Support Youth-led dialogue for Peace and Stability in the Sahel

Over the past year, Central Mali and Northern Burkina Faso have both seen a dramatic increase in inter-community violence. Armed groups responding to intertwined dynamics of banditry, violent extremism, and community-level conflicts have established a strong foothold in these regions, taking advantage of weak state presence, porous borders, and local grievances.

In this context, with funding from the PATRIP Foundation, our 24-month project supports young leaders and key community actors to collaborate with local authorities in designing infrastructure project proposals and implementing peace and dialogue initiatives. Our intervention is threefold:

- Strengthen the capacities of youth, local authorities, and border communities to transform conflict, communicate and collaborate effectively;

- Develop relationships and trust between local communities and key local and regional authorities through cross-border dialogue and joint planning for the identification of context-specific proposals for small and medium-scale infrastructure projects;

- Support the exchange of regional information on local perspectives on key issues related to cross-border collaboration and stability.

The targeted areas are evenly distributed in the two countries with 6 communes in Mali (Mopti region), including 3 in the Koro circle, and 3 in the Bankass circle, and 6 communes in Burkina Faso, including 4 in the Nord and 2 in the Sahel region.

Search for Common Ground (Search) is one of the largest conflict transformation organizations in the world. Our mission is to transform the way that the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions. In the Sahel region since 2011, our programs weave the fabric of society, from communities to nations, infusing social cohesion and providing equitable access and engagement at every level into political, social, security, and development efforts.
COLLABORATION TOWARDS PEACE

To strengthen trust-based collaboration between local communities and local and regional authorities, we support young leaders to conduct community dialogue sessions on peace and security issues. These dialogues gather community ideas for small-scale, inclusive infrastructure projects and open informal channels of communication between young leaders and local civil and military authorities.

Every quarter, the young leaders organize Town Hall Meetings (THM) in collaboration with local and regional authorities to provide opinions and feedback on local security and development decisions. Before, during, and after each of these regional forums, youth, community members, and local authorities use the community scorecard methodology to evaluate existing public services. This participatory evaluation process helps to develop a culture of mutual accountability and dialogue among all stakeholders.

Moreover, through two cross-border summits, young people from both countries have the opportunity to open a dialogue on their challenges and prospects for peace, stability, and social cohesion beyond their respective borders. These meetings make it possible to define recommendations with the competent authorities and the security and defense forces, which the youth then share in awareness-raising sessions.

Finally, to translate these dialogue sessions into concrete actions, the young leaders work with local authorities to implement peace initiatives. We provide young leaders with a package of technical support and financial resources to carry out their own peacebuilding projects. These activities, determined by the youth, promote collaboration between groups and include arts and sports competitions, peace festivals, exchange visits, or small-scale infrastructure projects.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CONFLICT-TRANSFORMATION

Selected based on their leadership potential and influence in their communities, we provide training to 120 youth in conflict transformation, dialogue facilitation, positive communication and leadership, and interest-based advocacy. Using their new skills, they develop joint action plans, including small-scale infrastructure projects that lay the foundation for increased collaboration and dialogue around cross-border peace and security issues with local authorities, representatives of border commissions and public services.

BETTER INFORMATION FOR BETTER COOPERATION

Search’s media team provides training to community radio station staff on the Common Ground approach to journalism, consisting of key tools and methodologies for conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Through these training, radio journalists produce positive, verified, and locally rooted information on critical issues related to peace and social cohesion. This trained radio staff then co-produces "Generation Sahel," a radio program highlighting local perspectives, challenges, and solutions, particularly those of youth and women, on critical issues of security and social cohesion in border areas.

Broadcast by our radio partners and on social networks, we also produce short messages providing concrete, practical, and detailed information on conflicts’ dynamics. These messages also raise awareness of the security situation and the regional authorities’ measures and star influential leaders to promote peace.