

Radio Programming to Support Participative, Transparent and Credible Elections



Women focus group participants in N'zérékoré

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Tenth Quarter Report from Search for Common Ground to USAID Guinea

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Contact

Quentin Kanyatsi
Country Director, Guinea
Kaparo Cité-Ratoma
Conakry, Guinea
+224 63 35 14 70
qkanyatsi@sfcg.org

Frances Fortune
Africa Director
44 Bathurst Street
Freetown, Sierra Leone
+232 76 603 098
ffortune@sfcg.org

Angola | Burundi | Côte d'Ivoire | Democratic Republic of Congo | Guinea | Indonesia | Jerusalem | Kenya
Kosovo | Lebanon | Liberia | Macedonia | Morocco | Nepal | Nigeria | Pakistan | Rwanda | Sierra Leone
Sudan | Timor-Leste | Ukraine | USA | Yemen | Zimbabwe

1. Executive Summary

In October 2008, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) signed a nine month project with USAID to help ensure that Guinea's upcoming legislative elections are held in a credible, participatory and transparent manner accepted by all. This grant received two extensions due to the evolving political context and the delays in the election calendar and will end in April 2011. Through that process, the focus shifted from the legislative elections to the presidential elections, which were successfully held at the end of 2010.

The project has consisted of three major activities: training radio journalists, producing radio programs, and monitoring the elections process. Journalists are the primary target of the project, as SFCG seeks to improve their skills and quality of engagement during the post-election period. The final beneficiaries of the project are the millions of voters, and particularly youth and women, across Guinea who have benefited from the increased availability of accurate and high-quality information on the elections process, allowing them to make informed decisions during the election process

This quarter focused mainly on evaluation activities, as all planned project activities were completed. Project output targets were exceeded in nearly every case. Evaluation activities consisted of:

- A participatory reflection session on February 17th and 18th to review the Synergie media programs, bringing together 80 journalists and radio station managers, in order to assess the project's impact, the partnership, and what lessons to draw from future activities.
- A Program Review and Assessment aimed at analyzing the projects' effects, its efficiency, and what lessons to draw for future programs. The evaluation consisted of surveys, focus groups, and interviews, and found that the project was extensive in its reach, widely appreciated, and generally effective in delivering the anticipated results, while proposing some refinements to the tools used.

The final program review, as well as SFCG-Guinea's analysis reveal the need for continued – or even intensified – efforts during the legislative elections period, which all observers agree will be especially tense. Civic education and media capacity building efforts – even apart from the electoral contest – will be necessary in order to strengthen democracy and support good governance.

2. Project Context

At the start of 2011, Guinea entered a new era, as the new government and policies began to take shape, after the November 7th, 2010 elections. During those elections, political differences led to isolated violent incidents between perceived supporters of the two opposing candidates, El Hadj Cellou Dalein Diallo and Alpha Condé, drawn roughly along ethnic lines. However, the elections nonetheless largely passed peacefully. The Election Commission announced provisional results on November 15th, and on December 3rd, Guinea's Supreme Court declared Alpha Condé the winner of the run-off vote with 52.52%. Cellou Dalien Diallo accepted defeat following the court's ruling, which helped to calm tensions and suspicion among rival supporters of the two candidates. The state of emergency, imposed

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on November 18th after clashes between the two camps, was lifted on December 12th, and Guinea's land and sea borders were reopened.

The presidential polls were viewed as Guinea's first democratic and transparent elections in its 52-year history and an important step towards democratization. The international community welcomed the transition to democracy. Thirteen African heads of states attended the newly-elected president's inauguration ceremony. Following the ceremony, Alpha Condé formed a government with representatives of the main regions and ethnic groups of the country. He also appointed an ombudsman, Sékou Koureissy Condé, at the end of 2010 to serve as a link between the population and the authorities. His role will be to promote reconciliation and national unity.

Despite the relatively successful electoral process, Guinea faces serious challenges in 2011. Voting in the the presidential elections largely unfolded along ethnic and regional lines; ethnic rhetoric during the campaign increased tensions. This will complicate the reconciliation process. Many observers worry about the dangers of "winner takes all" politics becoming entrenched. Fears have emerged that government appointments, not only at the ministerial level, but even in local administration, will be attributed along political lines as 'prizes' to ruling party supporters. Fears that the ministry of youth, the ministry of education, and others will replace professional bureaucrats with political appointees led to criticism this quarter – both as a non-conciliatory move that would potentially politicize local administration and increase tension between parties, as well as because of the potential loss of expertise.

Economically, Guinea has been rocked by high fuel prices and resulting inflation, posing a serious challenge to the new government. With already-high unemployment rates, the economic crisis poses the first challenge to the new administration. In the eyes of many Guineans, the economic crisis is enmeshed with the country's political outlook, and the high prices result from ethnic Peulh merchants 'punishing' voters after the defeat of Cellou Daliel Diallo. Regardless of the veracity of these claims, the government will have further challenges in meeting the already-high expectations of its supporters in the current context.

Legislative elections, scheduled for later in 2011 are currently being prepared, although a debate is looming over a proposal to re-do the voter registration to eliminate errors and inscribe new voters – but also potentially introduce long delays and additional expenses into the voting process. While campaigning has not yet begun, parties appear to be mobilizing, and some opposition members accuse that the ruling party of beginning its campaign early. With the large number of candidates likely to participate in the local and legislative elections, and the complicated apportionment of seats, balloting will require intensive civic education.

3. Project Activities

As the elections were successfully concluded, and the new government was installed, activities this project quarter focused primarily on evaluation and learning lessons for future activities. As shown in

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the “results” section below, during the electoral period, SFCG met or exceeded each of its output targets, producing more spots, more round-tables, more interactive programs, and training more journalists than initially foreseen in the project.

A. Synergie Reflection Session

On February 17th and 18th, SFCG undertook a participatory reflection session with journalists participating in the elections “Synergie” program. Held at the Maison de la Presse and chaired by SFCG, its partner URTELGUI (represented by President Yacine Diallo and Vice President Souhel Hajjar), and USAID (represented by Anna Diallo), the meeting brought together 69 journalists and 11 radio directors for a feedback session. Discussions were guided by a set of twelve questions aimed at guiding the consideration of all aspects of the process, including management and logistics, the strategic approach, and specific recommendations for the next activity.

A broad consensus emerged from this meeting that the Synergie played a major, positive, role in contributing the successful completion of elections, providing access to information that would not otherwise be available, and preventing potential rumours and voter manipulation. Participants largely appreciated the spirit of collaboration and teamwork throughout the process. Critiques focused primarily on three issues: (1) the lack of clarity between the CNC and the Synergie and the conflict that emerged over the broadcasting of polling station results via synergy radio stations (2) competition between stations and conflicts over the selection of journalists to participate (3) requests for additional budgetary support for radios and journalists.

A full report of this meeting is included in Annex A to this report.

B. Program Review and Assessment

As foreseen in the initial project, SFCG undertook an end-of project review, aimed at drawing lessons from media programming during these elections, to apply to future elections in Guinea and elsewhere that SFCG works. The Review was conducted by SFCG Africa Programme Manager Mike Jobbins and Burundi Programmes Director Floride Ahitungiye, both of whom have worked on SFCG’s media and elections programming in francophone Africa. The review, which began on March 24th ran through April 9th and had three key guiding questions:

- What impact did the project have? (how many people were reached? and what results among the population reached?)
- How effective was the project in achieving these results? (in terms of coverage, coherence, complementarity, coordination, comprehension of the strategy, and the efficacy of the various tools)
- What outlook for legislative elections and governance programming? (recommendations)

The evaluation was designed to target three key areas selected as having been potentially high-risk for electoral disruption: Conakry, N’zerekore, and Labé. The evaluation consisted of:

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- 11 focus groups with key actors in the electoral process (including voting staff, women leaders, elders, youth leaders, journalists) with a total of 165 participants,
- 48 in-depth interviews with government, civil society, media, and political party leaders
- A survey of 2,245 adult residents in the three cities, using a randomized sampling strategy.

Key findings of the evaluation were:

- The project's reach was enormous. 96% of respondents reported being exposed to at least one project activity; nearly 60% reported regularly hearing or watching at least two project activities. After accounting for the population living outside radio range, and excluding children we can conservatively estimate that the project reached *3.22 million Guineans of political age*.
- Key informants and focus group participants were nearly unanimous in citing at least one benefit of the project, either (a) preventing violence, (b) encouraging participation and acceptance of the results, or (c) meeting civic education needs.
- The tools were overwhelmingly appreciated, but several recommendations emerged for refinement, including:
 - Encourage media to consider their roles and responsibilities in broadcasting *political advertising and commiqués*. What editorial policies should media put in place?
 - Reinforce the production of spots in local dialects and, if possible, develop separate messages for rural and urban audience;
 - Reinforce training of journalists and media strengthening across the board.
- Interviews found that key actors, including within government and civil society, were very concerned about the legislative and local elections, anticipating these to be even more sensitive, for the following reasons:
 - The voting system for parliament will be one of the most confusing, and few citizens even understand the role of an MP;
 - Local officials have a great influence over people's lives and we can expect these to be hotly contested;
 - The ethnic and regional discourse seen in the national elections will be harder to moderate in the local elections. More candidates means a greater risk of extremist candidates.
 - For the two main political alliances, there is the opportunity for a "shut out," if the presidential party can also win control of the parliament
- The evaluation also made several observations on governance challenges in Guinea. This includes
 - The media sector is growing rapidly, but without the financial capacity or skill-base to meet these challenges, and there is need for capacity building in both private media, as well as rural radio;
 - There is some support for unchecked presidential power. Approximately 20% of the public surveyed rejected the thesis that the legislature, the media, the justice system, or opposition parties should constrain executive decision-making
 - The economic crisis has an effect on support democracy; more than one-third of the public feels that "if the current system cannot produce results soon, we should try another system of government."

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- Support for truth and reconciliation is present across ethnolinguistic groups, though it only gains an absolute majority among Puular and Susu speakers.
- Absolute majorities among all ethno-linguistic groups feel they are victims of discrimination based on ethnic lines, but absolute majorities also believe that interethnic relations will improve.

The preliminary findings of the evaluation, which were presented to USAID in Conakry on April 11th are included as Annex B. A final evaluation report will be completed and shared before the end of May 2011.

4. Results

Targets	Progress This Quarter	Total Progress to Date	Result
38 radio stations airing election preparations and post-election programs	No new partners added	37 radio stations: 21 rural radio stations and 16 independent stations	97% met
456 roundtable discussions produced and aired by 17 independent stations and 21 rural stations	No new roundtables produced	555 roundtable discussions were produced by 21 rural radio stations and 16 independent stations	122% met
228 interactive programs produced by 38 radio stations	No new interactive programs produced	252 interactive programs produced by 37 radio stations	111% met
144 spots or jingle messages produced by SFCG and aired by all 38 radio partners	No new spots or jingles produced	335 spots produced by SFCG and aired by 37 total stations	232% met
83 journalists from independent radio stations trained to monitor the elections process, particularly on election day	No new journalists trained	112 journalists trained, including 83 trained in election monitoring and 21 trained in roundtable techniques	135% met
A network of 17 independent radio stations with 83 journalists deployed in the field monitoring and reporting the election on Election Day	No new networks created	1 network of 16 independent radio stations with 83 journalists deployed in field monitoring and reporting of elections	100% met
A post-election assessment report produced to advise on the next elections in the country	This is underway as of end of quarter	This was underway at the end of the quarter	In train

5. Challenges

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The evaluation of the project – which began at the end of this quarter – encountered several challenges. Attributing attitudinal changes to a given intervention is notoriously difficult, but was complicated by the lag in time (3 months after the elections concluded), as well as the enormous reach of the project. With 96% of respondents exposed to at least one project activity, it is impossible to ascertain the effects of exposure to the project – although there are were differences in degrees of exposure among respondents.

It was not easy to get accurate numbers of listeners of this program from each radio station partner as this is not really easy to know exactly how many people are opening their radios when this program is on air. However to estimate the number of listeners, we used each radio station estimation of its listeners to all their programs as listeners of this project program since all radio stations partners were palying this program spots messages all day during the period of this project.