AMINA’S STORY: 
REDUCING VEO RECRUITMENT OF YOUTH AND IMPROVING SOCIAL COEXISTENCE IN RUFIFI, TANZANIA

(As stated above) Search for Common Ground is using media, safe spaces and networking to create opportunities for community members to build credible relationships with security actors, including local authorities, and youth influencers to meet, discuss, and later collaborate on tangibly addressing the issues they see. This US Department of State-funded initiative, “Kwapamoja Tudumishe Amani: Working Together to Reduce Violent Extremism Threats in Pwani and Mtwarra” seeks to strengthen linkages between youth, community leaders, and security actors to work towards a collaborative response to peace and security concerns in the Mtwarra and Pwani region.

Above: Amina Yusuf addressing members who attended the stakeholders rejection meeting in Ruffi
Through this project, Search conducted Common Ground Approach Trainings for key adult stakeholders, including security agents and community leaders. The training includes modules in engaging vulnerable groups, understanding community grievances, and best practices in transforming VE. One of the identified key stakeholders included **Amina Yusuph Mustapha**, a Ward Executive Officer and youth representative in Rufiji. Amina testified that through her participation in the project over the past two years, she has been able to see direct evidence of positive change in her community. Specifically, she notes that dramatic change has been witnessed related to youth, explaining “Before, nobody believed that it was possible to have conversations with youth, who often not only live in difficult situations but also are victims of peer pressure, negative mobilization and at risk of VEO (violent extremist organization) recruitment. However, after Search for Common Ground’s intervention the impossible was finally possible.”

During a stakeholder rejection meeting in late November, 2020, Amina testified that youth who were largely difficult to converse with, unwilling to listen and often lacking employment, were connected with trained key youth influencers who were able to apply their new skills to find common ground and help the youth understand the opportunities that exist outside of resorting to VE. She points out that, “Over time, some of the hard to reach youth have altered their perspectives and some would even say they have evolved for good. Additionally, many of the at-risk youth that many community members would label as dangerous are now considered and hired for various jobs, including cleaning and building stalls, houses, and gardening. Overall, Search has helped in maintaining peace and positive relationships within the community here in Rufiji.”

“Before, nobody believed that it was possible to have conversations with youth, who often not only live in difficult situations but also are victims of peer pressure, negative mobilization and at risk of VEO (violent extremist organization) recruitment. However, after Search for Common Ground’s intervention the impossible was finally possible.”

—Amina Yusuph Mustapha