

Name: *Centre Lokole/ Search for Common Grounds Participatory Theatre for Conflict Transformation*

Country: *Democratic Republic of Congo*

Artistic Medium: *Theatre.*

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Search for Common Grounds participatory theatre for conflict transformation is aimed at promoting peaceful solutions to conflict in DRC. In particular, we are focusing on the conflicts inherent in the process of repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Congolese now returning home after up to ten years in neighbouring countries as refugees. When they return home, they find innumerable conflicts, including material ones (land and property confiscated) as well as psychological ones (prejudices, jealousy, rumours, and stereotypes). This situation leads to many conflicts inherent in this repatriation processes. The project involves the use of participatory theatre troupes, whereby the troupe goes into a community, and first they LISTEN. They ask questions of the people of all social classes to find out what kinds of conflicts exist. Based on these real life conflicts, the actors develop a scenario which resembles the conflict in the community. The same day, they present the play, from beginning to end, in front of the public. Then they stop, and redo the play again, scene by scene. They then invite the audience members to identify what went wrong where... what could have been different to avoid us falling into a violent solution? This is when the audience members join the actors on the 'stage' (it's outdoor in public space mostly), and take on the role of one of the actors in the scene to make it end up... otherwise... better. We have already

reached out to more than 20 or 30,000 people in South Kivu province of the war-torn eastern DRC with this technique. Our beneficiaries are the returnees and the residents who have stayed behind, who are now welcoming back the returnees. The beneficiaries are also the actors in the theatre troupes that Search for Common Ground has trained, who now are becoming tools for social dialogue, for conflict transformation, and for positive change. We focus particularly in areas where there is extreme poverty and competition for resource

Search for Common Ground's technique of participatory theatre is a combination of various techniques (Forum Theatre, Playback Theatre, Image Theatre) but which crosses this with the conflict transformation methodology. In early 2007, Search for Common Ground will be launching a print and video manual in French and English on how to apply this technique, as we believe it is very useful for theatre professionals around the world. Our theatre approach draws on mediation and collective dialogue approaches, and yet is based on strong artistic professional techniques that reach out to both the 'head and the heart.' This is one of the reasons that it is so effective, and is enabling people to testify that, because of our theatre, they are able to see how they can address the conflicts in their lives without violence. These are the kinds of testimonies that we are receiving from audience members in South Kivu province each and every day.