
BURUNDI PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In early 1995, shortly following the genocide in Rwanda and in the midst of increasing ethnic tensions and violence in Burundi, Search for Common Ground launched a series of media and community projects in Burundi. The program seeks to strengthen the capacities of all segments of the Burundian society to manage their conflicts collaboratively, promote dialogue within diversity, and facilitate coexistence and reconciliation.

Our approach links grassroots activities with national dialogue. Radio programming produced by Studio Ijambo, and aired through partner radio stations, stimulates national dialogue around critical issues and creates opportunities for building peace and resolving conflicts without violence. Community-based initiatives engage divided communities in facilitated dialogues, cultural activities and joint projects to strengthen relationships and stimulate the search for solutions. These grassroots efforts often surface unmet needs and generate positive alternatives that can contribute to the larger national dialogue via the radio programming. Accurate and timely information, opportunities to participate in national and communal dialogue, relationships built on joint activities and a creative pursuit of constructive collaboration offer people an increasingly precious commodity - hope.

MEDIA – Studio Ijambo and Partners

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. Our programs examine all sides of the conflict and highlight the points that can unite, rather than divide Burundians. Studio Ijambo has a reputation for credible, unbiased reporting. In addition to its current affairs and news programs, Studio Ijambo produces a wide mix of documentaries, radio drama, discussion, and youth programs.

Examples of these programs include *Heroes*, which is a documentary highlighting the stories of people who risked their lives to save people from another ethnic group *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. The Studio recently 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.

The program's new partner, Radio Isanganiro (Crossroads Radio), is Burundi's newest independent radio, launched by a local association comprised of current and former Studio Ijambo journalists with years of conflict-resolution journalism experience. Radio Isanganiro can be heard through Burundi, in parts of Tanzania, Congo, Rwanda and in attempt to reach the diaspora, by the Internet. Other partner stations include, Radio Bonesha, RTNB, African Public Radio, Radio Kwizera, Radio Maendeleo and Radio Ivyizigiro

WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS – A Grassroots Movement for Peace

Burundian women have been excluded from the peace process despite their valuable interventions at the community level. To expand the work of women's associations throughout Burundi, the Women's Peace Center was established in January 1996. The Center has worked with over 1000 informal women's groups to strengthen their organizational capacity, to promote dialogue between Burundian women of diverse backgrounds, to support women playing an active role in peace building and to promote peace initiatives between divided communities.

The Women's Peace Center regularly pioneers public discussions on politically and socially sensitive subjects that reflect women's interests. Topics include ethnicity, sexual violence, inheritance manipulation by political parties, and forgiveness. Dialogue is enriched by the participation of experts in response to the needs raised by

women from the grassroots. These events are regularly covered in the media, making the issues raised and alternatives discussed available to women in and outside Burundi.

With the support and technical assistance from the Women's Peace Center, over 280 women trained in conflict resolution serve as volunteers in their communities in the eight provinces. Their role in facilitating the resolution of family and community disputes is becoming increasingly valued and in at least one community, the court refers specific cases to them.

YOUTH – Tomorrow's Leaders

The Youth Project was established in October 1999 as a natural extension of Search for Common Ground's commitment to working with populations at risk of participating 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 activities that bring together youth from different ethnic and geographical backgrounds, including workshops in conflict resolution techniques, facilitated dialogues, and sports and cultural activities.

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. Last 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," civilian militias composed of armed youth obligated to patrol their communities at night.

VICTIMS OF TORTURE

Despite Burundi's ratification of the Convention Against Torture in 1994 and the introduction of a revised Code of Criminal Procedure in 2000, the incidence of violence and the impunity with which it is carried out has not visibly diminished. Ultimately, the climate of impunity corrupts the transitional institutions of government and undermines their legitimacy and success. Torture is not limited to interrogation chambers of the security services, police stations or prison cells; it is also committed in refugee camps, on the streets and in communities, and in people's homes.

The Victims of Torture Project, which started in March 2003, is a joint undertaking by Search for Common Ground, Trauma Healing and Reconciliation, International Human Rights Law Group, Ligue Iteka and other partners. The project provides physical and psychological healing facilities, legal assistance, support for social reintegration, as well as preventive advocacy.

GREAT LAKES POLICY FORUM

In addition to our ongoing projects in Burundi, we routinely keep the Great Lakes region on the agenda of policymakers and the NGO community in Washington, DC, and Brussels through the "Great Lakes Policy Forums." Organized with partners, these forums bring together representatives of government and non-government agencies, diplomatic corps, and international organization 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 in addition to funds from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, UNDP, 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 with headquarters in Washington and Brussels, an international NGO working in the field 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.