

Search for Common Ground Sudan

2017 – 2021 Country Strategy

Context of Intervention

On October 10, 2016, Sudan's National Dialogue Conference was concluded with the adoption of a national document, including over 990 articles and recommendations developed to address fundamental issues of identity, human rights, the economy, governance, foreign affairs and peace. The dialogue process was held under the framework of the Roadmap Agreement, brokered by the African Union's High Implementation Panel and signed by the Government and four opposition groups in August 2016. This roadmap was perceived as an important first step to end violence and move towards a process of dialogue and lasting peace in Sudan, and in January 2017, the United States lifted decades-old sanctions on the country to foster further progress.

While perceived as not sufficiently inclusive by some given the absence of major opposition parties as well as all major Sudanese armed movements, the dialogue process did see the participation of over 80 political parties, over 30 armed movements, and a diversity of representatives from civil society, providing some space for these stakeholders to address critical yet sensitive issues for the future of the country. To sustain the momentum of the dialogue and address the root causes of conflicts, however, the recommendations from the dialogue need to be implemented and inclusive discussions need to be expanded and sustained. Both elements are critical to support the transition to sustainable peace and democratic governance in Sudan.

Since its independence in 1956, the country has experienced a combination of protracted internal conflicts in the states bordering South Sudan, as well as regional conflicts and political situations that have resulted in significant casualties, massive population displacements, and the marginalization of Sudanese peripheries. Humanitarian crises have been aggravated by demographic pressure, caused both by internal and external migration and a high youth population,¹ as well as by the proliferation of light arms, fueling increased levels of violence. Further Sudan sees growing incidences of recruitment into extremist groups, with ISIS as the primary destination.

Decades of instability have undermined the social fabric of many communities affected by high levels of violence and poverty, regional disparities and unequal access to resources and services, as well as political struggles over power and wealth. Limited freedom of expression and association, as well as rampant corruption and a largely centralized system of governance have also increased frustrations. As a result, mistrust and manipulation along dividing lines prevail and often escalate into violent conflict, preventing communities from peacefully coexisting, collaborating and self-realizing.

¹ More than 60% of the population is under 25 years old in Sudan.

Women have been one of the groups most affected by these challenges. Despite making up half of the population and playing a central role in the family sphere and labor force – women are at the heart of many agriculture and livestock related activities and actively participate in the informal economy – women remain marginalized. Victims of human rights violations and displacements, women have seen their already low social and economic status deteriorate as a result of conflicts. Violence has limited women’s opportunities for education, productive livelihoods, access to health services and participation in decision-making. Moreover, existing social norms and traditional roles constitute a barrier to women’s empowerment, as women’s access to and control of resources, particularly land and financial services, have been limited.

Young people are also particularly important, both given their numbers in the country as well as their vulnerability to manipulation and violence, including extremist groups, within Sudan and regionally. As in other places, many youth are more open than their elders to new ways of thinking and behaving, showing more engagement across regional and cultural lines in person and virtually. Efforts for peace and stability naturally need to engage young people as critical actors influencing the future of the country.

Building on the current momentum and to achieve lasting peace and sustainable development, Sudan needs to address these underlying political and socio-economic issues, which otherwise risk putting the country back on a path of violence and instability.

Strategic Response

Leveraging its eight years working in Sudan and 20 years in sensitive contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa, Search for Common Ground, one of the largest conflict transformation organizations in the world, has developed its vision for Sudan: ***“In 2021, communities, including marginalized groups, coexist peacefully, share opportunities and resources equitably, and participate equally in inclusive local development and democratic processes.”***

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

1) To empower women as active agents of peace and conflict transformation.

Outcome 1.1: Women play a leading role in peacebuilding and decision-making processes at the local and national level.

Outcome 1.2: An environment more conducive to women’s participation, protection and empowerment is strengthened.

2) To foster peaceful community coexistence and collaboration across dividing lines.

Outcome 2.1: Local capacities for conflict transformation and peacebuilding are increased.

Outcome 2.2: Inter-communal relations are improved.

Outcome 2.3: Communities collaborate around peace and reconciliation actions.

3) To increase economic resiliency of at-risk communities.

Outcome 3.1: Self-agency is increased in at-risk communities, who become less vulnerable to manipulation.

4) To promote platforms for inclusive and participatory dialogue and engagement on issues of common interest.

Outcome 4.1: Platforms for constructive dialogue and engagement are increasingly available, giving a voice to a diversity of citizens, including women and youth.

Search will work with the Badya Centre for Integrated Development and other local civil society partners in order to achieve these objectives and results. Search and its partners identified four key themes to be addressed as priorities in the scope of these objectives:

1) Women, Peace and Security

As stressed in the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, Search recognizes the importance of women’s equal and full participation as active agents in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and of the incorporation of gender perspectives in peacebuilding and decision-making processes. To advance the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and ensure sustainable conflict transformation, Search will aim at increasing the participation of women at all levels.

At the *local level*, Search will equip women leaders from various backgrounds with skills in leadership and conflict resolution to *strengthen their capacity to prevent and address community-level conflicts*. We will also ensure that women have the opportunity *to play a greater role in conflict mitigation* in their community by supporting women-led initiatives. To maximize the impact and sustainability of this women empowerment component, we will further strengthen an environment conducive to increased women’s participation by contributing to *enhance women’s protection*. We will engage key stakeholders to raise awareness on gender-based violence and discrimination and potential solutions to reduce it, as well as to promote gender sensitivity, with the aim to *transform social norms towards gender equality*.

At the *national level*, building on the momentum of the Roadmap, the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and increased representation quota of women in parliament, Search will enhance the ability of women leaders to *advocate for greater participation* in decision-making and peace processes, as well to *better represent the needs and interests of the communities that they serve*, and ensure that *gender sensitivity and inclusion are mainstreamed* in new policies and regulations.

2) Bridging Social Divides

To address community-level divisions and bridge existing social divides in fragile contexts, Search will strengthen local capacity for conflict transformation and peacebuilding, as well as support community actions for peace and reconciliation. Working with local leaders across religious, ethnic, tribal, generational and gender lines, we will *support locally-driven peace processes to strengthen conflict resilience* and prevent local communities from being drawn into divisions imposed from above. We will *facilitate dialogue across dividing lines*, building on existing community fora and local networks and using media and outreach tools, including radio, participatory theater and mobile cinema. Finally, we will *highlight voices for peace to develop alternatives to the cycle of violence and transform attitudes and behaviors*, from competition and confrontation over scarce resources to collaboration around shared interests. As relevant, these efforts will link with SFCG’s global efforts on [supporting UNSCR 2250 on youth, peace and security](#) as well as [transforming violent extremism](#).

3) Promoting Peace through Economic Empowerment

In a country like Sudan, affected by economic crisis and climate change, peacebuilding efforts must be integrated and address the practical needs of communities in order to be sustainable. Local conflict transformation initiatives should be linked to equitable and sustainable access to and management of resources and service delivery so that practical needs of community members cannot be leveraged and manipulated into violence. Linking peacebuilding to economic empowerment is critical, and can be achieved by *strengthening the economic resiliency of communities*. This is particularly essential for vulnerable groups, among whom marginalization is one of the main drivers to violence. For this component, Search will leverage the expertise of its partner Badya Centre and other local community-based organizations to strengthen the financial literacy of marginalized groups, and support them to develop their small businesses. This approach will strengthen the economic resiliency of marginalized groups. It will reduce their vulnerability and put them in a better place to contribute to local peace and security as they increasingly contribute to build more prosperous households and communities.

4) Building on the Foundation of the National Dialogue and Roadmap

Building on the foundation of Sudan’s National Dialogue and Roadmap Agreement, Search will aim to support a process of inclusive dialogue as a basis for lasting peace in Sudan. We will focus on ensuring awareness and ownership of the process among citizens, and in particular strengthen the participation of youth and women. Search will apply its experience in facilitating multi-stakeholder platforms for dialogue and engagement and aim at fostering two-way communication between key stakeholders directly participating in the dialogue and citizens, including in marginalized areas, building their confidence in and ownership of the process. Using media and outreach tools, Search will build bridges between formal processes and communities affected by violence to ensure that these newest peace efforts are inclusive, accountable, and thus sustainable.

Geographic Focus

Leveraging its presence and relationships in the two provinces, Search will primarily operate in *South* and *West Kordofan*, a highly divided and fragile region bordering on South Sudan, with potential extension to *Eastern Sudan*. For the Women, Peace and Security pillar, we will also aim to expand our activities in *Darfur*, where we will build on ongoing efforts supported by the United Nations Mission in Darfur, as well as in *Khartoum*, where we will seek to influence change at the national level.

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 active in Sudan since 2009. In collaboration with a Sudanese NGO, the Badya Centre for Integrated Development Services (Badya), we have developed and implemented innovative peacebuilding programs in South and West Kordofan, with the aim to strengthen local capacity for conflict transformation and peacebuilding, as well as support community actions for peace and reconciliation.

Our toolbox in Sudan includes participatory tools, ranging from conflict analysis to media programming, community dialogues and initiatives, participatory theatre troupes and performances, and mobile cinema screenings as platforms to trigger inclusive dialogue and mutual understanding around key issues that can lead to conflict. Search has also developed a peacebuilding training curriculum tailored to the Sudan specific context and needs.

Search has developed strong partnerships with local structures, including **Badya**. Badya, a leading development and peacebuilding NGO founded in 2000 in South Kordofan, has been a strategic partner of Search since 2010 and a co-implementer of our conflict transformation programming in the country. Search has also developed partnerships with **community-based organizations**, including the Sudanese Women’s Union, **media outlets** (Al-Fula and Kadugli radio stations) and universities (Dilling University) in South and West Kordofan. Search has also worked in close collaboration with authorities in South and West Kordofan, including the Humanitarian Aid Commission, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Communication.

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

- Search has played a critical role in building cohesion and capacity among women leaders to facilitate inclusive and peaceful dialogue. Using a combination of capacity building, dialogue and exchange tools, we **empowered hundreds of women** in South and West Kordofan and Khartoum, who played a key role in **transforming conflict** at the local level while **advocating for positive change** at the national level. As a result of our engagement, participants created **four women networks** in Al-Fula, Dilling, Kadugli and Khartoum and developed and ratified a **Sudan Women’s Charter**. Search’s leadership role in empowering women in Sudan was acknowledged at the national level, where Search was invited to become a member of the National Action Plan Taskforce to support the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325, a mechanism endorsed by the Government.
- Search has contributed to advancing peace and conflict transformation in South and West Kordofan by engaging a multitude of actors across dividing lines, building bridges within and between communities. We **encouraged key stakeholders to constructively address some of the central conflicts taking place in the region**, as well as **introduced key techniques like problem solving, negotiation and dialogue** to foster peaceful co-existence among communities. In 2012, Search and Badya played a crucial role in the facilitation of the **Kadugli Peace Forum**, which saw the participation of nearly 1,200 people from different backgrounds and affiliations engaging in dialogue on key concerns. The Forum resulted in a series of **recommendations promoting sustainable solutions** to the security, political, social and economic issues facing the region, which were **presented during peace talks in Addis Ababa**. More recently, Search supported the creation of two Peace Libraries in South and West Kordofan, where traditional and customary peace agreements are collected. These libraries have contributed to strengthen the reliance on trusted peace systems in the regions while serving as peace hubs for communities.
- Search has been instrumental in **promoting conflict sensitive journalism** and **creating a new culture of dialogue** via the media in South and West Kordofan. After receiving capacity building and

✓ 70% of trained women leaders utilized their skills to affect change at the national level.

✓ 79% of women leaders self-identified as having an influence in their communities.

coaching from Search, the quality and conflict sensitivity of our partner radio stations' programming increased, and now represent a diversity of voices and views. Programs produced and listening clubs created contributed to the development of *productive, inclusive and representative peacebuilding dialogue at the community level*. Youth and women, in particular, benefited from this as it enabled them to participate more freely in conversations around conflict, protection and peaceful coexistence.

Search's Strengths

- ✓ Our reputation as an impartial international organization with a proven track record in conflict transformation, combined with a strategic partnership with Badya, a recognized development and peacebuilding Sudanese organization;
- ✓ A long-term presence and strong understanding of local conflict dynamics and operational challenges in South and West Kordofan, as well as a flexible approach enabling us to work in a sensitive and fragile context;
- ✓ A unique Common Ground Approach to peacebuilding and conflict transformation and creative tools to foster dialogue and engagement;
- ✓ A strategic partnership with two radio stations, enabling us to reach a majority of the population in our zones of intervention.