

INITIATIVE FOR  PEACEBUILDING

Initiative for Peacebuilding Focus Groups
South Kivu, DRC October 2008

Bukavu – focus group of 7 market women

Territory Level – focus group of 23 female small businesspeople

Village 1 – focus group of 6 members of “Noyaux de Paix” peace committees

Village 2 – focus group of 31 individuals from nearby villages

Village 3 – focus group of 27 individuals from small community organisations

Total 94 people

During the focus group discussions, participants were asked to share their opinions on the democratisation process underway in the DRC, in particular whether they had voted in the elections in 2006 and whether they were planning to vote in the local elections next year. They were encouraged to describe the most important concerns facing them in their day-to-day lives, which local authorities they saw as key to resolving these problems and whether they had engaged in advocacy or tried to influence the decisions of local authorities. They were also asked how they got information and how they communicated with the authorities.

The focus group participants uniformly reported having voted in the last presidential, legislative and provincial elections and reported having had high hopes that the democratisation process would improve their lives. Two years after the elections, a strong majority also reported feeling disappointed and disillusioned that not more had changed, as conflict continues to engulf parts of eastern DRC and “development” seems as distant as ever from the perspective of most individuals. Many participants were still hopeful that the local elections planned for next year would lead to better governance, but that hope was now tempered with more realistic expectations. They felt that their past experience meant it was now even more necessary to be vigilant and choose the right person.

According to a majority of participants, the main governance problem they faced was heavy taxation (“*tracasserie*”) from all levels of government, from the local to the national, out of which they saw little in return. In one focus group, taxation was estimated at about US \$7-8 on merchandise valued at about US \$20-30. They felt this was crippling to their businesses and their families’ standards of living. In a majority of cases they or someone they knew had complained to the local authorities to try to change the situation. In some cases, this lobbying resulted in a slight reduction of the tax burden. In most cases there was minimal change.

Many rural women reported a lack of access to basic information as a result of being excluded from listening to the radio, which was seen as “men’s business” in the villages. Participants indicated a strong desire for citizenship education, i.e. learning what leaders’ responsibilities were and especially what power ordinary citizens had over leaders.