Youth, Peace, and Security

A community-based initiative for increased stabilization in Diffa

Since 2015, the region of Diffa has seen a sharp increase in attacks on Boko Haram. In 2018, a total of 156 incidents were reported, 88 percent of which were attributed to non-state armed groups. The remainder were related to banditry and inter-communal conflicts. This recent upsurge in violence makes it crucial to establish more inclusive, bottom-up, and participatory engagement processes with communities to maintain peace.

In this context, Search for Common Ground (Search) is implementing a 24-months project funded by the German Federal Foreign Office to reinforce the efficiency of existing local peace architecture and to foster mutual trust and collaboration between authorities, security and defence forces, and communities. “Youth, Peace, and Security” strengthens the participation of young people in local peace infrastructures and empowers them to actively contribute to conflict prevention efforts through innovative socio-economic and awareness-raising initiatives. Our intervention in Diffa is threefold:

- Strengthen the capacity of key community actors to address intra and inter-community conflicts;
- Increase youth-led community-level engagement towards community resilience to violent extremism, conflict mitigation, and economic recovery;
- Amplify voices of key stakeholders, particularly women, youth and marginalized groups in contributing to peace and stability.

The project prioritizes the localities with the largest number of ex-combatants and where imminent reintegration programs are already underway. These implementing localities are Bosso, Chetimari, Gueskerou, Kablewa, and Maine-Soroa. Our intervention is done in close collaboration with the “Haute Autorité à la Consolidation de la Paix” (HACP - the High Authority for Peacebuilding), the governorate of Diffa, and Regional Council’s representatives.

**COMMUNITIES AND YOUTH AT THE FOREFRONT TO ADDRESS CONFLICT**

Our project’s first step is to build trust between community leaders, youth, local authority representatives, and security forces. Once the foundations for a fruitful collaboration are laid, we bring these stakeholders together. Through capacity building and planning workshops, participants learn the basics of conflict identification and analysis, community outreach and mobilization, and strategic communication. Our workshops provide them with the tools to identify security and stability issues, discuss thematic priorities, and plan community solidarity actions such as peace awareness campaigns or small rehabilitation projects.
“Before, we didn’t know that it was possible to collaborate with communities. Since the activities, our relationship with the community has improved. We now have real opportunities for collaboration”

a member of the defence and security forces

Building on our proven methodology in the Niger Delta in Nigeria, we support state-sponsored Peace Committees (PCs) to collaborate with communities, particularly young men and women, to address security challenges. Specifically, Search bridges youth-led peacebuilding initiatives with PCs by organizing discussions on youth-led PC security measures and supporting youth in implementing decisions.

In addition to peace committees at the community level, we organize Peace Architecture Dialogues (PADs) at the regional level.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR RESILIENCE TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

This project enables youth leaders to contribute to conflict prevention efforts at the local level actively. First, we train them on the fundamentals of leadership, conflict management, community mobilization, and advocacy. With their new skills, youth participants work with local authorities and security forces to promote collaboration and non-violence in their communities.

Following the training, we organize innovation camps for young people from different groups in conflict. Together, they develop collaborative conflict analysis and design innovative activities to address conflict dynamics, including community outreach, societal media, and online advocacy. Young PCs representatives also participate in the camps, therefore opening informal communication channels between young leaders and security forces.

We then support the young trainees in the implementation of the projects they have designed. These activities focus on the main community conflicts, emphasizing bringing together farmers and herdsmen. They include inter-community events and market days, youth-led community dialogues, debates, and arts and sports activities. Finally, we help youth set up income-generating activities to contribute to their social integration and reduce their vulnerability to violent extremism exacerbated by unemployment.

“We were afraid of the security and defense forces. We thought that they did not distinguish between the population and the insurgents. Now we realize that they are there to protect us and that it is imperative to work together to build peace”

a young participant.

RADIO TO AMPLIFY COMMUNITY VOICES

Our media experts provide technical support and organize training sessions adapted to the needs of 8 community radio partners. This training helps journalists and radio producers produce conflict-sensitive content that addresses security and conflict issues. In our studio in Diffa, our team produces roundtables and a radio magazine to reinforce positive stories and amplify community perspectives on conflict and security issues. Besides our production, the community radio stations we support also diffuse monthly radio debates led with local actors.