

SEARCH  
BEYOND THE  
HORIZON

MAPPING THE NEXT

10

YEARS AT

SEARCH FOR  
COMMON GROUND



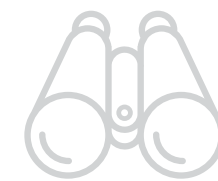




**Safe, healthy, just societies**  
 A world where conflict doesn't mean violence  
 A global movement of citizen peacebuilders

**THIS IS HOW WE GET THERE.** 

# 1 SCAN THE LANDSCAPE



*The world is coming together. It's also falling apart.*

For decades, violence has been steadily decreasing. Fewer people die from crime or armed conflict than ever before. Interstate wars are at historical lows. Political rights and freedoms have advanced for many. Digital technology has connected people around the world and amplified their voices.

At the same time, humanity is facing new challenges. Increased connectedness fuels social anxieties. New communications channels also give space for violent ideologies to grow. Ongoing conflicts trigger transnational population flows that threaten to upend many societies, and chronic crises seem no closer to being resolved. The dynamics of conflict are changing, and the mechanisms and institutions put in place after the end of World War II—for all their success over the last 70 years—are now struggling to cope.

*As conflicts change, so must we.*

We at Search for Common Ground have done it in the past. We supported diplomatic efforts with people-to-people approaches during the Cold War. We built a country program model and developed mass media to tackle the conflicts of the 1990s and 2000s. We championed citizen-led peacebuilding at the advent of the digital age. With every major change in the global scenario, we have adapted our program toolbox and organizational structure.

Today, as the nature of conflicts shifts again, we need new infrastructures for peace. That is why we re-examined every facet of our programs, operations, and identity.

*We learned from our history, our staff and partners, and the world around us.*

Over a two-year period, Search staff from around the world gathered to reflect on how our organization should change. We asked parliamentarians, diplomats, military leaders, and scholars how they see violent conflict evolving in the decades to come and how peacebuilders should adapt accordingly. We asked colleagues, communities, partners, and donors to tell us what was working well and what should be working better. Together, we rallied around a renewed vision for what Search for Common Ground will become.

*We built a 10-year Strategic Plan and embarked on a new phase of our history.*

The Plan positions us to transform today's and tomorrow's conflicts. Since our beginnings in 1982, we have been instrumental in defining citizen-led peacebuilding and demonstrating its efficacy. Now, we see the opportunity to take our field to a new level of reach, influence, and performance.

From program impact, to operational efficiency, local ownership, evaluation, and transparency, we will aspire to provide a model for successful peacebuilding in the first half of the 21st century. Here is how.



## 2

## PLOT THE COURSE



Every journey needs a direction. Ours is based on the *Common Ground Approach* and a unified *Theory of Change*.

## THE COMMON GROUND APPROACH

Our peacebuilding programs take many forms. From mediation over water rights in Yemen to helping prisoners reintegrate in Indonesia, from soap operas in South Sudan to back-channel diplomacy among foreign ministries, we have built a toolbox of tactics to tailor to each conflict's specific dynamics and history. While our programs may vary, they are based on the same foundation.

We call this foundation the *Common Ground Approach*.

The *Common Ground Approach* is a **methodology to transform how we respond to conflict, away from confrontation and violence and toward collaboration**. Guiding principles inform the design and application of peacebuilding programs, which generate tangible, positive outcomes.

Over the years, elements of the *Common Ground Approach* have become mainstreamed into the broader field of peacebuilding practice.



## THE COMMON GROUND APPROACH

01  
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**HOPE:** We believe that change is possible even in the worst circumstances for those who seek it.

**LEAD FROM WITHIN:** We believe that those closest to a conflict are best equipped to drive change.

**BE CREATIVE:** Embrace innovative, culturally relevant programming that enables new breakthroughs.

**START WITH PEOPLE...** The human journey of transformation is at the center of all change.

**... AND END WITH SYSTEMS:** Transform specific relationships that can catalyze systemic changes.

**COMMIT LONG-TERM:** Change takes time, so we make long-term commitments to the places where we work.

**BE INCLUSIVE:** Everyone who has a stake in a conflict should have their voices heard.

**FOCUS ON SHARED INTERESTS:** Identify common goals and build opportunities for collaboration around them.

**TACKLE ROOT CAUSES:** Focus on addressing the origins, not just the visible symptoms, of conflict.

**BE PRACTICAL:** Look for concrete avenues for collaboration between parties to the conflict.

**ADAPT:** Adjust programs to evolving conflict dynamics so that they stay relevant.

02  
PROGRAMS03  
POSITIVE OUTCOMES

**COLLABORATION:** Divided groups work together to achieve their shared goals.

**DECREASED APPEAL OF VIOLENCE:** Individuals and groups shift away from resorting to violence as a way to deal with conflict.

**TRUST:** People establish relationships of trust across ethnic, religious, political, and social divides.

**CHANGE THAT ENDURES:** Individuals and groups recognize the benefits of collaboration and seek to replicate it, even without outside support.

As part of our Strategic Plan, we have refined the articulation of our approach to improve its implementation internally and offer it to partners externally. In late 2018, we will launch the *Enduring Change Lab*—an interactive toolkit to design peacebuilding programs based on the *Common Ground Approach*, which anyone can use, regardless of their previous experience or the context in which they operate.

## A UNIFIED THEORY OF CHANGE

The *Common Ground Approach* is powerful. When individuals and communities embroiled in violence apply it, they experience profound shifts in the way they deal with conflict. But how do we ensure that the positive change it creates is systemic and sustainable, rather than ad hoc and short-term?

To answer this question, we codified our Theory of Change.

Our Theory of Change is not born of abstract speculation. It is the result of more than three decades of on-the-ground experience from hundreds of conflicts. It systematizes the process through which we achieve transformations that last well beyond our intervention and maps the thresholds we need to cross to catalyze change at the highest order.

It is based on a fundamental insight: **the *Common Ground Approach* becomes self-perpetuating when its rewards align with people’s aspirations.**

In other words, when the outcomes of the *Common Ground Approach* satisfy the needs of individuals, communities, and institutions, there is a strong incentive for them to adopt it in their daily behaviors and practices. When this happens, change can endure without an ongoing reliance on third-party intervention; it is the stakeholders to the conflict themselves that make it sustainable.

The Theory of Change outlines three ways in which change becomes enduring:



### CHANGE IN INSTITUTIONS

When governments, security actors, religious organizations, and other powerful institutions see how the *Common Ground Approach* helps them fulfill their mandate, they adopt it as their own.



### CHANGE IN SOCIAL NORMS

When conflict transformation becomes normal and expected, people’s behavior and interactions reflect the *Common Ground Approach*.



### CHANGE IN MARKETS

When the diverse actors who make up a market see the value of the *Common Ground Approach*, they resource it.

Once change takes one of these three forms, it will remain, and even grow, without external actors to sustain it. We don’t lead this process alone, but in partnership with local individuals and organizations; this ensures that our efforts are locally owned and endure far into the future.

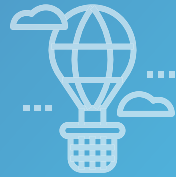
Along the way, we will observe a reduction in violence—but the shifts that we seek are more profound. Our goal is not merely to resolve specific disputes but also to transform the way conflict is addressed and leverage its potential to build safe, healthy, just societies. Ultimately, that’s what our Theory of Change sets out to do.

## THE THEORY OF CHANGE





## 3.



# WHAT LIES BEYOND THE HORIZON

Our Strategic Plan is divided into three scopes.

## NEW TERRITORIES

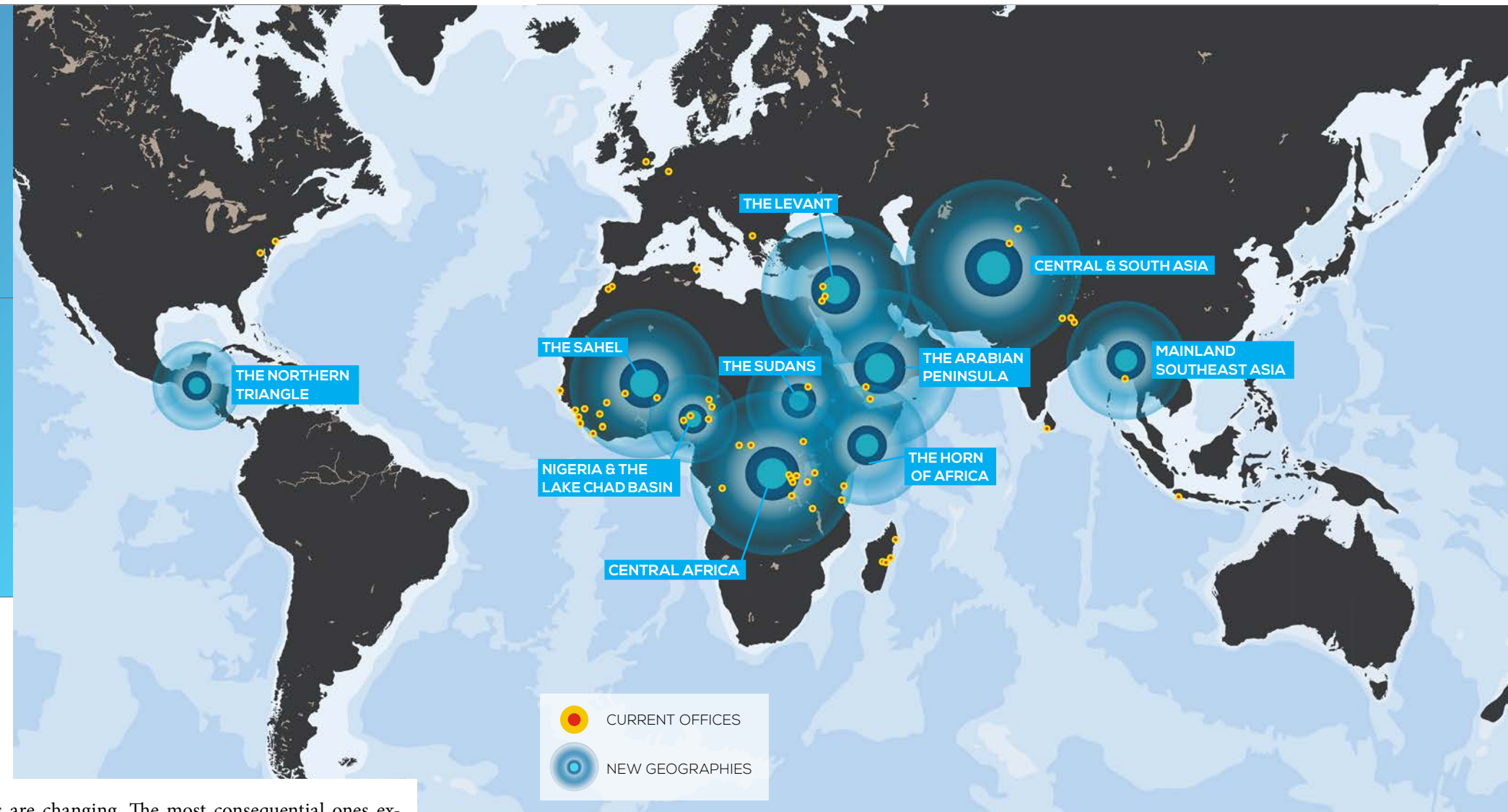
SCOPE I of the Strategic Plan

We pursue enduring change in the way societies address conflict. But how does that impact *which* conflicts we tackle and *where* and *for how long* we develop and manage programs?

These questions triggered internal and external consultations on our optimal operational model. We determined to move past country-based planning, to define the boundaries of our engagement by the borders of the conflicts we tackle, and to focus on **addressing the world's most consequential conflicts** (Scope I).

This decision is driven by three observations:

- 01** Conflicts are changing. The most consequential ones expand beyond nation-state borders, involving neighboring countries, cross-border populations, and outside powers. To maximize our ability to transform them, we need to understand conflict systems not delimited by national boundaries but by their own shifting and porous boundaries.
- 02** The *Common Ground Approach* yields the best results when applied across societies over a decade or more. The highest pursuit of our mission compels us to apply a long-term strategy in a limited number of the most consequential conflicts where failure threatens tens of millions of lives and success can improve just as many.
- 03** The ability to adapt our programs in accordance with shifting conflict dynamics is essential. Operationally, going beyond a country program model grants us the flexibility we need to address the root causes of conflict wherever they are.



We have initiated a shift of our program portfolio in 2018 and aim to complete it by 2023. We are prioritizing conflicts where the repercussions of instability reverberate across entire regions or even the world at large. Some of these geographies are experiencing violence; others are relatively stable, but the consequences of how conflicts within them are managed will be profound.

We will systematically apply proven approaches that can shift entire conflict systems and create an evidence-based framework upon which the field of peacebuilding can draw. Throughout and beyond this shift, we will remain committed to our research and channel what we learn into the design and implementation of our programs.

As we move past a country-based model, we will necessarily transition out of some places where we have operated for many years. In each of them, we will work with our partners and supporters to develop transition plans tied to the achievement of enduring change.

When we launched our programs in these countries, many of them were experiencing violence or tensions that threatened to tear them apart. Today, in part due to our work, individuals, organizations, and institutions have more tools to transform conflict. Tensions will still emerge, but the capacities to manage them hold new promise.



# NEW OPPORTUNITIES

## SCOPE II of the Strategic Plan

Change moves from the top down. It moves from the bottom up. But it also moves horizontally, across segments of society. We have seen it over decades of work mobilizing grassroots networks or using media to shift cultural perceptions.

Today, new technologies are a powerful avenue for horizontal change. Movements are born in the digital space. They are infectious, rapid, and transnational. In some cases, they fracture communities and incite people to commit violence. But the platforms that support polarizing movements can be equally powerful tools to bridge dividing lines.

In this connected world, we see an opportunity to make our practice globally known, accessible, and replicable. That is why **we will increase our investment in initiatives to popularize peacebuilding practice as the most effective way of dealing with conflict (Scope II).**

We identified three avenues toward this goal:

### 01 Build a global movement

With our peers in the field, we will mobilize behind joint campaigns that provide citizens with the tools they need to advance peacebuilding in their local communities.

### 02 Popularize a methodology

We will work with strategic partners outside of our sector to integrate the *Common Ground Approach* into their practice.

### 03 Create common ground in the digital space

We will expand our investment in virtual exchanges, social gaming, and other tools on the cutting edge of media, technology, and peacebuilding.

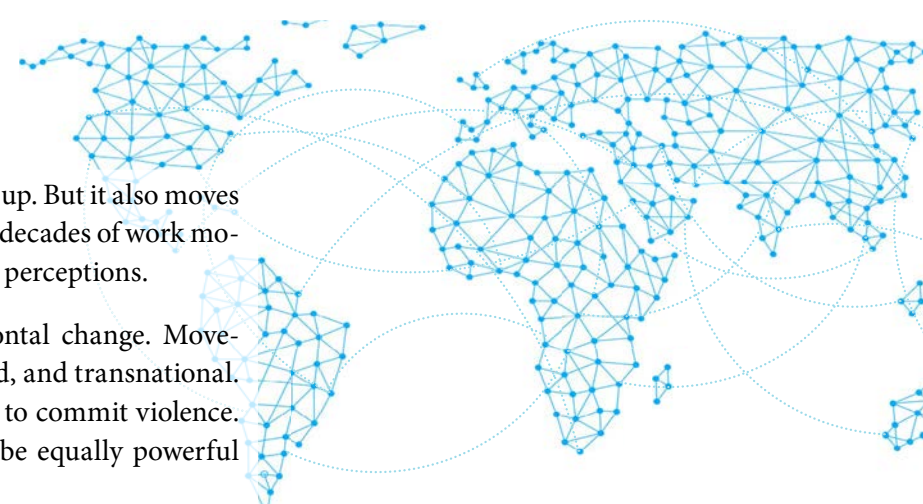
At this stage of the implementation of our Strategic Plan, we have initiatives underway in each of these three areas. In 2019 and beyond, we will prioritize investing where we see the greatest promise for scaled reach and impact.

The aim of this effort is not limited to public awareness. We seek to build a public that is able to deal with conflict constructively. **That is our ultimate vision—a global network of citizen peacebuilders**, popularizing the *Common Ground Approach* well beyond the places in which we are physically present.

## VIRTUAL EXCHANGE

*Virtual exchange is the first scalable model for cross-cultural education and holds the potential to change how societies relate to each other. In 2014, we formed a strategic partnership with Soliya, a pioneer in this field. Through them, each year we connect thousands of young activists and students from 27 countries to build intercultural communication and relationships across the world. Soliya's flagship Connect Program and UN-certified Facilitation Training are rooted in neuroscience research by MIT and UPenn.*

Learn more at [soliya.net](http://soliya.net).



# NEW VOICES

## SCOPE III of the Strategic Plan

Humanity's inability to deal with conflict constructively is the main challenge hindering progress on all other fronts. People directly experiencing violence in their communities know this. Policymakers struggling to build stability and prosperity know this. Businesses hindered from new markets and opportunities for profit know this.

These individuals and institutions want better options to deal with conflict, and we are uniquely poised to meet their demand. That is why we have decided to **invest in outreach and advocacy to inform policy, generate resources, and cultivate support for peacebuilding (Scope III).**

To do this, we will amplify the perspectives of those experiencing conflict first-hand among key constituencies of influencers and policymakers. Through advocacy, we aim to achieve four outcomes:

### 01 Support people working to build peace in conflict zones

We will highlight the perspectives of local peacebuilders and advocate for support to civilian-led peace efforts.

### 02 Work with institutions to transform their ability to mitigate conflict

We will share our insight and experience in conflict transformation with the private sector, governments, religious groups, and civil society institutions dealing with violent conflicts around the world.

### 03 Make the case for the field

We will invest resources in making the case to the public and policymakers that peacebuilding is a more ethical and effective approach to solving the world's problems than coercive, violent options.

### 04 Fix the funding ecosystem

Today's models of international assistance do not match what is needed to resolve modern crises. We will advocate for funding mechanisms that support and enable effective peacebuilding.





A PACKING LIST OF



# OPERATIONAL TO-DOS

Our Strategic Plan is ambitious. Executing it requires rebuilding aspects of our organization. Summarized here are the reforms that will accompany and enable the Plan's implementation.

PAST	FUTURE
Run successful programs	Pursue systemic change
Design and implement programs at a country level	Define engagement by the borders of the conflict, not the nation-state
Adopt a diverse set of innovative and experimental tactics	Innovate, experiment, and systematically apply proven methods
Focus only on project execution	Leverage program experience to improve peacebuilding practice, policy, and credibility
Build programs with available funding	Influence the funding ecosystem to support quality peacebuilding
Operate on revenue model that is almost entirely reliant on public sector grants	Achieve a diversified revenue portfolio with substantial private sector philanthropy and investment
Make systems investments to meet minimum operational standards	Build agile global operations to support effective local peacebuilding
Strategize only within program teams	Set strategy and track progress at every level of the organization



# 4 ROUTE TO 2028



## 2018: PREPARATION

- Consolidate transition plans toward new geographies
- Develop implementation plan for Scopes II and III
- Roll out *Enduring Change Lab* toolkit
- Restructure support units into a Global Services Team
- Establish Board development strategy

## 2019-2021: TRANSFORMATION

- Shift program portfolio toward priority geographies
- Build replicable private philanthropic fundraising program
- Develop advocacy, outreach, and communications to advance Scopes II and III
- Establish strategic partnerships to popularize the *Common Ground Approach*
- Complete implementation of Board development strategy
- Deploy Global Services Team functions optimally across local, regional, and headquarters offices

## 2022-2028: EXPANSION

- Develop robust programming in each of the priority geographies
- Offer program processes and methods to external partners
- Popularize the *Common Ground Approach*
- Achieve new levels of visibility and credibility for the peacebuilding field
- Sustain excellent operational performance





## WE BELIEVE...

### CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE, VIOLENCE IS NOT.

Conflict is a natural result of human diversity. When we deal with conflict adversarially, it sparks polarization and violence. When we collaborate, conflict is transformed and catalyzes positive change.

### HUMANKIND IS INTERDEPENDENT.

Human beings cannot survive in isolation. Our humanity is affirmed through relationships with others. Our world is more interdependent than ever before, and the challenges before us require collaborative approaches.

### CHANGE IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE.

All individuals and relationships can change, even in seemingly intractable conflicts. Every conflict offers opportunities for transformation. All wars end.

### WHEN EVERYBODY WINS, CHANGE LASTS.

When conflicts end with a winner and a loser, they often feed a cycle of violence. Enduring change arises from win-win outcomes which all parties defend.

### COMMON GROUND MATTERS.

Despite the depth and complexity of our differences, we can always discover something we share. In doing so, we grow our human connection, mutual trust, and respect and trigger collaboration in ways otherwise unimaginable. Common Ground can always be created.



# JOIN US ON THE JOURNEY TO A NEW WORLD.

[SFCG.ORG/GET-INVOLVED](https://www.sfcg.org/get-involved)



**Search for  
Common Ground**