
Following the aforementioned principles, which state that youth actors should be among the leaders in peacebuilding in their communities, the challenges listed here have been developed in consultation with various young peacebuilders in the DRC. While the challenges young people face vary across different regions and individuals, SFCG and our youth counterparts have noted some of the following overarching challenges that young people who have grown up in this situation of protracted conflict face:

### CHALLENGES

- Long-term violent conflict has created widespread fear and animosity between different groups in society;
- Economic difficulties have led to a lack of proper education or employment opportunities for numerous young people, in particular young women and girls, which makes youth more susceptible to manipulation to engage in violence, and less able to promote peace;
- Dismissal of young people as unimportant or unknowledgeable, and exclusion from local decision-making and the wider political process, makes young people more likely to approve of and engage in political violence, and less likely to support peace agreements;
- Marginalization and discrimination against young women and widespread use of gender based violence means that their voice is not listened to, and thereby diminishes the major role they can play in creating a lasting peace; and
- Lack of coordination and collaboration between youth actors reduces the potential impact they can have in peacebuilding.

**GRAPH 1.** This table, from an evaluation of youth organizations conducted in Goma in 2015, shows that a large proportion of young people feel that there are shortcomings in youth cooperation.<sup>3</sup>

### WHICH STATEMENT BEST REFLECTS THE DYNAMICS BETWEEN YOUTH ORGANISATIONS IN GOMA?



- Youth organizations have common objectives and work together to build peace
- Youth organizations have common objectives **BUT DO NOT** work together to build peace
- Young people are united, but youth leaders attempt to divide them
- Young people are divided and compete against one another to achieve their objectives

3 SFCG. 2015. Unite to Build Peace Baseline Study.



**FIGURE 1.** Young people can also play a part in peace processes. Here a young man signs an agreement prepared by two communities who had been arguing due to disagreements over school management in their area. Young people felt the impact of this tension more than most, and concurrently were a part of the solution to the problem.

SFCG and various youth actors have also found that young people have certain strengths that make them one of the greatest hopes for addressing the challenges they and society at-large face:

## OPPORTUNITIES

- In many areas, numerous young people and youth associations are very active in working to better their society;
- Young people have a creative and visionary outlook and can imagine a future where change is possible, as well as the desire, will and energy to strive to make that change a reality;
- Young people are able to mobilize and influence one another, and thereby play an influential role in society;
- Young women are viewed as being natural mediators and particularly committed to finding non-violent resolutions to conflict, and therefore can play an important role as educators and as a voice supporting peace; and
- Government, business and local communities regularly seek out young people to achieve their aims, and therefore young people can place themselves at the nexus between governance, business and social work, and harness and link these domains to build peace.

### 3. BEST PRACTICES

SFCG has consulted with local youth actors to ask them what their greatest accomplishments are, and also to hear about their needs for the future. These actors mentioned in particular their participation in large cultural festivals and conferences (which provided a chance to meet, learn and plan with one another) and projects they had implemented to bring communities together across ethnic and national boundaries. However, while young people did believe they could be a force for change, **they also acknowledged that many young people first needed inspiration in order to become active.** SFCG, working with key youth actors, intends to provide this inspiration, in part by promoting positive role models and detailed later on.

“*Young people can contribute to change in society, but they first need to be changed themselves, via outreach that helps them to change their behavior.*” Young man active in a youth organization.

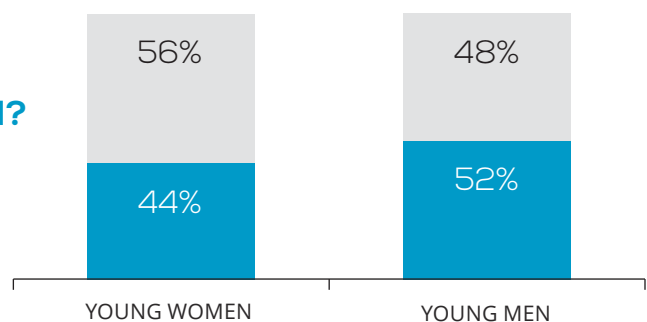
Local youth actors also discussed the **important role young women can play in peacebuilding**, as educators and mediators, but acknowledged that currently young women have not been able to fully take up this role. In general, youth actors identified discrimination based on traditional roles and responsibilities as a primary obstacle to women’s participation, which has also led to a lack of self-esteem among many young women, further heightening the problem. SFCG tackles this problem by developing programs that give women a voice and provide role models, thereby creating a virtuous cycle where young women contribute to peace, and thereby inspire other young women to do the same.

“*The participation of young women [in youth organizations] is low because many of them underestimate themselves, or are underestimated by men.*” Young women active in a youth organization.

**GRAPH 2.** These results from an evaluation of youth organizations conducted in Goma in 2015 show that whereas a slight majority of young men work in a youth organization, only a minority of young women do<sup>4</sup>.

#### DO YOU WORK IN A YOUTH ORGANIZATION?

NO  
 YES



4 Ibid.

In terms of SFCG's own work with youth, or that target youth, we have found that **the greatest success lies in engaging young people in stimulating cultural activities** that provide them with a chance to learn from one another, and a role where they can contribute to society. We have for instance produced radio programs focusing on youth like "Great Lakes Generation", "Duel of the Young Democrats" and "Sisi Watoto", which are youth-led programs that provide young people with a voice, and contribute to an awakening regarding social ills and solutions among youth.



**FIGURE 2.** A young journalist working for the Great Lakes Generation radio program.



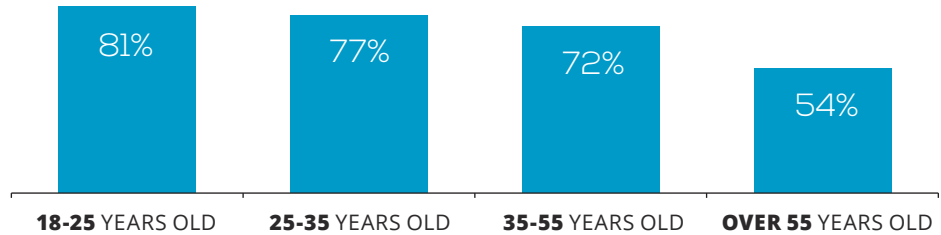
**FIGURE 3.** Young students take part in a musical competition aiming to promote positive relations between young men and women.

“I used to have a great deal of prejudices regarding marriage and ethnicity, believing that I should not marry someone from another tribe, but via Great Lakes Generation and Tosale’Ango [an SFCG TV program] I have really changed, and now am actually engaged to someone from another tribe. I have become inspired and now write poems about these issues that I share with other youth.” Young radio listener.

**Young people are also key actors in many of our other activities that engage society as a whole** – such as cultural and theatre activities, local conflict resolution and peacebuilding committees, or in town-hall forums and score card processes to improve the provision of social services. In all of these activities we have found that young people who were at first seen by their societies to have little to contribute, were in fact some of the most powerful drivers of change. This has been an important finding because there is of course a danger that adults might not look kindly on youth engagement and activism.

### PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO STATED THAT THE WORK OF LOCAL COMMITTEES WAS "GOOD" OR "VERY GOOD"

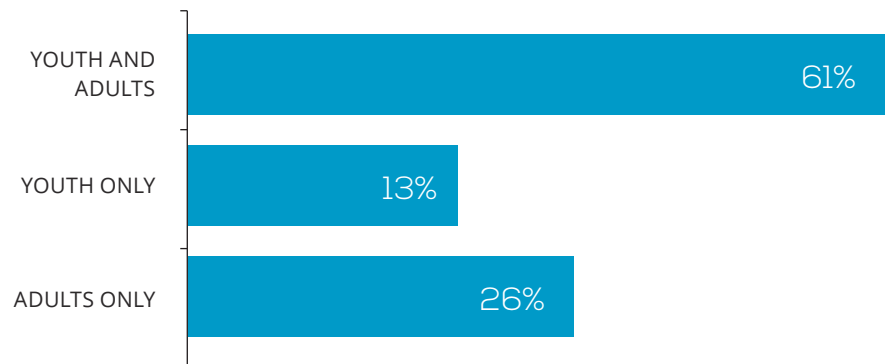
**GRAPH 3.** An evaluation of a peace-building project conducted in 2014 in Rubaya, North Kivu province, showed that younger respondents were more positive about the work of local committees. These committees were primarily put in place by the project to conduct conflict resolution work.<sup>5</sup>



However, we have found that adults are generally very positive about our work with young people, noting positive changes in their behavior and in the community as a result. Indeed, we feel that it is important to also engage adults when working primarily with youth.

### WHAT CATEGORY OF PEOPLE ARE MOST INVOLVED IN THE PEACEBUILDING WORK OF THE LOCAL YOUTH COUNCILS?

**GRAPH 4.** In evaluations of our programming, we have found that it is important when working with youth to engage with adults as well, as shown by the results from this evaluation of a peacebuilding project conducted in 2014 in Rubaya, North Kivu province.<sup>6</sup>



Furthermore, this multi-pronged approach allows SFCG to reach different groups of young people. For instance, we have found that young rural women do not listen to the radio as frequently as their peers, and are therefore less familiar with our programs. However, these young women do take part in our larger cultural activities, which we schedule to occur at times and places that allow them to participate.

<sup>5</sup> SFCG. 2014. Strengthening Social Cohesion in the Mining Sites around Rubaya Final Evaluation.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid



**FIGURE 4.** SFCG conducts participatory theatre across the country. The format is accessible for a wide cross-section of society, including young men and women who are among the primary participants.

## 4. OUR PLAN

SFCG’s multi-year vision for the DRC includes a strategy to “Support citizens and structures in the promotion of positive models that follow the Common Ground approach and lead to conflict transformation throughout the DRC.”<sup>7</sup> SFCG will apply this strategy to our work with young men and women by helping them demonstrate the positive and important role they play, and create positive role models for young people in the DRC to be peacebuilders. Based on the above, SFCG in partnership with local youth actors has developed the following strategy.



**FIGURE 5.** Promoting positive role models is a key element of SFCG’s work. Above we see the transformation of Ruffin, from former child soldier, to child reporter with SFCG, to customs official today. His story inspires other young people to create and be the change they want to see in the world.

7 [www.sfcg.org/programmes/drcongo](http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/drcongo)

## 1.1 PRINCIPLES

SFCG will follow the *Guiding Principles* adapted to the DRC context in collaboration with local youth actors. In particular, SFCG intends to:

- See young people as actors and partners in peacebuilding, and not merely as victims or beneficiaries;
- Focus on initiatives led by young men and young women;
- Be sensitive to gender dynamics;
- Create sustainable programs for youth involvement in peacebuilding; and
- Be innovative and be a thought-leader.

The first four above-mentioned principles are found within the *Guiding Principles*. The fifth reflects SFCG's own approach to constantly innovate and develop new methods that advance the field and impact of peacebuilding work across the globe. Most importantly, we believe that peace is a process that involves engaging local communities. One of our core global principles is that to "To shift a conflict situation, we have to make a long-term commitment to work in partnership with local people from various sectors of their society."<sup>8</sup> This principle suggests working closely with young people, as they will be SFCG's enduring partners as a part of our long-term commitment to transforming conflict in the DRC.

## 1.2 THEORY OF CHANGE AND OBJECTIVES

SFCG's work is informed by an overriding theory of change regarding youth engagement, which holds that ***if we can shape the role of young people in conflict contexts so that they contribute to peace, then they can shape the dynamics of the whole conflict.*** This inspires a more specific theory of change related to our programming, that states that if SFCG effectively supports young people as peacebuilders by amplifying their efforts and voices, and young people increased their collaboration through strategic and measurable peace dividend activities, *then* young people will alternate the dynamic of local and national conflicts; because they will have the skills, networks, role models, and adult-support to be effective and engaged peacebuilders.

Therefore, SFCG-DRC in partnership with small and large youth-led local and national organizations, will work collaboratively to strengthen coordination and accountability to young people in the DRC and to help facilitate a greater role for them in peace building processes across the country.

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8 <https://www.sfcg.org/core-principles>

SFCG-DRC will adopt the internationally recognized “Guiding Principles on Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding” as a tool to achieve the following objectives:

- To foster unity and collaboration between youth actors in peacebuilding in the DRC;
  - To train and enable young people to be engaged as partners in various peacebuilding processes, to share knowledge and develop a community of learning and practice, so that they can train and enable each other;
  - To develop key initiatives with youth that have measurable peace dividends locally (such as providing education, sports, recreational and cultural activities as an alternative to violence); and
  - To collect and amplify voices and successes of peace dividends locally, nationally and internationally.
  - To identify and evaluate innovative and promising approaches to youth participation in peacebuilding and share results widely with youth associations, national government, and international community
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## 5. HOW TO GET THERE

In order to achieve our objectives, SFCG will develop programs that address the challenges listed above:

- Long-term conflict leading to fear and animosity;
- Lack of opportunity leading to manipulation and violence;
- Exclusion from decision-making leading to political violence;
- Discrimination and violence against young women undermines a great source of peacebuilding;
- Lack of collaboration between youth actors reduces their impact.

SFCG addresses these challenges in three primary ways: the first is developing stand-alone projects to address a specific youth issue; the second is mainstreaming our youth approach throughout our country program to address these issues; and the third is to develop a community of learning and practice among youth-led and youth-focused actors to come together to collectively improve practice and policy. On the one hand for example, SFCG has developed a pilot program called “Unite to Build Peace”, that brings together youth actors in Goma to design and implement their own peacebuilding initiatives. In the Ruzizi Plain, we will begin working with local partners to put in place

a cultural center where young people from different communities can come together and explore alternatives to violence and division. On the other hand, SFCG mainstreams our youth approach via monitoring and evaluation of the impact of all of our programs on youth, integrating lessons learned in working with youth into our existing programming, and developing new projects that build on previous experiences and draw from this strategy.

“I used to not want to spend more than three minutes on the other side of the bridge that separates us...but now, thanks to the intercommunity dialogues that SFCG organized here, for all questions that divide us and used to lead to adhesion to armed groups, we instead speak openly and honestly to one another.” Former youth combatant from Pinga, North Kivu Province.

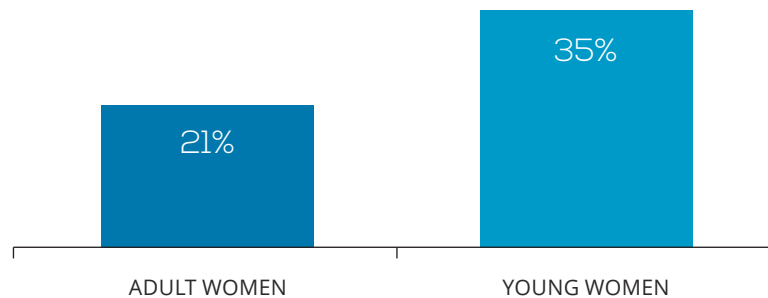
Furthermore, SFCG promotes a community practice by supporting youth-led research on youth peacebuilding and then publishing the results so that youth actors can draw lessons and develop responses; and also by creating links between different youth actors via networks of youth actors, notably those operating out of the cultural centers mentioned above, that serve as an informal advisory board for SFCG. For all of these approaches, SFCG takes care to respect the diversity of youth. Our actions are designed to appeal and be effective for young men and women, teenagers and young adults, urban and rural youth, and youth with differing levels of education and opportunity. For instance, certain activities are organized to target and support young women in particular, such as radio programs and listener groups for women around sensitive peacebuilding issues, or leadership training and large cultural activities that target young women.

**FIGURE 6.** SFCG comic books have proven to be popular across the board in the DRC. Here a group of young women read a comic book that deals with gender-based violence in schools, which is a major concern in the country.



Lastly, SFCG will capitalize on our media expertise by maintaining strong links between our youth and media activities. Young people are a key audience for SFCG in terms of numbers and as a target group. Young people are open to taking initiative and risks and are thereby more open to hear and act on messages of social change. As described in the next section, SFCG collects and analyzes data on youth peacebuilding, including from listener and viewer feedback on our media programs, and presents the results to our media team when they develop programs. This allows SFCG to tailor our programming for different target groups. We have found for instance that women respond less often with feedback than men do, but that younger generations of women are beginning to close this gap, as shown in the graph.<sup>9</sup> This provides cause for hope for the future and the effectiveness of radio as a tool for engaging young women.

### PERCENTAGE OF LISTENER FEEDBACK THAT COMES FROM WOMEN



**GRAPH 5.** SFCG receives hundreds of listener feedback messages per month. The results here show that young women are more engaged in radio programming than adult women.

On another note, SFCG will also encourage youth actors to share their peacebuilding success stories with us, either in written, audio or video format. SFCG will then broadcast these stories online, on radio or on TV, sometimes in partnership with existing initiatives doing similar work.<sup>10</sup> This gives young people a chance to inspire one another and via feedback from audiences, to start on a conversation on the work that different youth actors are carrying out.

Lastly, one of the main initiatives that SFCG plans to develop is to provide support for youth cultural centers. Young people across the country have expressed a desire for these cultural centers, seeing

<sup>9</sup> Further analysis of the listener feedback allows us to tailor our programming to target different categories of youth. In particular, we have found that via their feedback, young people express a greater degree of interest in partnering with SFCG than adults do, with most requests for partnerships coming from young people. However, this interest also comes primarily from young men, rather than young women and men. In general however, the analysis affirms that programs that target youth and/or young women in particular – such as Uishe na Upende, a radio program on healthy relationships between adolescent men and women – do receive greater feedback from those groups.

<sup>10</sup> These initiatives include Wajenzi wa Amani or Waza.

that they can deliver numerous benefits. These cultural centers can:

- Provide young people with a space where they can come together and develop their ideas, share their experiences, combine their efforts, and coordinate their activities.
- Create a physical space around which peacebuilding work can coalesce, where all young people can go to take part in conflict transformation activities, and where peace movements can emerge and grow.
- Allow young people who have grown up in conflict to socialize together, at times across dividing lines, and to heal the trauma and overcome the fear and mistrust that has been created by conflict.
- Via the multitude of activities that will be on offer, help young people to find a passion and a place in society, and thereby find alternatives to violence.
- Deliver young leaders and those who are most active a platform to inspire and be role models for other youth, in particular those who are often excluded from social and cultural activities, and provide trainings in a peer-educator format where young people can influence other young people.

SFCG will tailor our support to the cultural centers for each area where we work. Some locations do not currently have a cultural center, whereas others have a center that is inactive or that is not frequented by certain segments of the community.<sup>11</sup> SFCG will identify passionate and engaged youth leaders to partner with us in supporting cultural centers, and to develop the centers so that other youth leaders become involved and so that the activities of the centers also reach the ordinary youth in a community and provide for them as well. SFCG will always seek to partner with existing local initiatives where possible, and can bring them access to technical expertise, multimedia materials, innovative ideas for peacebuilding, fundraising opportunities, mentoring and coaching.

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11 Cultural centers are often primarily frequented by educated urban young men. SFCG will ensure that cultural centers are open to all groups by conducting outreach and having opening hours and activities that are attractive for a wide range of young people in society.



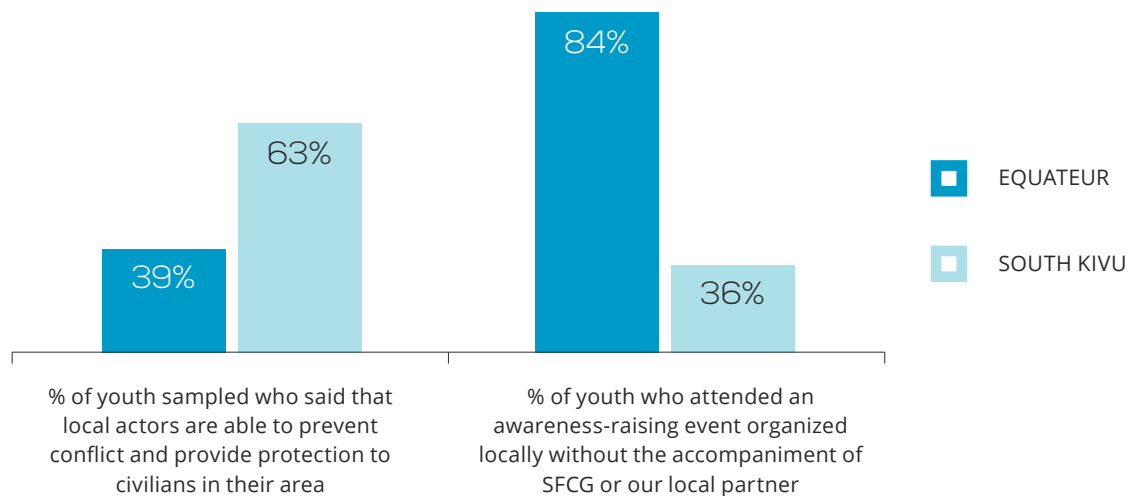
## BARAKA CULTURAL SPACE

In Baraka, South Kivu Province, SFCG supported a cultural space that resembled a youth drop-in. An evaluation of the program found that “when youth come together in a space where they can play, learn and create, magic happens...The Cultural Space in Baraka not only helps to integrate youth returnees with local youth, thus diminishing violent conflict. The Space contributes to build up their capacities, empowers them to take matters into their own hands, teaches them social skills as well as literacy, computer skills and English as a second language. It was wonderful to witness young returnees from Tanzania’s refugee camps, teaching local youth how to read and write in English, where they had learned the language as refugees. This happened almost by accident, a beautiful example of youth taking matters into their own hands when a Space offers them the means to meet, innovate and create, and a team of experts to facilitate their development.” Furthermore, it was found that there was a “willingness from the youth in Baraka’s Cultural Space to become more empowered. With the right support from SFCG, youth could actually create their own organization and continue running the Cultural Space independently from SFCG.”

*Results from the 2010 SFCG Children and Youth Program Review.*

Regarding the need to tailor our approach to different areas, the results of an evaluation SFCG conducted in 2014 on a project supporting the peaceful return of Congolese returnees in the DRC, confirmed what might seem like an obvious statement. The evaluation affirmed that young people in different areas felt differently about local peacebuilding capacities and engaged in peacebuilding work in different ways. In South Kivu province, a majority of young people felt that local actors have the ability to prevent conflict and protect civilians in their communities, whereas only a minority felt the same way in Equateur province. However, a far higher proportion of young people attended awareness-raising events that were organized locally without the accompaniment of SFCG or our local partner. These results show the varying levels of confidence in local peacebuilding actors, and in engagement in locally-organized activities.<sup>12</sup>

## CONFIDENCE AND ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL PEACEBUILDING WORK



**GRAPH 6.** Results from the final evaluation of a project supporting the peaceful return of Congolese returnees in the DRC.

12 SFCG. 2014. *Supporting the Peaceful Reintegration of Congolese returnees in the Equateur and South Kivu provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*.

To make this vision a reality, SFCG has developed a three-step process:

<b>STRATEGY</b>	
<b>STEP 1: FRAMEWORK FOR REFLECTION TO COLLECT INFORMATION</b>	
Development of draft SFCG youth strategy in consultation with key youth actors	First quarter 2015
Analysis of SFCG youth-related programs	First and second quarter 2015
Youth-related peacebuilding research	First and second quarter 2015
<b>STEP 2: STRATEGIC REFLECTION SESSIONS WITH YOUTH ACTORS</b>	
Finalize youth strategy	Second quarter 2015
Reflect on innovations made in the previous phase and brainstorm on future innovations and results to achieve in the following phase	Final quarter 2015
<b>STEP 3: PROGRAMMING TO BE DEFINED WITH YOUTH ACTORS</b>	
Develop and implement specific youth programs, notably cultural centers	Second to fourth quarter 2015
Mainstream youth considerations in all SFCG programs	First to fourth quarter 2015
Share guidelines and model for uniting youth for peacebuilding in the DRC	Third quarter 2015
Bring together peace, government, security, development, and humanitarian actors with youth actors to discuss youth peacebuilding	Third quarter 2015

## 6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

SFCG's Youth Program works with our Design, Monitoring and Evaluation (DME) team and Institutional Learning Team (ILT) to monitor and evaluate the results of SFCG and other actors' work specifically as it relates to youth and peacebuilding. This is done by:

- Supporting youth-led research;
- To develop and test youth friendly frameworks that capture youth impact on peacebuilding rigorously;
- Producing annual and quarterly reports detailing SFCG's results in working with youth;
- Analyzing youth peacebuilding research conducted by other actors and disseminate widely
- Using the results from our evaluations and other research to design and shape our work, via reflective practice sessions with SFCG staff and youth actors; and
- Maintaining communication between SFCG, youth actors, and other interested parties on the results of our evaluations, to develop a community of practice.<sup>13</sup>

It should be noted that SFCG places great importance on documenting and sharing emerging best practices and lessons learned as they relate to the variety of young people in society, which are among others young men and women, urban and rural youth, teenagers and young adults, and young people with differing levels of education or opportunity. A central component of our implementation and monitoring and evaluation strategy is a consciousness that youth should not be treated as one homogenous group and inclusion of young people at all stages is critical to successful peacebuilding.

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13 SFCG will leverage DME for Peace ([www.dme4peace.org](http://www.dme4peace.org)) – which provides peacebuilding professionals with a platform to share tools, methodologies and findings – in order.