After the 2018 general elections, Sierra Leone experienced a somewhat chaotic and critical political transition based on several violent episodes. The inter-party rivalry has defined political life and continues to deepen existing cleavages among the population. Besides, the lack of information and platforms for dialogue where citizens can share their concerns prevents them from engaging critically in politics and reinforces their mistrust and exclusion.

Funded by USAID, Search for Common Ground (Search) is part of the Consortium for Election Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), which has helped mitigate this competitive turmoil. Borne out of the consortium, our 18-month “Sierra Leone Elections Dialogue Series” project strengthens citizens’ participation, particularly women, youth, and marginalized groups, in a constructive political agenda.

Paving the way for inclusive governance and more robust local development processes, we encourage issue-based dialogue by strengthening the capacity of civil society, the media, and local officials to carry out their role effectively.

We do this by addressing four complementary objectives.

**Increase capacities of elected local government officials and staff**

Simultaneously building capacity and relationships, we combine dialogue and training of parliament members, elected officials, new councilors, and traditional leaders on decentralization. These activities lay the foundation for a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities and greater trust and collaboration on functional decentralization programs. Elected leaders then have the tools to create initiatives to strengthen the decentralization process and consolidate cooperation among elected officials.

We provide training to new local councilors and ward development committees, headed by women councilors, to ensure greater accountability in implementing their projects in their localities.

Search supports youth- and women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) co-lead Town Hall Meetings focused on specific issues. These activities provide a platform for local councilors, communities, elected officials, and service providers to discuss community needs and priorities and find collaborative solutions. CSOs monitor the various commitments and action plans’ implementation with each discussion building on the previous ones.
**Search for Common Ground (Search)** is one of the largest conflict transformation organizations in the world. Our mission is to transform the way that the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions. In Sierra Leone since 2000, our programs have opened a space for dialogue on critical and sensitive social and political issues, while promoting social cohesion and reconciliation throughout the post-war period.

**Strengthen civil society advocacy and oversight capacities**

We mentor civil society organizations’ leaders to build the capacities of other CSOs and co-host activities such as Town Hall Meetings or our radio show "Accountability Now!" on governance issues. These "Training of Trainers" enables CSOs to train other CSOs in leadership, non-confrontational communication, advocacy techniques, community mobilization, and networking to increase their capacity to support better governance and accountability processes and respond to the needs of citizens.

To ensure that the district budget is transparent, accountable, and inclusive, Search fosters collaboration between local councils, CSOs and the District Budget Oversight Committees (DBOCs). We provide DBOCs and CSOs training on gender-sensitive budget analysis and tracking. The trained DBOCs then co-lead forums that bring together CSOs, communities, and local councils to discuss and implement better gender-sensitive budgeting.

Broadcasted through our 33 radio partners, our radio magazine “Accountability Now” dedicated to governance issues, promotes elected politicians’ liability and transparency. This 30-minute program provides an interactive platform for voters to give their views on elected officials’ performance. The show also improves the understanding of governance processes, thereby strengthening CSO-driven advocacy and local development processes.

**Reinforce Media Capacity**

Entirely led by Internews, these activities support our goal of creating platforms for dialogue on relevant issues to Sierra Leoneans and help mitigate political division discourse.

Our partner provides mentoring and training to local journalists and community radio stations to accurately report court and tribunal processes, post-election, and governance issues. Besides, their Town Hall radio programs bring communities, civil society organizations, and community leaders together to discuss citizen needs and elected officials’ progress in fulfilling their commitments.

These interventions complement Search activities, such as its radio magazine and Town Hall Meetings, to improve the communication environment and promote evidence-based decision making, citizen understanding and engagement, better governance, and accountability.

**Building political consensus among key stakeholders**

Search provides violence prevention and peacebuilding training to the media, civil society organizations, and local authorities, particularly in conflict-prone areas. This training enables them to understand their role in violence prevention, outline peace initiatives before, during, and after elections, and identify early signs of tension and conflict. We emphasize the media by providing training in conflict-sensitive reporting techniques and Common Ground Journalism, giving them the tools to create solutions- and peace-oriented content.

In violence hotspots, Search conducts Violence Prevention Community Engagements (V-PCE) with the community, civil society members, local authorities, traditional leaders, and security actors. We support them in a dialogue around critical community issues that create tension and conflict and exacerbate the risk of violence to propose collaborative solutions. Also, we strengthen their capacity to prevent violence it through tools and processes for managing risks and conflicts.