

Democratic Republic of the Congo – Voter Opinion and Involvement through Civic Education (VOICE)

The DRC VOICE program, adopted by the DRC National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), was an initiative aimed to improve the knowledge and capacity of the Congolese people to participate more effectively in new democratic institutions and decentralization process in the DRC. A primary component of this program was the design and production of civic and voter education materials, and implementing activities in targeted provinces around the country.

The VOICE program featured the use of *boîtes à images* (image boxes). These civic education kits featured a variety of images that were designed to be relevant to the issues of elections and decentralization in the DRC. The image boxes were designed to communicate important messages to Congolese citizens, regardless of literacy rates. CENI worked with local civil society organizations, training facilitators and provided funding for face-to-face civic and voter education. The VOICE program was implemented in three phases.

Phase I targeted the four provinces of Bandundu, Katanga, Maniema and Sud Kivu, and served as a template for subsequent programming phases. In this initial phase, 41 local civil society organizations were trained on the use of the image box through cascade trainings. Additionally, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) was invited to implement a comprehensive media campaign which included the production and broadcast of radio spots in the targeted provinces, and television spots in Kinshasa, with an emphasis on election-related topics.

Phase II Under this phase, an additional 58 CSO partners were included and 121 sub-grants were issued to implement civic and voter education programming. At the same time, two series of motorized caravans aimed to reinforce key civic and voter education messages leading up to the national elections in November 2011. SFCG's media campaign continued until June 2012. Additional funding from DFID extended VOICE programming to the provinces of Bas Congo, Nord Kivu, Province Orientale and Kinshasa.

Phase III programming incorporated lessons learned from the first two phases of the program. An improved image box was produced, focusing on decentralization and local elections. 80 civil society organizations received sub-grants to implement grassroots civic education activities using the newly-produced *boîte à images*. These efforts focused on democracy and decentralization.

Over the course of the program, a total of 280 civil society organizations received sub-grants to conduct civic education programming using the image boxes in their communities. In total, these partners reached over 10 million citizens through this small grants program—approximately 14% of the total population of the DRC per 2013 estimates.

Impact Evaluation

The formal impact evaluation of the *boîte à images* methodology utilized control and treatment groups to examine the effectiveness of the approach. The evaluation revealed that the face-to-face sessions were extremely effective in increasing the level of factual knowledge on the topic being presented.

Moreover, 69% of individuals surveyed demonstrated increased knowledge in treatment villages, while only 36% of individuals surveyed in control villages demonstrated only some knowledge increase. The impact assessment supported the effectiveness of the face-to-face civic and voter education sessions.

These efforts along with a series of media campaigns and electoral caravans were implemented in partnership with Search for Common Ground and local community radio stations. A total of 106 radio spots in all five official languages of the DRC were produced and broadcast approximately 150,000 times in every province of the country, 40 motorized caravans throughout the country further enhancing the visibility of the VOICE program. A post-activity survey indicated that these mass media programs worked effectively in conjunction with the *boîte à images* sessions to prepare and encourage citizens to participate in the democratic process.

Source: IFES

