



**Search for
Common Ground**
Trust, Collaboration, Breakthroughs

CAPACITY STATEMENT: Climate, Environment, and Conflict

Organizational Profile

Since 1982, [Search for Common Ground](#) (Search) has transformed the way the world deals with conflict: away from adversarial approaches and toward cooperative solutions. Our long-term programming in 34 countries and network of over 1,200 partners around the world enables Search to reach over 700,000 direct participants and 50 million people through media programs in many of the world's most fragile settings. With 93% of our 1,000 global staff being from the countries in which they work, we adapt and contextualize our approaches according to the needs of local communities.

Over the past 20 years, Search has successfully brought together local communities, policy actors, informal leaders, women, youth, marginalized groups, and private sector stakeholders to peacefully address conflicts and build community resilience to climate change, environmental degradation, and resource scarcity in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Our goal is to transform natural resource-related conflict and leverage climate and environment-related tensions to bring together people across ethnic, political, religious, socio-economic, and other divides. We do this through community dialogue, capacity building, radio programming, awareness raising, knowledge sharing, policy advocacy, and inclusive approaches that center women, youth, refugees/IDPs, and other marginalized groups. We empower communities by involving them in natural resources management and create the premises for better governance.

What We Do

Transform Land- and Water-Related Conflict

Climate change, environmental degradation, and overexploitation intensify the scarcity of natural resources such as fertile land or water, minerals, and oil in the Global South. In already fragile contexts, this often leads to violent conflict. For example, violent **conflicts between farmers and pastoralists** over contested land have increased in regions such as the Sahel and Great Lakes in recent years. In response to this, Search developed a toolkit on "[Pastoralism and Conflict: Tools for Prevention and Response in the Sudano-Sahel](#)", capturing lessons learned and recommendations on how to transform conflicts associated with crossborder pastoralism.

In the **Great Lakes and MENA region**, Search leverages natural resources to bring together conflicting parties to address a joint problem. Between 2017-2021, Search implemented a project named [Maji ya Amani](#) (*Swahili: Water of Peace*) in the Great Lakes region, adopting an **integrated approach** to reducing conflict between competing ethnic groups and increasing stability in the Ruzizi Plain in the DRC through more **equitable access to land and water** for household and agricultural use. It targeted 28,880 people and also improved governance around the management of these resources.

In **Yemen**, where over 43% of the local conflicts are related to water scarcity, competition over **access to water** is a main driver of conflict. In Lahj, tensions over access to one well had been ongoing for 15 years when armed violence broke out between two neighboring villages. As part of a three-year project called *Promoting Women's Inclusion in Peacebuilding in Yemen*, Search trained 556 community representatives on nonviolent conflict transformation and facilitated participatory dialogue sessions. As a result, the two villages—led by women peacebuilders—eventually agreed to stop the violence, established a system for sharing the well, and sourced funds to construct a second well. Today, the two villages not only have equal access to water, but also have the skills and experience to find collaborative solutions to common problems.

Ensure Inclusion of Marginalized Groups in Environmental Decision Making

Search's activities empower women and girls to be agents of positive community solutions and active leaders for transforming resource-based conflicts in their communities constructively:

Combining **women's leadership** with arts and media (e.g. participatory theater, women-led media programs) proved to be an effective approach to raising awareness on land-related issues and opened safe spaces for solution-oriented dialogue. In our Rwanda project on mediating land disputes, over 10,000 women participated in theater performances and 16 were trained to become journalists. The number of women mediating land disputes increased to 44%, community satisfaction with female mediators increased to 85%, and the number of successful female mediation cases increased by 22% at the final evaluation. After public dialogue and media platforms in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, an average of 76% of men and 93% of women living in communities where we led programming indicated that women should have the right to own land, compared to 49% of men and 63% of women in areas where we did not.

Youth are also particularly relevant in this space. Youth leaders can drive activities addressing climate change and peacebuilding but are also facing the compounding impacts of climate change and conflict as older generations do not include them in local decision making and often disregard their needs. For instance, youth have limited access to land due to delayed inheritance, inability to gather resources to purchase land, social norms excluding them from allocation processes, and land policies which do not see them as a distinct group.

In Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Search's project "*#JashStan: Youth as Agents for Peace and Stability*" supports young men and women from marginalized backgrounds to reduce the likelihood of community-based conflicts by putting them in the driving seat and enabling them to become catalysts for peace in their communities. By working with local youth centers, we engage youth in collaborative initiatives with the national government and local self-government bodies to voice their needs and grievances and seek opportunities for shared and constructive problem-solving.

Popularize Legal Resolution to Land Rights Conflict

Search has been working on **land rights** for more than 20 years. Increasingly, climate is having an impact on conflicts related to land rights. Therefore, Search has been doing more and more to address climate-induced land rights work from a legal and community justice perspective. For instance, the changing climate and rapid population growth are impacting the availability of [farmland in Rwanda](#) and an increase in conflicts over land use and ownership, especially when coupled with dissatisfaction over government policies. To tackle this, we convened academics, peacebuilding, and policy practitioners to examine opportunities to address emerging issues at the intersection of land, climate, and conflict.

Search utilizes media as a tool to produce and broadcast radio shows and TV series to inform public audiences of natural resource and **land management issues** and to empower them to utilize legal institutions for resolving disputes. By including different perspectives from women and youth, law enforcement, government officials, traditional leaders, and civil society, participants challenge key stereotypes, de-mystify dangerous rumors, and create safe and positive problem-solving channels.

- In **Rwanda**, Search produced over 150 radio programs and 40 participatory theater performances to increase legal knowledge on land rights issues in the general public. As a result, 77% of participants reported feeling prepared to manage conflict in a collaborative, nonviolent way, and participants' knowledge of legal frameworks rose by 25%.
- In **Sierra Leone**, Talking Drum Studio's Bush Wahala radio drama is one of the most famous radio programs, exploring issues related to natural resource management, climate change, land rights, and mining. We began producing the show in 2000, it has since become a household name and a go-to radio program for Sierra Leoneans to get involved in discussions on land rights and natural resource management. The show is produced in local languages and reaches some of the most rural and marginalized communities affected by environmental challenges.

- Search created [ConnexUs](#), a global learning and networking platform for practitioners/civic actors in conflict-affected contexts. It has a thematic platform on [Climate Change](#) where a large community can exchange best practices. With users in over 190 countries, ConnexUs offers a space to create shared solutions to shared challenges.

Promote Sustainable Business Practices

In fragile and conflict-affected countries, ensuring socio-economic development through the private sector is critical for stability and prosperity. At the same time, companies in the natural resource, extractive, or infrastructure sectors have historically caused severe environmental damage and have contributed to existing tensions. Search promotes sustainable business practices and corporate social responsibility, supporting private sector actors in building company-wide capacity and commitment to sustainable, conflict-sensitive operations. Search also supports local communities in advocating for their rights and encourages meaningful collaboration, dialogue, and dispute resolution between private companies, local governments, and communities. We play a leadership role in multi-stakeholder initiatives for sustainable business practices, including serving on the Steering Committee of the [Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights](#), engagement with the [Kimberley Process](#), and the [Global Network Initiative](#).

- In **Madagascar**, Search worked with Ambatovy between 2015 and 2018 to support information flow and **good governance around mining sites** and to improve communication around the **management of natural resources**. The project helped establish platforms for dialogue between citizens, authorities, and the mining company, and enhanced collaboration around shared issues. Search was able to build the capacity of project staff on rumor management. The training with Ambatovy staff in Toamasina provided them with a better understanding of rumor management and its usefulness. A 31% increase in knowledge was noted among all participants after the session.
- Search implemented a **sustainable business practice** project called *"Tuunganishe Mikono kwa Maendeleo Yetu Eendelevu: Let's join hands for sustainable development"* in Mara and Shinyanga regions in **Tanzania**. The overall goal was to foster sustainable, positive, and cohesive relationships between community members, government, decision-makers, Acacia Mining, and other stakeholders in mining communities at the local and district levels. Data shows that the [Search program](#) was positively associated with an increase in feelings of social cohesion, safety around the mine site, and trust with the police and Acacia security. At the end of the project, 65% of households surveyed felt that policewomen and policemen respected and upheld human rights and Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights, social cohesion was rated positively at 3.6 out of 10 by community members (on a scale of 0-10, with 0 being the most positive).
- In light of the DRC's application to join the **Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI)**, Search supported a project in collaboration with USAID aiming to contribute to the institutionalization and successful implementation of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPs). This is driven by **Congolese civil society organizations**, who have an acute sense of the realities of mining sites and adjacent communities, and are well placed to monitor on-ground developments, conduct evidence-based research, and provide actionable recommendations for successful implementation of the VPs. The aim is to support the capacity of civil society organizations to review current **minerals-related programs** in order to identify opportunities and challenges for the adoption of the VPs, and to advocate on the national level for improving transparency and human rights abuses in the mining sector.

Conflict-Sensitive Climate Change Programming

Traditional environmental programming (e.g. disaster risk reduction, conservation etc.) does not have the best track record when it comes to understanding its role in conflict exacerbation or its potential to address conflict. Increasingly, climate change is a cause of conflict - requiring climate-sensitive approaches to conflict programming. Search contributes to the mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity in climate-related programming through:

- **Conflict analyses:** Our in-house research, monitoring, evaluation, and learning experts conduct conflict

analyses to identify and monitor local drivers of conflict as they relate to climate and the environment. The results are shared with relevant stakeholders to inform climate change policies and programs in conflict-affected and fragile settings. In 2017-2018, Search implemented a project in Lebanon aiming to encourage the Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities to consistently apply a collaborative, conflict sensitive, and non-violent response to rising communal tensions. With the influx of Syrian refugees, the amount of garbage increased by 30%, from 8 tons to 12 tons on a daily basis. Activities implemented included: trust building, capacity building, roundtable discussions, design and implementation of Joint Community Initiatives and outreach to the communities. As part of this project, we produced a video called "[A solution to Lebanon's garbage crisis](#)".

- **Supporting governments in ensuring their adaptation policies are conflict sensitive**, e.g. through policy recommendations, reviewing climate and environment strategies, consultations, and capacity building activities. In Guinea, Search worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Mines and Geology, including its Community Relations and Local Content Department, as part of the 2017-2018 project "*BOKE HERY: Renforcer le dialogue et réduire les conflits entre compagnies minières, autorités et communautés*". We strengthened mining companies' capacity to understand how their activities interact with local conflict dynamics and how to mitigate these potential side effects from a conflict sensitivity perspective.
- **Improving conflict sensitivity among non-governmental actors** who are helping local communities become more climate-resilient. Humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, and environmental organizations play a crucial role in climate resilience, adopting new livelihoods, and coping with climate stressors. Through training, tools, and dialogue, we promote conflict-sensitive policies and approaches among those implementers to ensure their efforts are conducive to peace.