“I am a griot... My word is pure and free of all untruth; it is the word of my father’s father... When a quarrel breaks out between tribes it is we who settle the difference, for we are the depositaries of oaths which the ancestors swore.”

...The Griot in the telling of the Sundiata Epic¹

¹D.T. Niane. Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali. Longman Group Ltd. 1965
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper lays out Search for Common Ground’s 10-year strategy for its engagement in the West African Sahel, particularly in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. As part of Search’s organizational strategy, the Sahel was chosen as one of the eleven conflict geographies in which Search will focus its efforts over the coming decade.

There is an air of pessimism and fear gripping these three countries as they are confronting a shifting conflict environment which is at once unfamiliar – in terms of the levels of violence and the rapid progression of the conflict – and at the same time built on some long-standing root causes which have not been addressed since independence. This geography is home to some of the world’s most ancient civilizations and the great cities of Timbuktu and Agadez which acted as hubs for scholars and traders since the 11th century. The instability and violence of today has grown and has been influenced by a multitude of factors over the last centuries. In addition to internally fueled conflict, the region has been destabilized by the actions of external actors - the colonial reimagining of borders in the Sahel stoked violent conflict and the population decline and warfare caused by the Atlantic slave trade also helped to set the stage for subsequent instability.

The current epicenter of the conflict is the Liptako-Gourma region and its surrounding areas where the borders of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso come together. A confluence of factors fueling violence across the Sahel has resulted in the emergence of a number of non-state armed groups and increased militarization2 concentrated in this region. In recent years there has been a sharp conflagration of inter-communal and terrorist violence which shows no signs of abating. The driving factors shaping this conflict geography reach far beyond the Liptako-Gourma. The armed conflict in the region started in Northern Mali as a result of the flood of weapons and fighters from Libya and spilled over into Niger and Burkina Faso. There are proxy factors and spillover effects across Niger, Algeria and Libya in the Sahara desert through to coastal West Africa. Western militaries were drawn into the conflict initially to prevent the collapse of Mali in 2015; they remain involved due to the global response to jihadist inspired terrorism, the presence of uranium and gold, and the flow of migrants northward to Europe. France, the United States, Germany, and Italy all have a military presence on the ground. Finally, the conflict in this region is also deeply connected to all that is happening in the Lake Chad Basin and the rest of Nigeria which will be treated in a separate but connected strategy.

At the heart of the conflict is the stalled peace process in Mali; the implementation of the Algiers Agreement, which halted hostilities between Tuareg Rebellion and the Malian government, has hardly progressed in the four years since it was signed. The delay around the implementation of the agreement in addition to the emergence of local interests along identity lines have essentially created opportunities for an array of existing jihadist groups to expand their reach, using Northern and Central Mali as launching points for regional operations. Some of the groups are deeply local and others are networked with Al Qaeda and ISIS. Thirdly, these groups have broader designs, and there are escalating spillover effects into Tillabéri in Niger and across the Northern belt of Burkina Faso. The phenomenon of violent extremism has emerged in the context of a longer-standing and more intractable dynamic - the sharp divisions between and within groups, which are fueled by land and resource conflict. Sharp stereotypes and attitudes have gained traction and have created a basis for persecution and targeted violence by community-based militias. There have been many attacks on civilians and retaliation killings; the situation threatens to spiral out of control, even potentially reaching the level of ethnic cleansing. At the same time the Fulanis are seeing their nomadic lives and their herding livelihoods slipping away, threatened by climate change, population growth, increased demand for animal products, and governments which have not protected them. Similarly, farmers have seen their crops devastated by herds, entrenching grievances between farming and herding communities. The lack of capacity by the region’s governments to respond effectively has further enabled the spread of violent extremist groups to entrench themselves in communities and be transnational in nature.

Therefore, this strategy takes a regional approach to tackling the conflict, targeting Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. It is a complex conflict system and is deeply impoverished; Niger ranks last in

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the world on the Human Development Index while Burkina Faso and Mali are ranked 183 and 182 (out of 189 countries) respectively. The development challenges facing the region are immense and deeply integral to ending the conflict. Search’s role is to transform the conflict dynamics which shape the region, ultimately enabling efforts to modernize the economy and strengthen livelihoods to be successful.

Search’s overall mandate in the Sahel is to weave the fabric of society, from communities to nation, infusing social cohesion and providing equitable access and engagement at every level into political, social, security, and development efforts. This requires supporting national and international actors moving past a state-centric approach to security, justice and peace, to address the current crisis, recognizing that the state-based security complex perpetuates the conflict across the Sahel. This also goes beyond a resilience approach which has been a dominant framework for development in the region, largely due to cycle of devastating droughts. Rather, it focuses on leveraging key ongoing processes to cause vertical and horizontal social cohesion, targeting those parts of the geography which are particularly crucial for long-term peace. Critical to this will be working at the intersection of peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance, and economic development, in order to most effectively capitalize on the region’s assets for peace and address sources of instability. This directly builds on Search’s expertise and presence in the Sahel since 2011 and drives us to develop or strengthen partnerships with organizations outside of the peacebuilding sector to support major ongoing initiatives which are underway.

The ensuing strategy focuses on five key, inter-related changes which are part of the conflict system and to which Search can substantial contribute:

1. To strengthen social and economic interdependence across dividing lines. Inter-communal tension, which has long been a defining (and unaddressed) feature of conflict in the Sahel, has resulted in entrenched ethnic divisions, increased identity politics, and a cycle of violence which threatens to spin out of control. This includes large-scale violence which some analysts believe rises to the level of ethnic cleansing. Search will employ both a short-term and a long-term strategy, focused on Central Mali, Western Niger and Northern Burkina Faso. In the near-term, Search will prevent further escalation of violence and mass atrocities while laying the foundations for long-term interdependent relationships among people from different groups. Because ethnic-based conflict in the Sahel is so deeply linked to livelihoods, our work will, in part, focus on demonstrating how relationships across dividing lines can lead to livelihood dividends - by building economic linkages between farmers and herders, strengthening local-level trade, and in opening the value chain on key market segments.

2. To advance equitable and inclusive management of land and water resources. Competition over natural resources, particularly land and water access, is a key root cause of conflict across the Sahel. While complex natural resource management schemes have existed since the Macina Empire of the 1800s, the legal regimes and customary or traditional mechanisms to manage related disputes have been unable to cope with the stressors created by population growth, climate change, and increased demand for animal products. They have also struggled to create cross-border connections or effective resource trade between capitals and periphery areas. In addition, lack of regulation over resources and corruption of local power holders contribute to tensions due to unequal distribution of resources. Work under this strategic objective will focus largely on improving policy on equitable and sustainable land management and incorporating conflict sensitivity into government, agribusiness, and mining practices. This will be done by inculcating the Common Ground Approach into land management reform efforts (reforms of the Rural Code, for instance), strengthening accountability of land conflict management mechanisms, and linking local actors - particularly youth, women and traditional elders - to nationally driven processes in all countries.

3. To transform the way that states respond to security threats so that they collaborate with local stakeholders to address the root causes of conflict. The proliferation of armed groups, including Al Qaeda and ISIS networked organizations, has triggered strong-handed responses from security forces across the region. Yet, the prospects for stability depend on security forces having collaborative relationships with communities, based on mutual respect and trust, and together holding human dignity at the center of their actions. Search will leverage its existing cross-border SSR programs and further develop partnerships with key governmental actors in the security and defense sectors and the peace architecture, including the G5 Sahel Permanent Secretariat, as well as international militaries present in the region.
4. To strengthen inclusive governance and improve equitable access to public services. Long-term peace in the Sahel depends on each government’s ability to serve all of its citizenry effectively and equitably. All three countries in the geography have road maps to decentralization, yet efforts to reassert service delivery, provide security and administer justice has been stymied. Establishing a state presence is insufficient to reduce armed group presence; inclusive notions of governance - which engage women, youth, traditionally marginalized communities, and others - is vital to address the grievances which have public traction. Search’s efforts will focus on advancing citizens access to decision-makers and improving state capacities to engage their constituents to jointly address the myriad challenges faced. This will enable partnerships with government and civil society groups at every level.

5. To create conditions for the success of an inclusive political settlement to the conflict in Mali. While the Algiers Agreement has laid out a roadmap to long-term and enduring peace in Mali and the wider region, implementation has largely stalled, save for some small steps in the DDR process of the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) soldiers. Search’s efforts will focus on engaging communities, especially youth, in envisioning a political settlement process; facilitate the implementation of DDR and reconciliation initiatives; and initiate community involvement in implementing structural reforms in Mali.

In order to accomplish these objectives, Search will form a set of partnerships with public, private, and non-profit institutions who have ongoing initiatives and expertise in relevant areas. For instance, there are a number of organizations which focus on economic recovery or land resource management; through strategic and long-term partnerships, we will be able to integrate the Common Ground approach into their work, strengthening social cohesion and offering us platforms for scaling our work. This is driven by the nature of the strategic objectives of this strategy and is central to our potential to have an impact at any significant scale.

Search has a great opportunity in this geography; we have worked in Burkina Faso in the past and we have a sizeable staff presence in Mali (with offices in Mopti and Gao) and Niger (with offices in Niamey, Tillabéri, and Diffa). We have experience implementing cross-border projects. We have a growing network of partners, have existing media production capacities, and have emerging relationships with key government partners including security forces. While there are a number of other peacebuilding organizations (especially in Mali), we are considered as authoritative with a perspective that is valued. Therefore, we expect to utilize this strategy to develop long-term strategic partnerships, rallying institutions to work collaboratively to cause the changes outlined here.

Beyond security risks, there are few operational constraints which shape our strategy. Our footprint in the Sahel will be substantial, with full-time staff in all three countries and program teams based in field offices. We will establish a backbone team to ensure that program design and M&E is fully integrated. Based on recent engagements by bilateral donors, including those who are contributing to the G5 Sahel, it is anticipated that funding will continue to grow in Mali and Niger, and will spike in Burkina Faso. Eventually it is expected that the funding will be evenly available across the region with a mixture of multi-country or regional projects and country-specific funds. There is a fair amount of donor interest at the present, most of whom are engaged militarily in the region, with the US focused on VE prevention and the Europeans with a strong interest in addressing the causes of migration, sometimes merged with security issues. Most interestingly, the donors are already developing regional approaches to programming, and so the conflict geography approach has a particular resonance in this part of the world, giving us the confidence that we will be able to fund the strategy in the near term. Because the objectives are rooted in our ongoing work and programming, this strategy will come to life quickly, starting with our programming in Mali and Niger, with the establishment of our presence in Burkina Faso just following.

This document aims to present a cohesive and detailed picture of our strategy, summarizing key insights and highlighting the top-line information which drove our decision making. It lays out the key decisions we have taken and includes:

➢ A description of the process and methodology of the strategy development, including limitations;
➢ A summary of the conflict analysis and opportunities for building peace;
➢ An elaboration of our overall mandate and strategic objectives including the rationale for their selection, the theory of change behind them and a sense of the programmatic approach; and
➢ A business plan which describes the envisioned revenue model, the operational model, and partnerships.
This strategy has been developed through a consultative process which involved over 25 staff members and engagement with over 100 people in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso as well as with global experts on the region and in the subject matter. The process was led by the West Africa Regional Team with the Associate Vice President for Strategy over the course of 4 months in early 2019. It included field missions to all three countries, ensuring that the strategy is grounded and based on diverse input.

ANALYTICAL PROCESS

The strategy development process consisted of a rigorous analytical exercise which brought together five tools:

Conflict Analysis. Utilizing Search’s conflict analysis approach and framework for understanding the nature of a conflict geography, we analyzed the Sahel conflict system. Through this process, we answered three major questions: i) what is the conflict geography? ii) what are the key driving factors which are enduring which are critical to transforming the conflict? iii) what are the key opportunities for peace upon which we can build? The information was gathered through an extensive literature review and on-the-ground engagement with diverse stakeholders operating at every level. Through this process, we identified the Liptako-Gourma as the epicenter and analyzed the substantial spillover and proxy factors at play across Northern Mali and Niger and in Nigeria. We were able to identify five dominating conflict factors and three critical opportunities for peace.

Peacebuilding Sector Analysis. We analyzed the state of the peacebuilding sector in the region, identifying our value added and drawing on lessons about what has worked and not worked with regards to each of our strategic objectives.

Operational Assessment. We conducted an operational assessment looking at two questions: i) what are the operational constraints and opportunities in Burkina Faso (as that is the only part of the geography where we don’t have a current office); ii) how will we set up our team in an integrated manner to ensure operational and programmatic cohesion?

Partnership Assessment. We conducted a partnership analysis to understand who we might be able to work with, the state of each sector and the strategic implications of the sectoral capacity. In particular, we looked at new partnerships with organizations that work in economic recovery, livelihoods, land and resources. We also looked at what has worked and hasn’t in the sectors in which we are engaging.

Donor Assessment. We conducted a review of donor priorities and strategies in the region and utilized predictive work done by Search’s Global Affairs and Partnerships Team to assemble a projected revenue model. We engaged with key donors in Ouagadougou, Bamako, Niamey and Dakar for input into the strategy.

FIELD ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP

In order to ensure that this strategy is firmly rooted in the ground realities and encompasses diverse perspectives, we conducted on-the-ground missions to engage a cross-section of stakeholders and draw in the input from our staff. This included three distinct pieces of work:

Staff consultations. In order to draw on the vast expertise, passions and ideas of our teams in Mali and Niger, we ran a process for them to provide analysis and input into the strategy development. This included workshops with staff in Bamako and Niamey in which we identified major conflict themes and opportunities for Search to cause change. We did further consultation meetings with staff based in field offices to deepen and localize our analysis;

Engagement with diverse stakeholders. The core strategy team interviewed over 100 people in all three countries. This included
senior members of government, military officials, youth leaders, women leaders, civil society organizations, business leaders, academics, donors, and members of the media. This exercise exposed the strategy team to a broad diversity of viewpoints and perspectives.

**Internal workshop for strategy development.** In Dakar, Senegal, we convened a working session with the West Africa regional team and a consultant from Burkina Faso. Through a facilitated process we i) identified the key drivers of conflict in the geography; ii) used an adaptation of Kees van der Heijden’s *Scenario Matrix Tool* to imagine how certain factors would influence each other as the conflict unfolds in the future; and iii) defined the overarching purpose and strategic objectives.

**PROPOSED REVIEW PROCESS AND TIMELINE**

In September 2019, an internal review panel provided feedback on the strategy. A revised version was circulated to experts in the region to ‘ground truth’ it prior to a final version. The strategy will come into effect in Q3 of 2020, and we will begin implementation.

At the outset, our focus will be to harmonize our existing portfolio to the strategic objectives laid out here and to establish a presence in Burkina Faso. We will develop a single M&E plan to detail how we plan to capture the changes caused by the implementation of our strategy. We will treat this strategy as somewhat emergent, meaning that it is adaptable as we learn what works and what doesn’t. Three reviews are planned:

**One-year validation.** In April 2021, we will conduct a validation exercise which examines four core questions: i) with experience implementing the strategy, do the core assumptions underlying the strategy hold up? ii) After a year of fundraising, is the revenue emerging to fund the execution of the strategy? iii) Are the core measures we have sought the track over the lifetime of the strategy realistic? iv) Have we been able to establish the partnerships to envision a scaling of our work?

**Two-year review.** This will be a strategic review process where we will analyze the results of our work to date (against the short-term outcomes designed in the strategic framework below). We will conduct a series of engagements with our key partners and experts to review the strategic objectives. This will result in a renewed conflict analysis and a written review/update of the strategy.

**Five-year review.** We will conduct a full review of all aspects of the strategy through scrutiny of our results (using monitoring data, trend lines, and evaluations), identifying key strategic opportunities for enduring change, and updating our core analysis of the conflict, operational environment, and donor priorities.

None of these steps precludes adjustment to the strategy at other points. Given the volatility of the Sahel and the potential for significant escalation of the conflict, we must anticipate there could be significant shocks. Such a shift in the context should trigger a review. Our field research, evaluations, and monitoring data will be used to test our strategy and adapt our approach as we go. In other words this strategy is live and will unfold as we gain further insights and experience in the conflict geography.
SUMMARY OF THE CONFLICT ANALYSIS

This section provides an overall summary of the conflict analysis and is based on a longer report; The explicit purpose is:

➢ To document the analysis which guided the strategic choices made so that other stakeholders can understand the assumptions inherent in the work going forward;
➢ To inform the decisions on strategic objectives, ensuring that the work Search does is rooted in our understanding of the conflict system; and
➢ To establish a baseline of analysis so that future evaluators can analyze the changes to the conflict system.

The analysis does not aim to detail, or even touch on, all aspects of the conflict system nor to delve into the details about key actors or localized power struggles; that would be an impossible task given the complexity. There is abundant literature on this subject which has been used to shape our analysis. Rather this section seeks to answer three questions:
i) what is the conflict geography and how do we understand it? ii) what are those key driving factors that fuel the overall conflict system and what is their importance? iii) What are the opportunities for peace which we are seeking to build upon?

DEFINITION OF THE CONFLICT GEOGRAPHY

As our strategy takes shape, our focus is drawn to the Liptako-Gourma region and its surroundings in which the borders of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso come together. It is the epicenter of the conflict system we have mapped. This area encompasses administrative regions where there is concentrated violence and little-to no state control, particularly; 1) Taoudenit, Tombouctou, Gao, Menaka, Mopti, and Segou in Mali; 2) Boucle du Mouhoun, Nord, Centre-Nord, Sahel, Est and Centre-Est in Burkina Faso; and 3) Tahoua, Tillabéri, and Agadez in Niger.

This conflict geography is an ancient and historically rich region of the world. The Sahel his home to some of the most important ancient trading cities and intellectual hearts of the region. Cities like Timbuktu cultivated relationships in the region through economic connectivity and ancient universities established the geography as a heartland for religious thought. The conflict and instability outlined in this strategy stemmed from both internal changes and external involvement, the latter prominently European colonialism and the Atlantic slave trade. In Mali, for example, Historical distrust between northern and southern populations, due in part to the historical association of northern communities with rezzou, or raids, and the role of some northern nomadic groups in the Trans-Sahara slave trade, was exacerbated by a colonial France that educated a ruling class of southerners who decided to assert their authority over the nascent Malian state using strategies such as economic marginalization, divide and rule, and military control.

The latest Tuareg Rebellion emerged in Northern Mali in January 2012, as thousands of Tuareg fighters returned from Libya following the collapse of the Gaddafi regime. The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and a coalition of separatist and Jihadist groups tied to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), some of which had been around since 2007, quickly overran state security forces, leading to a coup d’état and the collapse of the Malian government in March of the same year. The international community rallied to prevent the collapse of the state, resulting in a French-led military intervention that ended the Jihadist occupation of two-thirds of Malian territory in mid-2013.
The 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, also known as the Algiers Agreement, brought hopes of an end to the Tuareg Rebellion, but its implementation has not progressed. Different groups, many of which were not party to negotiations, have co-opted the peace process to challenge traditional hierarchies. The ethnic Fulani - or Peuhl - are one group whose exclusion has been perceived as further evidence of marginalization from the central state. The Fulani are mainly nomadic pastoralists who have long standing grievances against a state who they see as willfully inactive in addressing existential threats to their herding livelihood. Jihadist organizations have stoked these tensions and made them central to their recruiting campaigns. Attacks against civilians are increasingly prevalent and violence has shifted southwards. As armed groups compete, international armed forces secure more northern areas and shifted armed group operating areas south. Communal militias and vigilante groups, usually formed along ethnic lines to carry out “revenge attacks”, have been responsible for most atrocities and human rights abuses against civilians in Mali.

Attacks by armed Jihadist groups, meanwhile, have steadily increased in Burkina Faso since early 2016; 2018 saw 158 Jihadist attacks, a four-fold increase from 2017. These groups are most prominently Ansaroul Islam, AQIM (including its affiliates such as Jama’a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin [JNIM]), and ISGS. AQIM and its affiliates have given extensive support to Ansaroul Islam while claiming responsibility for numerous high profile attacks, including the January 2016 bombing of the Splendid Hotel in Ouagadougou that killed 30 and the March 2018 attacks on the French Embassy and Army

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See 5.

https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/all-the-warning-signs-are-showing-in-the-sahel-we-must-act-now/?utm_campaign=clipping_institucional
dia_a_dia&utm_medium=email&utm_source=RD+Station


Headquarters in Ouagadougou. Burkina Faso has a sizable Christian minority and the first half of 2019 saw a marked increase in Jihadist attacks against churches and worshippers as Jihadists in Burkina Faso have seemingly changed their strategy from inciting intercommunal violence to instead sow interreligious division. The response from the Burkinabe state and koglweogoos, or communal militias incorporated into the state security apparatus, has been especially heavy-handed, with exactions against civilian populations that have been widely documented.

The government in Niger declared a state of emergency in 2017 in response to the deteriorating security situation in Mali and the influx of over 50,000 Malian refugees, in addition to the more than 62,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Tahoua and Tillabéri regions. Armed Jihadist groups use the border area to launch attacks against Nigerien and International Armed Forces, but are increasingly targeting civilians. Transhumance and nomadism are increasingly under threat due to desertification and agricultural expansion, especially in Niger, which possesses the highest global rate of population growth. Land and water intensive mining operations, land speculation, and urbanization also present threats to historically nomadic communities in Niger.

The spillover and resonating effects reach far beyond Liptako-Gourma, from coastal West Africa through the Sahara Desert, Algeria, and Libya into Europe. Regional and economic insecurity has led to the expansion of criminal smuggling networks as a wide array of groups capitalize on a weak state presence and porous borders to traffic large amounts of arms, drugs, commodities, and people from the West African coast to Libya and Europe, by way of Mali and Niger. Neighboring countries have had a militarized response to the conflict; Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana have each bolstered their troop strength at their borders and Togo and Benin are preparing for spillover effects into their territory. In addition, there is a humanitarian crisis with over 335,000 internally displaced persons in the region and 5.6 million facing food insecurity in the three countries.

Due to its geographic location, this region is a meeting point for foreign cultural, economic, and religious forces - proxy factors driving conflict. Algeria and Libya have long involved themselves in Tuareg affairs as part of a rivalry to control the Sahel. Recent domestic political instability in the former and ongoing crisis in the latter, however, have debilitating effects on stabilizing efforts. Funding from Gulf States goes to promote a Salafist ideology and the Arabic language in madrasas that educate as many as a quarter of school-aged children in Mali, Niger, and Chad, and responses to this creates further divisions

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12 Human Rights Watch has documented over 150 cases of extrajudicial executions by Burkinabe state security forces of men accused of harboring terrorists since 2017, the majority of whom are Fulani. The significant role of Koglwegeois within the state security apparatus is a cause for concern given their documented record of human rights abuses and lack of oversight.
13 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20190322_acaps_regional_briefing_note_mali_-_niger_-_burkina_faso.pdf
15 Ibid.
in already fractured North-South relations. Lastly, the global response to Jihadist inspired terrorism, widespread migration, and a number of factors including migration and the presence of uranium and gold has drawn Western powers into the conflict. The US, Germany, Italy, and especially France maintain a military presence with troops on the ground.

KEY DRIVING FACTORS OF CONFLICT

There are a plethora of dynamics fueling violence in the Sahel, deepening divides and driving loss of life. Five key factors emerge which, if addressed, have the potential to reduce violent conflict and improve peace and stability, within and across the conflict geography.

1. Divisions between and within groups are increasingly entrenched and there is a risk that the ongoing “inter-communal” conflicts could metastasize into broad identity-based conflict. Today, there are more deaths related to intercommunal conflicts than to attacks perpetrated by Jihadist groups. This situation feeds off local dynamics and tensions between and amongst groups, including farmer and herder communities. What were typically low-level recurrent community conflicts have now spiraled into recurring and protracted cycles of violence, and attacks against civilians are growing in both number and scale. More specifically, anti-Fulani sentiments are widespread, have taken on a dangerous quality, and have led to a spate of vicious attacks. Left unredressed, the political weaponization of identity can evolve into macro-level ethnic antagonism.

2. Land-based and natural resource-based conflicts are at the root of local grievances, driving violence across the conflict geography, and traditional and legal mechanisms have failed to respond effectively. Livelihood is closely tied to group identity in the region and preexisting agro-pastoral conflict dynamics have erupted into violence due to increased competition, lack of state regulation and inequitable distribution of resources between and within groups. In all three countries, customary tenure systems continue to predominate, despite statutory measures to “modernize” the tenure landscape. There is, however, historic legal precedent for land management in the Sahel, established in the 1800s. Government and regulatory bodies have failed to oversee and implement such measures. Efforts to devolve land management responsibilities to local institutions have not been effective as these administrative bodies lack the resources and capacity to realize the provisions of legislation. Corruption, endemic to the region, further erodes trust in local institutions to manage conflict. Furthermore, both legal and traditional dispute settlement mechanisms have been unable to cope in the face of increasingly complex ecological and demographic stressors. Effective engagement with the private sector is lacking and economic disconnection of the peripheries and urban centers, as well as across borders, limits growth and resource sharing. Local capacities must be built to ensure equitable, productive, and inclusive access to land and resources.

3. A proliferation of increasingly well-armed non-state armed actors, including violent extremist groups with clear affiliations to al Qaeda and ISIS, are escalating the conflicts. State-centric security approaches are out of touch with the current reality of security provision in the Sahel as the state is not the only, nor the most trusted, security provider in many areas. There is thus a proliferation of armed actors in the Sahel with a range of intersecting interests and constituencies. Good governance of the security sector is a key enabler for progress in other sectors, but a history of adversarial relations between the state security services and citizenry make constructive engagement difficult. Democratizing the security sector would enable a transformation of the state response to security threats to focus on the structural issues driving the proliferation of non-state armed groups. This will ultimately bridge the trust deficit between state security forces and civil society through a collaborative emphasis on human security concerns.

4. There is a conundrum of governance: a lack of state presence enables violent extremists to operate freely, but inequitable governance fuels the grievances of the population. Stability will only be achieved if governments move past counter terrorism and divert a greater share of resources to tangibly improving livelihoods. All three governments struggle to deliver basic services and maintain a security presence outside of town centers. Despite their eroded legitimacy, traditional elders still wield enormous influence in most communities, and although the legal framework for local power sharing differs from country to country, a lack of capacity and resources undermines state positioning in all three contexts. Efforts to increase state presence risks alienating substantial portions of the population, due to the limited recognition that an increased state presence is sufficient to address the grievances among...
5. Despite the vision for restructuring power and governance, implementation of the Malian Peace Process has not progressed leaving open the window for violence committed by other groups. The Algiers Agreement offered the country a pathway for decentralization and local elections to ensure communal representation in politics, creating a chance for enduring peace. Four years on, however, there has been little-to-no progress in implementing the accords. A lack of political will, unresolved disputes between rebels and the government over disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), and the co-option of the peace process by different groups challenging traditional hierarchies have presented barriers which have been insurmountable so far, and there is a sense that the agreement will need to change substantially for progress to be made.

Many other factors shape the conflict dynamics across the Sahel, and internal and external powers are making decisions and implementing policies that continually change the conflict dynamics - for better or for worse. It is a complex system and deeply impoverished; Niger ranks last in the Human Development Index globally, while Mali and Burkina Faso are both in the bottom ten. The reshuffle of the Malian government in April 2019 leaves an even murkier political future amidst escalating violence. In Burkina Faso, the state security response to increased Jihadist violence is characterized by collective, indiscriminate, and extrajudicial punishment. The criminalization of migration in Niger has only strengthened illicit smuggling networks as vulnerable nomads are denied their traditional resilience mechanisms, simultaneously fueling government corruption where it is already endemic. Much has been written about the abundance of short and long-term factors that influence the conflict dynamics in the region - too numerous to comprehensively cover in this document. For example, endemic poverty and unemployment, decades of underdevelopment and central state mismanagement, and international exploitation of natural resources all drive violence within and across borders. There is growing discontent of local populations against their governments.

This conflict geography is sprawling, with vast swathes of sparsely populated desert that create challenges to address conflict drivers throughout the region. The conflict geography also has the presence of many Western powers who, excluding France, only recently began to have interest and investment in the region to shape their respective strategic goals. The conflict system includes violent conflict ranging from hyper-local disputes to the global fight against terrorism, necessitating a dynamic approach with multiple entry points. This analysis describes some of the critical driving factors which fuel conflict in the Sahel and which are key to address in order to achieve greater peace and stability in the region.

KEY DRIVERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE

Some specific factors for peace are worth delving into as they have shaped our strategic decisions:

Engagement of youth and women in peace architecture and local governance frameworks. The Sahel is the youngest region in the world, and when engaged, young people believe that their role as peacebuilders is important -- yet this importance is often not recognized by their community or authorities. This in turn negatively affects both their will to act and the impact of their actions. Women activists and civil society organizations are similarly excluded from peace and security measures at all levels of government, although women demonstrate greater resilience to voluntary recruitment from violent groups. Women have specific experiences and their experiences and perspectives must be incorporated into peacebuilding efforts. The maintained marginalization of youth and women only serves to deepen frustrations and grievances.

The institution of cousinage/parente à plaisanterie and its potential to ameliorate the political salience of ethnicity. Social scientists attribute the moderation of identity politics in ethnically diverse societies to cross-cutting cleavages, or the dimensions of identity which cause members of the same ethnic group to have diverse allegiances. The institution of cousinage, or "joking relationships" has existed in Mali since at least the time of the Malian Empire and linked subjects who bore certain occupational patronyms, binding families in relations of mutual obligation and respect that enabled the circumvention of
Existing local conventions and dispute settlement mechanisms can play a key role in addressing land tenure disputes, and establishing mutually agreed enforcement procedures sanctioned by local authorities. These include the Village Development Councils in Burkina Faso, the Land Commissions or the HACP-supported Peace Committees in Niger, as well as the Comités communaux de réconciliation (CCR) currently being established in the Centre regions by the Ministry of Reconciliation. If supported to become more inclusive, self-sufficient and accountable, these structures can be a key vector to link government and community-led efforts and synergistic bottom-up and top-down strategies. These state-sponsored platforms are complemented by more customary forms of land management, including through the role played by traditional leaders, which legitimacy stems from deeply rooted into social norms. If empowered, they have great potential for sustaining peacebuilding efforts within societies endogenously.

The opportunity to strengthen agro-pastoral economic interdependence. The demand for meat is growing rapidly in coastal West African states, and Nigeria alone accounts for half of West African demand. Half of the meat and over two-thirds of the milk consumed in these states is produced from the Sahel. Tapping into these markets and creating economic corridors for the transport of animal products from the Sahel to coastal West African cities could be a boon for Sahelian agro-pastoral communities. Many pastoralists are currently outside the channels of the meat market, while most markets and outdoor slaughterhouses lack basic conditions such as running water or cold storage. Investment into strengthening these supply chains to capitalize on growing regional demand not only has the potential to significantly boost pastoral livelihoods, but also for sedentary agricultural communities, who could grow forage and grains in sub-humid southern zones to create feed markets for northern livestock communities.

A history of climate resilient production systems. For decades, the Sahel has been presented as suffering from irreversible degradation, desert advancement, and the impoverishment of the local population due to factors related to climate change. And while climate change has had effects on increased climatic variability--climatic variability, instability, and unpredictability are inherent features of the Sahelian environment. These factors need to be recognized as such and not as external shocks to what are otherwise constant conditions. Sahelian populations have developed resilient livestock and crop production systems based on exploiting climatic variability to establish successful local and national economies. Their knowledge should be promoted and incorporated into development policy to promote a more climate resilient future.

The success of the Nigerien peace process offers a blueprint for Mali. The Nigerien Peace Process following the 2007-2009 Tuareg Uprising, while imperfect, offers a successful framework at peacebuilding and integration of former rebels into existing governance structures. The framework is heavily based on the involvement of the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace (HACP), whose original role was to implement the 1995 peace agreement but has been expanded to “win hearts and minds” in fragile areas. High-level domestic political backing from the Nigerien presidency, in addition to international support, ensure that HACP has the resources to fulfill its ambitions. In addition, the national program adopted by the Government of Niger for the reintegration of ex-combatants and those formally affiliated with Boko Haram has been a first step towards peace and reconciliation in the Diffa region. While the process is still ongoing, it has had positive results so far and already set a precedent, which might inspire national policies in favor of the defection of other violent extremist-affiliates in the Western part of the country, and in the wider Sahel region.

SEARCH IN THE GEOGRAPHY – OUR PRESENCE AND VALUE ADDED

SEARCH PRESENCE & CAPACITIES

Search is a leading peacebuilding organization, working in about 30 countries around the world. Founded in 1982, the organization’s mission is to transform the way that the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions. We work with actors from all parties, ranging from grassroots organizations to top-level leaders, supporting them to implement locally tailored responses to conflict. We use a toolkit that includes capacity-building, community dialogue, mediation, art-based approaches to conflict resolution, and media.

Search has had a presence in this conflict geography since 2011 and has worked in all countries targeted, with the most robust presence on the ground of any non-humanitarian/development NGO. We currently have over 20 programs in conflict prevention, stabilization, and reconciliation under implementation in the region. We have offices in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, with substantial staff presence in each country. Search’s programming model relies on staff deployed on the ground on a permanent basis, providing us with a unique ability to rapidly respond to prevent and mitigate escalating conflict, as well as to innovate and scale. We have a regional office in Dakar, Senegal and one of Search’s largest programs is in neighboring Nigeria. Our presence and network in the region is quite comprehensive; we are able to leverage our network and local insights to drive programming at every level.

Search has worked in Niger since 2011 through programming focused on youth engagement and violence prevention. Since then, our programming has transformed into a multi-faceted set of activity streams focusing on media production and capacity building, supporting fragile communities, engaging youth and women in civil society, local development and peacebuilding, violence prevention, countering violent extremism, re-insertion and reintegration of ex-combatants, and security sector engagement as well as related sub-themes. We have offices in Niamey, Tillabéri and Diffa, and we work in most parts of the country. We have the capacity to develop high-level partnerships with government agencies, produce radio and television programming and distribute it across the country. Our presence is similar in Mali, where we have worked since 2014, with offices in Bamako, Gao and Mopti. Our programming in mediation, peace education, social cohesion and security sector engagement have led to the development of a wide set of relationships at the governmental and community levels alike. Search set up, trained and supported networks of hundreds of media professionals and peace ambassadors among women and youth in support of bottom up engagement of the peace agreement. We are leaders in the peacebuilding community, convening a peacebuilding working group of peer organizations to strengthen the overall sectoral approach. Search has been working in Burkina Faso since 2011, mostly through programs empowering youth as agents for peace. Search has set up a permanent office in Ouagadougou since January 2020 and is currently setting up sub-offices in the most fragile regions to implement a series of new programs in security sector, stabilization, peace education and conflict analysis jointly with local and international organizations.

Our existing cross-border programming, supported by the main stabilization programs of the UK, France, Denmark and Germany sets us apart. Unlike in much of the organizations working in the regions, Search has sought to tackle the conflict dynamics regionally from the very start of our programming in the Sahel.
THE PEACEBUILDING SECTOR IN THE GEOGRAPHY

There has been a fair amount of focus by the international community on the Sahel, largely driven by poverty alleviation, economic recovery, governance, resiliency strengthening and humanitarian programming. Since the crisis in Mali peacebuilding organizations have been drawn in as more funding has gone in that direction. With the rise of Jihadist groups and the increase of migration through the Sahel en route to Europe, the sector has seen an injection of funding, leading to its quick growth.

There are several interesting dynamics shaping the peacebuilding sector in the Sahel which shape the nature of our engagement and our understanding of our value add: a countering violent extremism lens has shaped much of the surge in peacebuilding activities. This has focused on equipping the states to respond to terrorist threats and prevent recruitment of youth into jihadist organizations. There has been a regionalization of state-led peacebuilding, and the stabilization agenda has made the sector quite politicized. The G5 Sahel Joint Force has brought the five countries of the region together to fight a mutual threat. This is beyond a military alliance; it builds on the Sahel Alliance which fosters both regional collaboration and cooperation with donor countries in confronting security risks. Most importantly, there are increasing efforts to integrate peacebuilding with humanitarian action and development to bring a triple nexus approach to confronting the challenges.

In a rapidly deteriorating context, with homegrown violent extremist groups emerging and seemingly expanding towards the coastal states, international partners and local governments alike recognize the urgent need to shift from a hard, top-down and militarized approach towards more inclusive, bottom-up engagement to sustain stabilization and peace efforts. Donors contributing to military efforts in the region are looking for “quick wins” to hold onto territories gained through military action. A stronger focus is placed on development programs that promote peace and stability, which are coordinated by the G5 Sahel Permanent Secretariat. This also comes with an increasing risk of politicization of the peacebuilding component at the humanitarian, development and peace “triple nexus”.

Security Sector Reform (SSR). There is also a growing interest from donors to support comprehensive SSR in order to re-establish or strengthen the presence of national governments and address the shortcomings of national armed forces, which undermine stabilization efforts in the region.

The presence of peacebuilding organizations and programming is most pronounced in Mali and is growing in Niger and Burkina Faso as the conflict spreads. The sector as a whole is quickly gaining maturity and traction, and the approaches developed by peacebuilders are being utilized in mainstream programming which is funded by donors. Search has been part of mainstreaming the sector, and our strategy is to play a critical role in integrating peacebuilding into the array of economic and governance initiatives which are forthcoming.
OVERARCHING PURPOSE AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Overarching Purpose of the Strategy - A Unifying Idea

Search’s overall mandate in the Sahel is to weave the fabric of society, from communities to nation, infusing social cohesion and providing equitable access and engagement at every level into political, social, security, and development efforts.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #1
To strengthen social and economic interdependence across dividing lines

Explanation of Objective

This SO aims to promote enduring horizontal cohesion among ethnic groups which are in conflict and prevent increased violence and mass atrocities. There are two dimensions to this work: in the short term, there is a need to reduce hate speech and prevent the spiraling cycle of violence so that the inter-communal conflicts don’t mutate into intractable divides or escalate to mass atrocities. In the long-term, the work will focus on weaving enduring and mutually enriching relationships among people from different ethnic groups. This will include three dimensions:

- Leveraging the role played by traditional stakeholders involved in existing local dispute mechanisms that stem from deeply rooted social norms, and supporting their ability to sustain peacebuilding efforts, despite their somewhat eroded legitimacy;
- Fostering interdependent relationships among people from different ethnic groups, particularly across the farmer-herder divide so that people experience that prosperity comes from collaboration;
- Creating readiness among those in divided communities at all levels so that there is acceptance and normalization of economic relationships;
- Solidifying inter-ethnic relationships by emphasizing the positive relationship between improved collaboration across divides and improved livelihoods and local trade.

Conflict Dynamic Addressed

Divisions between and within groups are increasingly entrenched, and there is a risk that the ongoing “inter-communal” violence could metastasize into broad identity-based conflict and mass atrocities. While inter-communal divisions aren’t new, there is evidence that they are increasingly violent, and community-based disputes are taking on a clear ethnic dimension which causes them to spiral out of control. Land and resource-based conflicts have a particular edge; today, there are more deaths related to community conflicts than to attacks committed by violent extremist groups. In a region where livelihood is closely tied to group identity and increasingly under stress, the current and foreseeable context presents the risk of disputes cutting across livelihood groups and escalating into large-scale, violent clashes that engage whole communities along ethnic fault lines. The case of mainly nomadic pastoralist Fulani communities, marginalized and increasingly targeted by both the security forces and militias operating on behalf of other groups, epitomizes the structural change of latent agro-pastoral conflicts, shifting from micro-level tensions to macro-level conflict. There is also a risk that the mainstream media coverage of the crisis, which places a strong emphasis on ethnic divisions, might become a self-fulling prophecy and fuel mass atrocities.
This dynamic is characterized by a number of factors:

- **Increased pressure on natural resources.** The increased pressure on the region's natural resources - namely the decrease in water access and the growth of the population - in addition to the lack of state regulation, uneven distribution between and within groups, as well as predation and greed dynamics have caused a shift in how different groups are relating to each other; there is increasing competition over these resources and resulting gnawing grievances, particularly among nomadic groups, which are going unredressed.

- **Erosion of interdependence.** The overall lack of integration of peripheries to the Centers, both economically and politically, together with an increased emphasis on agricultural development, encroachment by farmers on pastures, and the shifts in transhumance routes has reduced the traditional interdependence between farmers and herders.

- **Shift in markets for meat driven by the rising West African middle class.** The increase in demand for animal products in Nigeria and elsewhere in Coastal West Africa is causing a shift in transhumance routes, drawing interest and engagement from business entrepreneurs from across the region and degrading the lifestyles of herders. These market forces represent a major disruption to economic life and the ways that ethnic groups relate to one another; it is both an opportunity and a risk factor for violence.31

- **Politization of ethnicity.** In order to establish state control over territory and push back against the increasing influence of armed groups, a number of ethnic-based militias emerged, some with state backing. This, together with reported human rights abuses32, a rise in hate speech, and government policies by all states in the region which favor certain ethnic groups over others - has politicized ethnicity. Divisions between Tuareg and Bambaras, Dogons, Mossi and Fulanis and other fracture lines escalate in waves of tension and often erupt into violence, with the potential of spiraling out of control. At the same time, there is a reluctance to address these differences openly, and silence about these dynamics is dangerous and pervasive.

- **The erosion of legitimacy of traditional stakeholders,** whose role is central to dispute mechanisms across the region. The clientelist power of traditional chieftaincy, their collusion with public authorities and the presence and growing influence of non-state armed groups, among other factors, have eroded legitimacy and fueled conflicts across the region.

These dynamics - shrinking livelihoods, ethnic division, a loss of interdependence - are shaping how individuals and their communities experience conflict and violence. Community level disputes over land tenure, resource access and regulation, and economic opportunity are amplifying and having detrimental effects at the societal level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory of Change</th>
<th>Geographic Focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IF</strong> there is a strengthening of relationships among and within groups throughout the region which is based on mutual economic benefits <strong>THEN</strong> local-level grievances will be less poignant and communities will be more resilient to conflicts</td>
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<tr>
<td>In the short-term, the establishment of dialogue and relationships reduces the potential for mass atrocities, and in the long-term the ethnic diversity of the region becomes an asset for economic growth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This is a critical shift as the governments in the region seek policies to manage limited resources, generate economic growth and protect their countries against the shocks of drought and war.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This is a region-wide objective, most relevant along those lines where farming and pastoralism come together and where resources are contested. It is focused on those areas which have been identified as having the highest risk of mass atrocities, specifically in exondée zone of Mopti, east of the Bandiagara River and along the Sourou River.</td>
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## Incremental Changes

### 2 Years

In the near term, efforts will focus on breaking the cycle of revenge which has come to dominate the conflict. This will include:
- **Humanization of the ‘other’** whereby there is a reduction of stereotypes and there emerges an essential portrayal of all involved ethnic groups in mainstream media;
- **Reduction of hate speech** through active civil society-led efforts to defang the power of hateful narratives;
- **Establishment of constituencies for peace** among people in marginalized communities who are willing to build bridges across dividing lines with a specific focus on women and youth;
- **Injection of conflict sensitivity into livelihood development, economic corridors** and development corridors in the Sahel, leveraging the numerous economic strengthening efforts which are underway.

### 5 Years

In the medium term, efforts will focus on developing instances of inter-ethnic cooperation;
- **Key economic actors identify opportunities for economic cooperation** across dividing lines which would generate access to new markets, livelihood opportunities;
- **Demonstrated examples of economic cooperation** where collaboration brings about increased prosperity for all involved;
- **Popularization of the notion of collaboration** whereby it becomes widely understood that working across dividing lines creates opportunities for livelihood and economic prosperity;
- **Government policies foster inter-group cooperation, including with (semi)-nomadic populations**, as a central theory of its economic development and market regulation approach.

### 10 Years

By ten years, there are three main results:
- **Proven increase in the economic wellbeing** of those involved in inter-group cooperation, including women and youth;
- **Norms are established** whereby people expect that inter-group cooperation on all aspects of economic life brings prosperity.

## Key Measure(s)

- Favorable perceptions of those ethnic groups which are most at risk
- Demonstrated inter-group collaboration on economic matters, improved regulation, and more equal sharing of available resources
- Linkages between inter-group cooperation and micro-economic prosperity are proven

## Programmatic Approach

This objective will bring together three essential approaches:
- Through **community-based dialogue** and **media**, Search will shape the attitudes and actions of key stakeholders vis a vis community conflict. This will reduce stereotypes, establish common ground among people from across dividing lines, model cooperation and prepare communities to engage with one another, even in the context of stark ethnic conflict;
- In partnership with governments, Search will seek the **inclusion of marginalized communities from the peripheries** particularly through women and youth - into key economic policies, including land use, market regulation, etc.
- Search will work with key economic development actors to develop **livelihood creation** and **economic development activities** across ethnic divides which explicitly foster interdependence. This will include work on value chains, market access, creating of development and economic corridors, and agriculture. For instance, we may connect animal feed/grain farmers in Mali with cattle herders, to meet the demands for Mali’s quickly growing livestock industry.
- Search will seek to **empower local stakeholders** involved in local dispute mechanisms to sustain peacebuilding efforts by building on their established social roles (griot; traditional leaders; religious leaders) stemming from deeply entrenched social norms (parenté à plaisanterie; cousinage).

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33Corridors can be understood to be a collection of routes linking several economic centers, countries and ports. While some are only road transport corridors, most of them include more than one mode of transport. Some corridors place emphasis on the facilitation of cross-border trade along corridors. They focus on identifying impediments to the efficient movement of traffic and seek to promote appropriate strategies for minimizing hurdles to such movement. (https://www.tralac.org/images/docs/11490/acma-strategy-document-march-2017.pdf)
**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #2**

To catalyze equitable and inclusive management of land and water resources

**Explanation of Objective**

The area of land cultivation in the Sahel has dramatically increased over time, while available grazing land has decreased with rapid population growth, leading to the extension and overexploitation of agricultural space. Without capable and inclusive management of resources, competition over access to water and pasture has intensified. This leaves pastoralists especially vulnerable, as they are often excluded from local decision-making bodies in favor of sedentary communities, leaving them politically disadvantaged in a newly devised system for negotiating land use. Additionally, the recent boom in the number of small-scale and artisanal mining sites has had a destabilizing impact on the economies of the region and has contributed to the exacerbation of pre-existing conflicts and to the creation of new conflicts and violent clashes. Some extremist groups are also looking to tap into resources from mining activities to fund their actions and poor resource management is increasing citizens’ vulnerability to dangerous migration and violent extremist recruitment. This objective focuses on increasing the inclusivity of natural resource management, going beyond the resiliency models and dispute-resolution focus that has been the prevailing approach, to improving policy and developing strategic partnerships with organizations working on agriculture and development and with private sector actors to create an inclusive prosperity model whereby key stakeholders collaborate to maximize the productivity of resources. This includes three dimensions:

- **Policy.** The first dimension is equipping all actors with the information on the legal parameters for governing natural resources, particularly for those most easily exploited. This goes beyond simply ensuring that information is accessible, but that all stakeholders have an understanding of how to advocate for their own rights and engage with others to collaborate on natural resource usage. We will also work with policymakers and issue experts to develop and implement policies that improve equitable access to natural resources.

- **Resource management.** Search will work to transform the management of land from national to local levels. Initially this will focus on working with local actors to more effectively intervene in land disputes and then grow to develop community processes to determine effective uses of local resources. This will include causing structural changes, aligning customary and statutory land tenure practices and social norms transformation around the way that stakeholders collaborate on land and water usage. This will also include working on transforming the relationship between the private sector, authorities and local communities involved in small-scale and artisanal mining and agribusiness to lower the risks of conflicts.

- **Conflict sensitivity.** Search will also seek to mainstream conflict sensitivity into government and private sector development policies, especially agribusinesses. This goes beyond ensuring Do No Harm, but focuses on leveraging development and economic corridors and other growth instruments to actively foster interdependence across dividing lines. This will be done through strategic partnerships with agribusinesses, humanitarian-development NGOs, and economic growth private sector groups.

**Conflict Dynamic Addressed**

Land-based and natural resource-based conflicts are at the root of local grievances, driving violence, migration, and extremist recruitment across the conflict geography, and traditional and legal mechanisms to respond have failed. The increasing competition of land access and use of natural resources is at the center of this conflict system. Given the climate of the Sahel, there has always been tension over land use; the caring of animals has been the purview of nomads, most the Fulani, while the cultivation of land has fallen to over ethnic groups including the Dogon and Bambara among others. In recent decades, some new stressors have upended whatever equilibrium (and interdependence) may have existed between farmers and herders in the past. There were a number of shocks; severe droughts in the 70s and as recently as 1990 caused major population movements and reset some of the parameters on which pastoralism was governed. High birth rates have caused demographic pressures as there is a need to increase crop yields to keep up with demand. Farmers, often with tacit approval from the state, have begun cultivating land which had long been set aside (legally or traditionally) for grazing. The practice of transhumance has, at times, been stifled by land grabs and the growth of a more formal agricultural sector. At the same time, a growing middle class in Nigeria and elsewhere along the West African coast has driven up demand for animal products and changed grazing routes. The increased value of livestock has led to cattle rustling, and many herders have sold their animals.
Traditional mechanisms for addressing these conflicts have been unable to keep up with these drastic changes. In all three countries, customary tenure systems continue to be dominant despite state efforts to ‘modernize’ governance of land use. Efforts to devolve land management responsibilities to local institutions have been unsuccessful due to a lack of resources and capacities. Clientelism, corruption and land-grabbing have undermined the legitimacy of traditional chieftaincies. The clash of traditional and modern systems for resource management leaves pastoralists especially vulnerable as they are often excluded from local decision-making bodies.

Additionally, the boom in the number of artisanal, small-scale mining sites in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso has a destabilizing impact on the region. According to OECD estimates, the production volume of artisanal gold mining sites represents 50% of the legally registered industrial production for 2017 for all 3 countries. According to recent estimates, more than 1 million people are directly employed by artisanal and small-scale mining in Mali (400,000), Niger (450,000) and Burkina Faso (200,000) and 6,100,000 are partially dependent on them for income - out of a cumulative population in the three countries of nearly 60 million inhabitants. Artisanal and small-scale mining activities contribute to sparking land conflict between miners and farmers, and between miners themselves due to the lack of transparency in the allocation of land and resource exploitation rights. These conflicts can lead to violent clashes, such as clashes at the border between Mali and Guinea at the end of 2017, or more recently in northern Chad since the end of 2018. The same type of conflict dynamics exist in Burkina Faso and in northern Niger, aggravated by the presence of numerous non-state and terrorist groups who benefit from revenue from gold mining activity.

Lastly, regions with a relatively high share of protected areas with policies which restricted access can exacerbate grievances against local authorities among communities and contribute to providing a fertile ground to violent extremist groups. This was the case in the East province of Burkina Faso in 2017 where the ISGS was able to establish a foothold extremely quickly. Recognizing that restriction to land can be among push factors to violent extremism, Search will support local authorities to develop and apply conflict sensitive and inclusive policies for the management of land and water resources in protected areas.

**Theory of Change**

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<tr>
<th>IF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IF there is increased collaboration among all stakeholders in the determination and utilization of natural resources, particularly land and water, THEN natural resources will more equitably serve all community members and will be maximized to promote prosperity.</td>
<td>This objective would target all three countries in the geography, focused on the belt across the region where disputes between farmers and herders have increased. We will focus on those places where there is current conflict, but also predict where conflict could further emerge based on analysis of land use and new transhumance routes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>IF competition over resources and land is reduced, THEN it will drain one of the main drivers of ethnic-based conflict and eliminate a key grievance used by non-state armed groups to mobilize recruits and popular support and reduce a push factor for migration. This would, in turn, shift the overall political and security environment, enabling local level stakeholders to move beyond a resiliency model of resource management to pursue prosperity through collaboration.</td>
<td>We will also focus on areas where extractive industries are active (such as the Kayes region of Mali), and where small scale and artisanal mining drive local conflicts. This would include gold mines in Mali and Burkina Faso. The management of natural resources (access restriction) by state actors in protected areas and related community grievances, including in Eastern and South-East Burkina Faso, will be addressed too.</td>
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Additionally, to accomplish this change, there would have to be harmonization between statutory and customary law; national legal frameworks in all three countries would need to be updated while traditional mechanisms for resource management would need to be inclusive, bringing in women, youth and traditionally excluded groups.
Incremental Changes

| 2 Years | • Increased information of local-level stakeholders in land tenure and customary law so that they can effectively advocate for their rights;  
| • Strengthened capacities of local level actors to address land and water-access disputes;  
| • Increased utilization of conflict sensitivity (or the Common Ground Approach) by network of key actors seeking to tackle land and resource management.  
| • Increased awareness of local conflicts related to small scale and artisanal mining in rural economic development policies  
| • Strengthened capacities of local level state actors to apply conflict sensitive policies with regards to access to land in regions with a relatively high share of protected areas |

| 5 Years | • Harmonized customary and statutory law on land use;  
| • Strengthened collaboration between state administration, the private sector and the local populations for local development and prevention of conflicts in mining regions and over land tenure  
| • Establishment of local level networks and institutions for natural resource management which utilize the CGA  
| • Demonstrated examples of collaborative approaches to land use generating increased productivity. |

| 10 Years | • It will become a norm in the Sahel for farmers, herders, and local leaders to utilize collaborative approaches to land use for prosperity;  
| • Local and traditional institutions will be the primary resolver of disputes, will act within the law, and will have wide-spread trust;  
| • The use of land and water resources will be considered equitable across ethnic and vocational divides;  
| • Government policies are in place which aim explicitly to have benefits for both farmer and herder communities, fostering cooperation;  
| • The private sector is a driver for sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development in the region |

Key Measure(s)

• Levels of trust that land and natural resources are administered justly;
• % of land and resource conflicts resolved without violence;
• # of collaborative efforts to utilize natural resources.
• Level of harmonization between statutory and customary land law

Programmatic Approach

Search will take a multi-pronged approach to tackling this objective, building on its vast experience in addressing land and resource-based disputes in the region and beyond. Specifically, this will include:

• **Increase public and decisionmaker access to relevant information.** Working with media and local authorities, Search will implement programming which equips all actors at the local level with knowledge about their rights, about both statutory and civil law, and about how to manage land conflicts at a local level. Working with local radio stations, Search will increase access to relevant information on migration calendars, livestock movements, cross-border transhumance corridors demarcation, to prevent potential conflict before violence erupts. Search will also work to bring together an array of stakeholders in land-law reform, ensuring the participation of key stakeholders, to raise awareness on existing regulation and foster harmonization of customary and statutory land tenure over the long-term

• **Localize dispute resolution mechanisms and increase access to justice.** Programming will equip land commissions, peace committees, local mediators and traditional leaders with conflict transformation capacities to address disputes around land and resources and prevent violence from spiraling out of control.
STRA TEGIC OBJECTIVE #3
To transform the way that states respond to security threats, shifting from a military approach to address the root causes in a collaborative manner

Explanation of Objective

This SO aims to transform how the three states respond to security threats, moving from a primarily kinetic approach to one which engages communities as partners and puts human security at the center. This means transforming the relationship between security forces and civilian actors, both in capital cities and in conflict-affected parts of the three countries. It has a few dimensions:

• Increase trust and collaboration between security forces and communities;
• Strengthen institutional processes of security forces so that engagement with communities, human rights organizations and others is structured and normalized;
• Enable security forces, civilian government agencies, civil society, and religious leaders to work together to address threats by tackling the root causes of conflict.
• Facilitate collaboration between local communities and international military actors to reduce public resentment and build trust

Conflict Dynamic Addressed

A proliferation of increasingly well-armed non-state armed actors, including violent extremist groups with clear affiliations to al Qaeda and ISIS, are escalating the conflicts. These are: 1) locally rooted armed groups, such as the Tuareg CMA; 2) jihadi st organizations aligned with AQIM and ISIS, most notably JNIM and Ansarul Islam; 3) ethnic-based militias, such as the Dogon Dana Ambassagu; and 4) scores of localized vigilante groups, such as the ill-famed Koglweogo in Burkina Faso, who take responsibility for law-enforcement in the absence of state-administered justice. This patchwork of armed groups presents a particular confounding challenge for building peace in this conflict geography as there is no dominant armed actor to engage nor any clear top-level leverage point. Some actors have sought to forge local-level agreements between ethnic-militias and Fulani leaders, but this has failed to stem the tide of violence in a sustainable fashion. International Crisis Group has laid out a road map for engaging the Macina Liberation Front, seeing them as a lynchpin organization, through existing channels and the Islamic scholars who inspired the movement. Yet, there is minimal support for this idea, and with so many other armed actors operating, it is hard to know if a negotiated approach to the conflict would have a rippling effect.

Security forces in the region have struggled to respond effectively to this crisis and have needed the backing of Western militaries to maintain control of their countries; in Mali, French forces have even prevented the total collapse of the state. US forces in Niger are involved in counter terrorism operations. There is, however, widespread dissatisfaction with foreign military presence and public criticism is mounting against French and US forces, particularly in regards to their CVE operations.34

34https://issafrica.org/iss-today/what-exactly-are-foreign-troops-protecting-in-the-sahel
There is also the risk of **reduced ability of communities to assert resilience to VE**. The lack of public services and basic infrastructure, coupled with ongoing insecurity, rampant corruption, and dysfunctional or non-existent justice systems, fuel resentment among rural populations. In a region where 70% of the population is under 30 years old, limited socioeconomic opportunities, and the lack of inclusiveness and legitimacy of local governance mechanisms, have also deepened the trust deficit between state institutions and citizens. Security forces are not seen to be able to deliver adequate protection to local communities. The use of excessive force, violent exactions, including sexual violence, extortion, and corruption have created high levels of mistrust between communities and security forces. Failure to hold perpetrators to account increases tensions between communities and the state and drives insecurity.

**Theory of Change**

**IF** security actors can develop policies, procedures and capacities to engage effectively with local populations and stakeholders to collaborate to address the causes of armed groups, **THEN** they will a) develop more nuanced and effective responses to security threats; b) reduce their contribution to marginalization of youth and c) drain the grievances which are used by armed groups to recruit and generate popular support.

**Geographic Focus**

This is a region wide-objective, but will be concentrated where the proliferation of non-state armed group violence is most prevalent: Mopti and Gao regions of Mali and the northeastern belt of Burkina Faso, and Tillabéri in Niger.

**Incremental Changes**

**2 Years**

In the short term, our activities will focus on establishing a dialogue between state security forces and civil society to bridge the existing trust deficit between them:

- A broad constituency of actors engage in a non-adversarial manner, intersecting different branches of government, the security sector, and civil society. At the national level and regional levels, various multi-stakeholder platforms will have emerged across the three countries.
- In Mali, the security consultative committees (Comités Consultatifs Locaux de Sécurité) are implemented at regional and municipal levels;
- In Niger, the Peace Committees sponsored by the Haute Autorité de Consolidation de la Paix (HACP) are operational;
- In Burkina Faso, the local committees spearheaded by the ONAPREGEC (Observatoire National de Prévention et Gestion des Conflits) and the security consultative committees (Comités Locaux de Sécurité), are operational
- Conversations extend beyond the usual suspects, allowing actors with diverse interests a legitimate platform. These include different political parties, non-state armed groups, unions, professional organizations, religious institutions, and marginalized populations, with a very specific emphasis on women-led CSOs.

**5 Years**

- Work with security forces to develop institutional structures for collaboration with communities (community-policing, training programs, etc.)
- Normalize engagement between civil society groups and security forces so that it is expected and trusted
- Cause a perceptible shift in the trust environment so that communities feel that security forces are addressing the root causes of conflict collaboratively with them.
- Establish effective accountability mechanisms for state security forces' abuse of citizens
| 10 Years | • Government policies are in place that establish cohesion between communities and the state security sector, demonstrating collaborative resilience between communities and the state security sector in the face of security threats;  
• Norms are changed so that there is a legitimate non-violent mechanism and platform to air grievances and challenge the preeminent role of political and security elites in the national security apparatus. |
| Key Measure(s) | • Increase in communal trust in state security forces and vice versa;  
• Success of DDR processes;  
• % decrease in violence against civilians, including from security and defense forces.  
• # of new policies in place focused on improving community-security relationships |
| Programmatic Approach | Search will work alongside those engaged in broad security sector reform efforts - including civil society, national security actors, and international military forces - with a three-level approach:  
• **Facilitate national and regional working relationships** between security forces and non-state actors such as religious leaders, human rights organizations, women's associations, youth groups and others to develop collaborative approaches to common security threats.  
• **Strengthen relationships between security forces and community members at the local level**, by combining skills building with facilitation of collaborative efforts. Specific emphasis will be given to those communities where police and military - both national and international - are increasing their presence as part of efforts to strengthen state control over territory.  
• **Work with governments to enact policies and institutionalize practices** which promote effective security engagement with citizens. This will include community policing policies, strengthening of PVE/TVE frameworks, and development of accountability mechanisms. |
STRAEGIC OBJECTIVE #4
To strengthen inclusive governance and improve equitable access to public services

Explanation of Objective

This SO address four dimensions of governance:
• Civically engaged population. Search will work with citizens groups, particularly with media and the increasing proportion of the youth population and women-led organizations, to ensure that the citizenry of targeted areas is constructively engaged with their government and that their voices are amplified to the decision-making level.
• Improved responsiveness and accountability from local governments while incentivizing a more equitable redeployment of national administrations throughout the Sahel. Search will engage government officials to equip them to perceive citizens engagement as being in their benefit, promoting accountability and effective service delivery, with the aim to strengthen the legitimacy of local national authorities in areas where the latter are redeploying and build trust.
• Strengthened collaboration between citizens groups and government officials on service delivery. Search will work with governments to develop concrete and enduring mechanisms of collaboration and accountability with the purpose of improving service delivery and creating quick peace dividends.
• Access to justice. Search will address the competition between formal and informal mechanisms of justice.

Search will seek to promote citizen's participation and good governance that is consensus-oriented, transparent, responsive, and efficient. Towards this end, we work to engage all groups, particularly minorities and society's most vulnerable, in a productive and inclusive process of dialogue, engagement, and collaboration. Through this approach, we will seek to strengthen the perception of the Government's legitimacy, particularly in areas the coverage of Government's services has been uneven or of poor quality. We will promote inclusive local governance structures that remain accountable to citizens through meaningful civic engagement, especially between civil society, local, regional, and national government structures. We will also foster inclusive and participatory election processes. One of our main focuses has been to open up broader channels of communications between government officials and their constituents that are constructive, solutions-oriented, and can be sustained.

Conflict Dynamic Addressed

Local, traditional leaders wield powerful influence in the geography, but tension exists between them and the government, which has failed to deliver essential services, and between them and other community members, due to their collusion with local state officials. The legal framework for local power sharing differs from country to country, but a lack of capacity and resources undermines state positioning in all three contexts. The failure to engage the populace and deliver services has led to distrust and animosity towards the government, which has created an opening for violent extremist groups and militant organizations to try and fill the void to support their recruitment and influence campaigns.
• The lack of effective service delivery and government presence which is being filled by local leaders. While the authority or legitimacy of Governments has progressively been eroded in areas where their presence has been limited and due to their perceived failure to cater to the needs of communities, traditional leaders have demonstrated impressive power and influence, as well as the ability to cope and effectively deliver a minimal level of much needed services. While this has been critical to bringing necessary services to local populations, it has created a challenging push and pull between traditional and official government leaders. As traditional leaders seek more recognition and autonomy from the government, the government’s attempts to exert more control set the stage for conflict when the legitimacy of the latter has been affected.
• There is a conundrum of governance: a lack of state presence has eroded Governments’ perceived legitimacy to cater to the needs of populations and fueled their grievances, enabling violent extremists to partially substitute in providing critical services such as justice. A commonly held belief is that the lack of state presence in rural areas - particularly near the borders of all three countries - is a critical enabling factor for armed groups to increase their influence as they position themselves as best suited to protect the interests of marginalized populations. Indeed, outside town centers, all three governments struggle to deliver basic services, from health to education, or to maintain a security presence. In Mali, the ongoing political turmoil, a
substantial lack of capacity in state institutions, and the discernable lack of progress on the implementation of the peace process all contribute to profound public distrust of the government.

- **Increased level of intercommunal violence.** In view of the fast deteriorating security context across the Liptako Gourma region, there is an urgent need for national authorities to shift from a hard, top-down and militarized approach towards more inclusive, bottom-up engagement to sustain peace. Security and defense forces, government actors, and the population are adopting increasingly adversarial views due to poor accountability, nonexistent reporting mechanisms, lack of trust in justice institutions, illegitimate use of force, and weak or nonexistent communication channels between these stakeholders. Without proper, locally-rooted communication, dialogue, and collaboration frameworks, the outcome of violence prevention efforts is likely to be compromised and perpetuate existing grievances and divides.

### Theory of Change

| IF | Mali’s, Burkina Faso’s and Niger’s governments can expand state presence through delivery of security, justice and basic services in those areas which they have lost control over AND those governance services are delivered in an inclusive manner with full participation from the public and engagement with local leaders and civil society. | THEN | armed groups will have substantially less operating space and influence, and will be unable to mobilize popular support to their causes. |

### Geographic Focus

Work on this SO would span the entirety of the conflict geography but would focus on rural areas in which state presence is tenuous or mistrust in the state is high. In Burkina Faso, Haut Bassin, Cascade and Centre-East. In Niger Maradi. In Mali Sikasso and Kayes, for instance.

#### Incremental Changes

| 2 Years | Develop avenues for collaboration and foster mutual trust between security defense forces (SDF), civilian authorities and communities to enable the progressive return of regional and local administration structures in areas where the state is largely absent due to ongoing insecurity (presence of armed VE groups threatening state representatives)  
| | Support active civic engagement, build and support women and youth’s effective participation in constructive debates, empower media streams for the promotion of violence-free elections in Mali and Niger in 2020.  
| | Strengthen participative and inclusive governance processes at the regional and communal levels in areas specifically at risk of VE, to create positive examples of effective two-way communication and increased collaboration between local population and state authorities.  
| | Establish avenues for communication and collaboration between traditional leaders and official government bodies on the improvement of equitable social services.  
| | Joint collaboration peace initiatives between local authorities and youth in VE prone areas. |

| 5 Years | Increased presence and sustained legitimacy of state representatives in VE-prone areas and beyond, including by scaling up inclusive and participative decentralized governance mechanisms.  
| | Effective partnership between State authorities and youth in designing inclusive CVE policies. |

| 10 Years | Governments have developed and implemented integrated and inclusive development strategies across their entire territories, including through the inclusion of youth and marginalized groups’ perspectives in public policies. |

#### Key Measure(s)

- Measure trust in the state in target communities, especially among youth and women
- Improvement in service delivery (education, sanitation, healthcare, etc.)
- Decrease in violence in upcoming elections vs. past
Programmatic Approach

Search will take a people-centered approach to strengthening inclusive governance, with a focus on improving the access of marginalized populations to decision-making bodies, including:

• **Bringing youth and women's voices into decision-making processes** by establishing lines of communication, demonstrating the value of inclusive decision-making to government leadership, and designing partnership mechanisms for sustained collaboration.

• **Ensuring key government processes are equitable and conflict sensitive** including service delivery, elections, and state management of natural resources. This goes beyond ensuring that marginalized communities can access public services but working with governments to harness service delivery as a tool to address citizen concerns and improve social cohesion.

• **Harnessing the power and influence of local leaders** to improve equitable service delivery and develop effective power-sharing practices between traditional and government leadership that re-establish the government as a reliable leader but doesn't undermine the importance of traditional local leaders.

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**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #5**

To create conditions for the success of an inclusive political settlement to the conflict in Mali

**Explanation of Objective**

This objective focuses on mobilizing support for a broader peace process in Mali, building on the [Algiers Agreement](https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/2019/mali-051419.html) and any unfolding political negotiations which ensue. There is a clear need to ignite the peace process, which has largely stalled, and do so in a manner that encompasses a broader set of actors - both at the community and national level - and recognizes an evolving political landscape. Search will accompany that process - whether it is the continuation of implementing the Algiers Agreement or a renegotiation of a broader settlement - focusing on engaging at the local level in central and northern Malian communities. We will have a particular emphasis on the roadmap to decentralization. It is based on the assumption that citizen demand and engagement will re-dynamize the process and maintain pressure on the key actors to follow through on its promise, updating it to reflect the current political context. In other words, Search is committed to the process, either through implementation of the Algiers Agreement or any subsequent process that emerges. To support this objective, Search will:

- Engage communities, with a focus on youth engagement, who perceive to have a stake in the outcome of the process;
- Support the implementation of a successful DDR and reconciliation process.
- Trigger communities’ engagement in the implementation of structural reforms as envisioned in the peace accord or any subsequent process.

**Conflict Dynamic Addressed**

Overall, the process to implement the Algiers Agreement has stalled; very few of the key provisions have been implemented and there is limited will or resources put behind advancing it. There appears to be limited popular support and people in conflict-affected communities largely feel very distant from the process, meaning that the political agreement is not translating into a transformation of the society as a whole. There is no clear sign that the core political provisions - namely the decentralization processes and the changes to the national parliament - are moving forward. The DDR process is only now happening, 4 years after the agreement came into effect, and is fraught with problems. While the agreement was signed in 2015, the context in the country is very changed and so there is a perception that many aspects are not relevant. In particular, the exclusion of armed actors who supported the Tuareg rebellion created automatic spoilers who have gained power and influence in the conflict system.
There are a number of other compounding factors. Many actors involved lack the political will to implement the agreement; there are no clear incentives and in fact the status quo - a tense peace with non-state militaries intact - seems to benefit many of the primary stakeholders, many of whom benefit from the trafficking networks which run through the region. Thus, some of the major provisions of the agreement have failed to go into effect; the provisioned DDR and army integration processes have hardly moved forward and the decentralization process which is laid out faces enormous obstacles.

There is a general lack of awareness among the public about the status of the peace process; other security concerns have eclipsed its importance, removing a key constituency. Yet, the agreement as it stands offers the best pathway to peace in Mali and, by extension, the region.

Given the unfolding dynamics in Mali with the rise of powerful armed actors, the establishment of the G5 Stabilization force, and the rising inter-communal tensions, there is a need for a broader peace process which is more inclusive. This may mean that other political dialogues may emerge and that the Algiers Agreement may even be superseded by another agreement of some sort.

**Theory of Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IF there is an inclusive political dialogue which addresses the political structures of the Malian state; and IF communities, particularly youth leaders, actively participate in such a process from agreement through implementation, THEN corresponding political and governance reforms (through implementation of the Algiers Agreement or any subsequent agreements) will have buy-in from across the population, realistically reflect the power dynamics which are at play and catalyze a societal transformation from top to bottom.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The transformation of the tentative stability in Northern Mali into enduring peace AND the establishment of a peace process which includes other armed actors is critical to the entire conflict region in that it would transform Mali into a source of stability in the Sahelian context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Geographic Focus**

| Northern Mali: Regions of Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal and Ménaka. |
| Central Mali: Regions of Mopti and Ségou. |
| South and West Mali - while less affected by the Algiers Agreement, the rest of the country needs to be sensitized to it and engaged in any next phases of political negotiation. |

At the commune level, we will target cantonment zones and communities in which the demobilization process will take place.

**Incremental Changes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 Years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The disarmament and demobilization process as designed in the Algiers Agreement is implemented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Information about the existing peace process is readily accessible to the public.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Constituencies for peace - which is rooted in youth and women-led civil society - emerge as a potent force in Malian society</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>5 Years</th>
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<tr>
<td>• A broader peace process which is inclusive of key actors emerges</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The decentralization process is completed and the structures set-up within the framework of this process are inclusive and accountable to their constituents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Intra-army divides are addressed, and trust and collaboration between security and defense forces, communities and local and regional authorities is strengthened.</td>
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<tr>
<th>10 Years</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Structural changes and policies as provisioned in the peace accord are inclusive and reflect central and northern Malian communities' needs.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Programmatic Approach

The programmatic approach to this SO will focus on facilitating vertical integration of any political dialogue process that unfolds, whether implementation of the Algiers Agreement goes forward or it is superseded by a next generation peace process. We will maintain an adaptive approach, interacting with the process as it unfolds. This will likely include:

**Strengthen communities’ access to information on the evolution of the peace process in whatever form it takes:** As a foundation of our work, we will work with media (community-based radio stations and social networks) to inform communities on the evolution of the peace process, ensuring that key community stakeholders KNOW about unfolding events and have channels to engage in public discourse on the key issues at play.

**Build public constituencies for peace,** whereby we convene people and institutions across dividing lines to create political support and pressure for a successful peace process. This would include the private sector, media organizations, community-based civil society organizations, women’s associations, youth-led formal and non-formal groups, and others. We will utilize an array of tools ranging from accountability instruments (such as scorecards) to multi-stakeholder dialogue. Throughout, the focus will be on two-way messaging - from local to national and national to local.

**Facilitate youth engagement in the peace process (per UNSCR 2250).** Search will position itself as a key facilitator of youth participation in the peacebuilding process, partnering with key youth-led organizations and the government to engage young people's voices and cultivate youth leadership in peacebuilding at the local level. If there is any further negotiation, ensuring youth voices will be central to our approach.

### Key Measure(s)

- % of target communities who report having been regularly informed and provided with opportunities to voice their perspectives and expectations concerning the ending of armed conflict
- % of target community members who report to have participated in or promoted the implementation of a peace process.
PARTNERSHIPS

Search will pursue a broad set of partnerships in order to implement this strategy, building on our already vast network. Because this strategy positions Search as a critical organization in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, the long-term and strategic partners we work with will define our potential to succeed. This has particular importance for a number of reasons:

a) Several of the objectives require collaboration with those having particular technical expertise that are outside Search's competencies. Partnerships with economic development, humanitarian, and natural resource management groups will be necessary and enable such groups to ensure that their work has a positive impact on the conflict environment;
b) Each of the strategic objectives is rooted in processes which are ongoing in the geography. By working in close collaboration with others, we have the potential to scale our impact well beyond our natural reach.

Search will build on its existing partners in several key sectors:
a) livelihood and economic development; b) natural resource and land management; and c) security and governance.

This will include:

Government and quasi-governmental agencies. In each of the targeted countries, Search will work with governmental actors, involving them in our activities at all levels as appropriate, recognizing that history of adversarial relationships between authority representatives and populations directly contributes to conflict, partly due to unequal governance and injustice undermining vertical cohesion in most unstable areas. At the local level, Search will involve local state representatives, wherever present, in all projects to build two-way communication channels between them and communities for the identification of priority needs and solutions to be implemented. At the regional level, Search will develop Memorandum of Understanding with the Governors as appropriate to develop locally tailored frameworks for cooperation. At the national level, Search will work with key agencies active in the peace, security and justice sectors, especially all relevant organizations in charge of, or contributing to, implementing the security and peace architecture. In Mali, these include but are not limited to the National Council for Security; the Centre National d’Alerte Précoce; the Haut Representant pour la Région du Centre responsible for the implementation of the Integrated Security Plan for the Central Regions (PSIRC); the Ministère de la Défense; Ministère de l’Intérieur; Ministère de l’Administration territorial; et the Ministère d’Appui à la Réconciliation. In Niger, those include the Ministère de la Défense ; Ministère l’Intérieur, de la Sécurité Publique, de la Décentralisation et des Affaires Religieuses; the Haute Autorité à la Consolidation de la Paix; and the state-sponsored National Center for Strategic Studies and Security. In Burkina Faso, these include the Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale, de la Décentralisation et de la Cohésion sociale; the Ministère de la Défense et des Anciens combattants; the Ministère de la Sécurité; the Observatoire National de Prévention et de Gestion des Conflits Communautaires (ONAPREGECC) attached to the Ministère des Droits Humains et de la Promotion Civique; the Haut Conseil pour la Réconciliation et l’Unité Nationale (HCRUN); the Mediateur du Faso; and any other governmental agency already existing or which might be created in support of the development and operationalization of the peace architecture. Overall, these partnerships will aim at bridging any gaps between state-sponsored, nationally led mechanisms to prevent and mediate conflicts, with grassroot-level, externally supported community led efforts to build peace constituencies, in order to develop operational and efficient peace architectures at all levels.

Regional security and resiliency actors. There are a number of regional organizations with which Search will develop formal partnerships or working relationships, including the G5 Sahel Permanent Secretariat, through its resiliency and/or security focal points. Search might also develop a framework agreement with the Collège de Sécurité in Bamako, training...

36International Crisis group has called for the creation of an organ directly attached to the Presidency. The United Nations, together with AU, OECD, and the WB and the Government of Burkina Faso, has conducted a joint assessment, to shift donor priorities in line with the fast deteriorating security context, based on which it was recommended to create a new structure in charge of local peace architecture.
actors of the penal chain from the Sahel region, to include the Common Ground Approach training into the training curricula of the College. Search will also work with ECOWAS, through its support to national early warning mechanisms, and the African Union should the organization continues to boost its engagement in the security sector across the region. With regards to farmer-herder conflict, Search will work with regional and international policy development frameworks on transhumant pastoralism (UNOWAS, CILLS, ECOWAS, CSAO, ALG, among others), as well as its relationships with national Ministries in charge of agriculture and herding in each country to make sure that best practices, lessons learnt, and recommendations for the prevention of land and resource-based conflict stemming from work at the grassroot level feed into cross-border cooperation frameworks. Search will notably seek to develop close working relationships with ECOWAS for all issues pertaining to conflict related to the demarcation of cattle tracks and transhumance roads across the region.

**Grassroot organizations.** Overall, taking a long-term approach, Search will develop partnerships with a large network of grassroot organizations, building their capacities and involving them in the design of our intervention, with the overarching view of scaling up and sustaining peacebuilding efforts at all levels. Recognizing that the engagement of international actors with small and medium sized CSOs is fairly limited across the region, compared to that with national CSOs, Search will work with local groups, both those already well-structured and informal ones, especially those youth and women-led, providing them with 360º support in each country. First, Search will seek to bridge the gap between national peace processes, which are mostly driven by state actors, and grassroot actors who do not have the opportunity to share their views of conflict dynamics and contribute to tackling peace, security and justice issues. Search will also explore the opportunity to work with influential CSOs leaders as part of its Track II Mediation Program, especially in Mali and Niger. Second, with regards to land and resource-based conflicts, Search will work with regional and local networks of pastoralists and semi-pastoralists, such as the Reseau Bilital Maroobe (RBM) and its affiliates in each country (CRUS, RECOPA, AREN and TASSAGHT), organizations of local livestock farmers, cooperatives of farming communities, CSOs with strong rural roots working on local and community development, etc. Third, Search will work with religious actors and inter-faith organizations, which have long been active in the peacebuilding space across the region. Where and when appropriate, Search will involve networks of religious leaders into C/PVE efforts, building on its experience implementing programs for the freedom of belief in West Africa and beyond.

**Media.** Search will work not only with community radio stations, which have been its main target throughout the past years, but also with national ‘mainstream media’ (print and radio). Mainstream media will be selected based on their permanent readership or audience, financial and editorial independence, and solid management. Community radio stations will be selected based on their location in relevant regions and their coverage, especially in most unstable and hard-to-reach areas. Search will build on its extensive network of partner community radio stations to develop framework agreements with the aim of moving beyond a model where Search plays the major part of content production -- in addition to provision of equipment materials, training and coaching -- to one where the organization provides adequate support so they can autonomously produces conflict sensitive content. At the same time, Search will also allocate resources into its own in-house production, with a view to build a landmark studio production well known and recognized, such as Talking Drum Studio in the Mano River region.

**Researchers.** Search will also develop partnerships with both international/regional and local/national research organizations. International research organizations active in the region include SIPRI, ICG, ISS, Clingadensael institute, and others which have the potential to enrich the quality and depth of our work. Search will mostly seek to work together with local researchers active in the fields of justice, peace and security to root our intervention in the most recent research program run locally and create coalitions of local practitioners and researchers. In Burkina Faso, these include but are not limited to: Centre d’Etude Stratégique en Défense et Sécurité; Institut Supérieur de Sécurité Humaines; in Mali, the Institut Malien de recherche-action paix (IMRAP); in Niger, the Centre National d’Etude Stratégique, and others. Regionally, the African Security Sector Network is among the key research institutions that will be associated with Search-led advocacy efforts to move past a state-centric to a people-centric approach to justice, peace and security.

**INGOs.** Search will work with humanitarian and development INGOs with a view to integrate conflict sensitivity into large livelihoods and economic recovery programming. Beyond conflict sensitivity and the do no harm approach, spearheading partnerships with Humanitarian and Development organizations will aim at implementing projects combining
sectorial aid and governance/social cohesion, thus contributing to operationalizing the so-called triple nexus across the region. Beyond economic recovery, Search will also develop partnerships with INGOs active in the field of governance and justice, with a view to strengthening interfaces between formal, customary, and informal justice, as well as setting up dialogue and consultation frameworks with a broad range of criminal justice actors, traditional authorities and civil society representatives to jointly determine priorities at the local level, identify and support reforms of customary and informal justice systems, and create accessible justice systems effectively responding to ongoing conflicts. In the security sector, Search will work with organizations active in the field of security sector reform, such as CIVIPOL, DECAF, ASSN and many others, to make sure that locally led efforts to develop trust and collaboration between security providers and communities feed into broader institutionalized frameworks at the national level. Search might also develop framework agreements with organizations whose mandates include supporting DDR efforts in Niger and Mali, such as MINUSMA in Mali, IOM in Niger and others. Overall, by working in such partnerships, Search will find opportunities to integrate conflict sensitivity and the Common Ground Approach into the large economic development, governance, and security programming which is ongoing. For instance, we will integrate sustainable local mechanisms for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, enabling target groups such as agro-pastoral groups to respond jointly to the challenges of increasing divisions. Search will also ensure that economic development and local governance systems and frameworks are inclusive. Ultimately, the only potential for us to have an impact at a significant scale is to work with the most influential groups in the region so that their work directly and explicitly advances social cohesion.

Private sector. First, Search will work with private companies interested in improving human security across the region, especially those involved in reconstruction/recovery and stabilization efforts. Second, Search will work with social media platforms, such as Facebook, to prevent the dissemination of fake news and hate speech that is contributing to. Third, Search will develop partnerships with private sector technologists and ‘Peace Tech Labs’ to develop ICT4P tools and projects.