WHO WE ARE

Search for Common Ground’s (Search) mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict——away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions. We work with local partners to find culturally appropriate means to strengthen societies’ capacity to deal with conflicts constructively; to understand differences and act on commonalities. With that in mind, Search established an office in Lebanon in 2008 to address the legacy of conflicts linked to the civil war, sectarian divisions and weak state institutions.

WHO WE WORK WITH

Search-Lebanon is at the forefront of initiatives promoting social cohesion in Lebanon, and has developed highly successful and beneficial relationships with communities and local organizations throughout the country. Because of the violent conflict raging across the border, there are now almost 2 million Syrians in Lebanon. While the humanitarian response and sympathy of host communities has played a crucial role in providing sustenance and livelihoods to Syrians, over time, deteriorating economic and security conditions have given rise to bitter sentiments and increased hostility. In line with Search’s overall objective to build capacities for dealing with conflict constructively, the Lebanon office has implemented projects at three levels: with children; youth; and adults. These use a variety of approaches to strengthen social cohesion within and between communities. In total, Search has engaged 6,004 people in social cohesion programs in Lebanon since 2013.1

1 Unless otherwise noted, all projects aim to include equal representation of boys and girls, and men and women. The ‘Lebanese’ category includes Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (PRL) and the ‘Syrian’ category includes Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) that have come to Lebanon since 2011.
Search engages with children through the Rainbow of Hope project, now entering its third year of implementation. Over 1,270 Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian children between the ages of 6 and 11 years have taken part to develop their skills in English literacy and conflict transformation through storytelling. Thanks to this project, children overcame their pre-existing prejudices and increased their sense of mutual understanding, empathy, and ultimately, longstanding friendship with each other. Search has trained over 75 young Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese teachers and animators to lead the children in their learning journey, resulting in an overall increase in the children’s English language and conflict resolution abilities as detailed in the graph above.²

In the Better Together project, Search has worked with young Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian artists who taught youth leaders to express themselves through arts and to work together, across dividing lines, towards advancing change in their community. So far, 320 youth have developed their skills through this arts-based peacebuilding approach.³ As a result of the increased skills and confidence, many youth have pursued their own initiatives, such as a dabke group or a theatre troupe. Youth act as multipliers, bringing their skills and attitudes to their families, friends and the wider community.

Search has also improved social cohesion among more than 150 local adult leaders through a community dialogue initiative bringing together in the form of “joint committees” Lebanese and Syrian communities. Syrian and Lebanese adults community leaders engage in roundtable sessions to discuss community needs and collaborate on the design and implementation of 16 joint community initiatives for over 1,500 people. This process fosters cooperative community-led solutions to mitigate tensions and improve social cohesion. For example, in the town of Sarafand, the joint committee worked with the municipality and a local organization to install a new garbage pick-up and recycling system that helps to mitigate the effects of the current waste management crisis. 100% of the stakeholders who were surveyed stated that the projects implemented by the joint committees had a positive impact on their communities.

² Rainbow of Hope I Final Evaluation can be found in the following link: www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/LIB_EV_July15_Rainbow-of-Hope-project.pdf and short videos about the achievements of year 1 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=vV5c09XQoGc) and year 2 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=l355mzR36QY&feature=youtu.be).
³ Better Together Mid-Term Evaluation can be found in the following link: www.search.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/LIB_MT_July15_Better-Together-A-Youth-Led-Approach-to-Peaceful-Coexistence.pdf along with a video showcasing the first year of the project (www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7rCFrXkIQ).
YOUTH-LED APPROACH

In addition to the three-layered approach described above, all of our youth programs are youth-led, guided by our firm belief that organized and effective community engagement of youth is a prerequisite for laying the foundations for positive change at the local and national level.¹

Search builds the capacities of Youth Agents of Change through specialized training workshops and practical experiences of positive leadership. These youth then act as multipliers of the overall impact of our projects and peacebuilding ambassadors in their communities leading their peers in collaborative initiatives. For instance, after participating in youth-led social cohesion activities, there was a 42 percentage point increase (as indicated in the graph above) in youth participants who indicated that they could initiate activities that promote living together peacefully and respectfully in their communities.⁵ Since 2013, Search has built a pool of 175 Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian Youth Agents of Change who are triggering positive change across the country as facilitators, teachers, animators, and volunteers. The ongoing Aswat Faaela (Active Voices) project has trained 14 Syrian and Lebanese Youth Master Facilitators to lead workshops and activities for a further 100 Youth Community Builders. Our training has enabled youth to become Youth Agents of Change in their communities and catalyzed their own personal transformations.

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¹ This is also in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2250, which Search played a leading role in initiating and advocating for. (www.sfcg.org/un-security-council-resolution-2250/)
INNOVATIVE TOOLS

Search has learned from experience that one of the most effective ways to engage young people in peacebuilding is to use entertaining, engaging and non-traditional tools and approaches. Such tools have been a hallmark of Search’s work around the world, and Search-Lebanon in particular has recently produced television series and a video game promoting peacebuilding in the Middle East whilst using arts-based approaches to engage youth and women. TV Series “The Team”, “Kīlna bil Hayy” and, most recently, “Madam President”* are all locally produced television series that promote peacebuilding principles. In Madam President, the lead role is played by acclaimed Lebanese actress Carmen Lebbos, who becomes the first female president of a fictional Arab country. Search–Lebanon trained youth facilitators who organized viewing sessions of the show and subsequently led discussions about active citizenship and the role of women in leadership positions - reaching a total of 857 youth throughout Lebanon - with a final evaluation of the project finding that 78% of those polled liked the series7.

Cedaria: Blackout is a Search-produced video game that provides children and youth in Lebanon with a platform to learn and practice how to manage conflict, solve community problems collaboratively, and understand the perspectives of the ‘other.’ Search trained 8 youth Lebanese and Syrian facilitators to organize gaming sessions and lead discussions about how they can relate conflict resolution themes that come up in the game to their own lives. In total, Search-trained facilitators reached 233 youth. The sessions proved especially successful with young women and youth from vulnerable backgrounds, such as Syrian refugees and Palestinians. Moving forward, several educators in schools and universities have expressed a desire to use Cedaria with their students as an education tool.

Search is continuing all of the aforementioned programming, with projects across Lebanon, as a part of our long-term commitment to strengthen social stability in the country. We also continue to innovate and pioneer new tools, such as online platforms, social media and internet radio programming.

* Madame President was produced in 2015 in Jordan.