



# Search for Common Ground Rwanda

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## 2017 – 2021 Country Strategy

### Context of Intervention

In the 22 years following the genocide, Rwanda has seen impressive economic growth and a concerted effort from national and international actors to heal wounds and rebuild communities. This process is hailed as a modern day success-story in post-genocide reconciliation and development.

Rwanda is often celebrated as a champion of good governance on the continent. It ranks 44<sup>th</sup> out of 168 countries on the Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index and 62 out of 189 in the World Bank's 2016 Doing Business report, some of the best scores of any African country. Despite these successes, Rwanda's model of governance is characterized by a top-down approach, with policy-making processes heavily centralized. It lacks transparency as well as inclusive and constructive citizen and civil society engagement. An emphasis on "national unity" effectively limits political pluralism and the government imposes legal restrictions and informal controls on freedoms of the press and expression. These realities have isolated policy makers and implementers from the citizenry and putting pressure on them to "deliver" at the expense of citizen participation. This approach results in the adoption of policies that do not necessarily respond to the needs of the population, especially marginalized groups, and risks alienating citizens who lack avenues to voice their grievances and discuss the decisions that impact them.

In rural areas, high population density and rapid population growth, declining soil and environmental conditions, and land scarcity pose significant challenges to communities. Disputes over the allocation, access, and ownership of land remain the most common cause of conflict. While the Government has tried to address this issue by adopting new policies and putting in place local conflict mediators (*Abunzi*), these efforts have had limited impact. The top-down design and implementation described above combined with the lack of transparency and information on land-related policies have exacerbated tensions. While the *Abunzi* and other district level officials have contributed to address land conflicts at the community level, there is a need to continue to building their capacity to respond to land disputes constructively, while fostering inclusive dialogue around land and livelihood. At the same time, given the demographic pressure, there is a need to promote alternative livelihoods and equal access to economic opportunities, especially for youth and women, who remain traditionally marginalized.

At the social level, despite great progress in post-genocide healing and reconciliation, Rwanda is still struggling with social cohesion and a true sense of unity. However, because of their sensitive nature and a dominant historical narrative, ethnic-based conflicts remain latent and often unaddressed. Transitional justice mechanisms contributed to healing and reconciliation, but also further exacerbated community fault lines by worsening ethnic divides, re-traumatizing survivors,

reinforcing the notion of collective guilt, and, through an imperfect compensation process, provided a potential trigger for future conflict.

At the intra-household level, gender-based conflicts, often related to land, inheritance, or decision-making, are widespread and affect many communities, preventing inclusive and sustainable development. While Rwanda has adopted many gender equality laws, the gap between policy and practice, widened by traditional patriarchal norms, especially in rural areas, is still a reality for many Rwandan women, who face discriminations within their household, at the workplace, etc.

At the regional level, Rwanda's relations with its neighbors continue to be challenging in a context of political crisis in the region, and especially in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Diplomatic relations between Rwanda and Burundi have worsened since the Burundi crisis began in April 2015, over the alleged role of Rwanda in fueling the opposition. Given the interconnectivity of the region, the diplomatic crisis has had an impact on citizens and could jeopardize stability. Rwanda is currently hosting more than 84,000 Burundians,<sup>1</sup> increasing the demographic pressure in the country. Burundi's ban on food exports to Rwanda has created shortages and an increase in prices on some commodities, and tensions have limited cross-border trade, affecting marginalized groups such as women. Ethnic dynamics and past grievances in the region could also lead to further manipulation, population movements and deterioration of the economy, fueling cross-border violence that could lead to a regional conflict, especially as the DRC is heading towards a contentious electoral process.

To achieve lasting peace and sustainable development, Rwanda needs to address these underlying political and socio-economic issues, which otherwise risk putting the country on a path to violence, as grievances increase without participative avenues to address them.

## Strategic Response

Leveraging its eleven years working in Rwanda and 20 years in the Great Lakes region, Search for Common Ground, one of the largest conflict transformation organizations in the world, has developed its vision for the country: ***“In 2021, Rwanda is a peaceful country, with inclusive participatory governance and equal opportunities for all, in good relations with its neighbors.”***

To achieve this vision, and based on a series of consultations with key stakeholders, an analysis of conflict issues in Rwanda and in the region, as well as a reflection on gaps and added-value, we have identified four key strategic objectives and series of related outcomes:

### **1) To foster inclusive and participatory governance and social justice.**

**Outcome 1.1:** Citizens increasingly participate in policy- and decision-making processes, in an informed and constructive manner.

**Outcome 1.2:** A culture of transparency and two-way communication is promoted among authorities and key institutions.

### **2) To support sustainable peace, engaging media and civil society.**

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<sup>1</sup> Representing over 25% of the total of Burundian refugees in the region; UNHCR figures, as of January 5, 2017.

**Outcome 2.1:** The role of media and civil society organizations as agents of positive change is strengthened.

**Outcome 2.2:** Platforms for constructive dialogue on issues related to peace and security are increasingly available, combating stereotypes and preventing manipulation.

**3) To promote equal access to opportunities and entrepreneurship for all.**

**Outcome 3.1:** Alternatives to land-related livelihoods are promoted, especially among young men and young women.

**Outcome 3.2:** An environment conducive to entrepreneurship for all is promoted.

**4) To strengthen positive relations and mutual understanding at the community, national and regional level.**

**Outcome 4.1:** Trust and respect are increased across dividing lines at the interpersonal, community, national and regional levels.

**Outcome 4.2:** Individuals and communities increasingly collaborate around shared interests.

In addition to these strategic goals, Search will focus on the cross-cutting objective of ***empowering young men and young women as agents of positive change, from their community to the nation and region.***

Search identified four key themes to be addressed as priorities in the scope of these objectives:

**1) Fostering Inclusive Governance**

While recognizing the sensitivities of operating in the governance sector, Search believes in the importance of fostering inclusive and participatory governance to respond to growing frustrations and promote sustainable peace. We will aim to identify government and civil society champions and build their capacities and opportunities for collaboration around shared issues and interests, identifying entry points that might be less sensitive. Leveraging the expertise of our Monitoring and Evaluation unit, we will use research and survey on social services delivery satisfaction to identify areas for improvements. We will then engage the authorities around improving services and performance, in collaboration with the population, building incentives for improvements achieved through collaborative processes. Through participatory media formats, delivering information on key policies but also opening up space for constructive dialogue and two-way communication, Search will foster an environment conducive to participatory and inclusive governance, transforming norms of what is good governance, towards increased participation rather than top-down implementation.

**2) Strengthening Media and Civil Society as Peacebuilders and Promoters of Dialogue**

Media and civil society have a key role to play in promoting sustainable peace and inclusive governance. Yet, they are facing a series of challenges that lead to self-censorship and prevent them from fulfilling this role. While recognizing the lack of openness and the difficult operating environment, Search will leverage its Common Ground approach to strengthen the capacity of media and civil society to engage with the authorities and with the population in a constructive manner. In the media sector, we will seek to institutionalize our conflict sensitive journalism training curriculum by partnering with universities and working with media professionals associations. To engage a diversity of media across affiliations, we will foster peer exchanges and media synergies, highlighting the value of participatory formats engaging the audience as a cornerstone to quality

journalism. In the civil society sector, Search will build on existing structures, seeking to maximize their visibility and impact by responding to their needs and existing gaps. We will promote collaborative models of civil society-government engagement, sharing our experience and tools and highlighting positive role models and success stories of collaboration.

### **3) Supporting Access to Livelihoods**

Recognizing the reality of unemployment, high population density and rapid population growth, the prevalence of land conflicts, and the importance of all of these issues in the long-term stability of the country, Search will aim to promote entrepreneurship and access to non-agriculture related livelihoods for all, with a focus on marginalized groups such as youth and women. This will serve as a key avenue to prevent community-based conflicts and promote sustainable and inclusive development. Through partnerships with key stakeholders in the education and business sectors (universities, vocational training center, cooperatives, petty traders, the private sector, etc.), Search will aim to foster an environment conducive to access to livelihoods for all. We will strengthen the skills and self-agency of relevant actors to develop their own livelihood opportunities. We will also promote collaborative approaches among stakeholders to promote a business environment focused on collaboration as a key to economic success. Finally, we will highlight opportunities for and the value of a diversity of livelihood opportunities, including non-agriculture livelihoods and vocational opportunities.

### **4) Promoting a Good Neighborhood (Locally, Nationally and Regionally)**

Search recognizes the importance of building capacities for conflict transformation to address conflict and promote household, community and regional peaceful coexistence. Our approach will focus on fostering a culture of dialogue and peaceful dispute resolution at all levels, encouraging the population to act on their commonalities and highlighting the value of collaboration across dividing lines to support sustainable and inclusive development. Through community-based and media activities, we will seek to engage communities where tensions and the risk of violence are high. At the same time, we will target influential stakeholders, such as local mediators and authorities, to strengthen local resources for conflict transformation and mainstream collaborative approaches to addressing issues. By working with authorities at the national level, we will aim to institutionalize our Common Ground approach of conflict transformation among institutions such as the *Abunzi*, within schools, youth associations, etc. Search will also leverage the power of media to combat stereotypes related to gender, ethnic groups and nationality, in the country and the region, preventing the risk of manipulation and encouraging exchanges and cross-fertilization as a path for regional development.

## **Organizational Background and Added-Value**

Founded in 1982, Search is an international conflict transformation organization dedicated to transforming the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions. Search's core principles include reaching out to all parties and encouraging them to cooperate with those they disagree and to focus on positive opportunities and commonalities.

Search has been working in Rwanda since 2006 as part of our broader Great Lakes strategy to bring solutions to regional and national conflicts in the area, while promoting greater cooperation and

understanding across borders. Our work in Rwanda has two main objectives: to promote constructive and collaborative dialogue within Rwanda and the wider Great Lakes region, and to reinforce media capacity to address conflict issues with accuracy, impartiality, and responsibility.

Our toolbox in Rwanda includes: training material and experienced trainers in mediation, conflict transformation and conflict sensitive journalism; participatory theater experts and trained troupes; weekly radio programming and video production capacity; as well as support to collaborative projects that bring divided groups together through a common interest.

Search has developed strong partnerships with local structures such as *media outlets*, including private and community radio stations throughout the country. Search also works in close collaboration with *local authorities* at the cell and district levels, especially with the *Abunzi*, who play a key role in mediating conflict at the local level. At the national level, we have developed partnerships with *key institutions* such as the Ministry of Justice, the National Commission for Unity and Reconciliation, the Rwanda Natural Resources Authority and the Media High Council.

Leveraging its presence, toolbox and relationships, SFCG has achieved key successes that highlight the added value of Search to promote sustainable peace in Rwanda:

- To respond to the prevalent issue of land conflict, Search has developed an approach focused on capacity building of existing structures to *facilitate participatory and inclusive land dispute management in a sustainable manner*. We have empowered thousands of *Abunzi* and Community Resource Persons to identify the root causes of conflict, actively listen to the grievances of each party, and reach shared solutions. Leveraging the power of radio, we have shared relevant information on land-related issues and have amplified success stories of peaceful land conflict management, promoting a positive alternative to violence. Evaluations have shown that Search *has effectively contributed to strengthening decentralized implementation of land policy in the country*.
- Through a combination of relevant partnerships from the local to the national level, and a conflict sensitive approach focused on building bridges and repairing relationships, Search was able to *address issues particularly sensitive in Rwanda, such as reconciliation*. Search successfully created platforms for genocide survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders to come together and effect the bonds that can forward community healing.
- Search has successfully developed *innovative media and communication approaches* to address issues prevalent in Rwanda. Our reality TV show Zamuka, which followed the entrepreneurial journey of young Rwandans, was well received by the audience, who overwhelmingly found the show relevant, citing reasons such as the practicability of the messages shared on the program in addressing local problems and the simplicity of the messages that highly integrated local content.

#### *Search's Strengths*

- ✓ A reputable and impartial international organization with a proven track record in conflict transformation;
- ✓ A long-term presence, both in Rwanda and in neighboring Great Lakes countries;
- ✓ A unique Common Ground Approach to peacebuilding and conflict transformation;
- ✓ A in-house media expertise combined with partnerships with multiple media outlets that enable SFCG to speak to the realities of thousands of people;
- ✓ Strong partnerships with reliable and credible local partners and institutions.