Search for Common Ground (Search)’s strategy for “Central and South Asia,” focuses on the dynamics within and around five countries - Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. This conflict geography is made up of three interlocking conflict systems: Afghanistan’s recurring and ongoing war; social and political divisions in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) on Afghanistan’s border; and the conflicts of the Fergana Valley and beyond in Central Asia. As part of Search’s organization-wide strategy, this region was identified as one of eleven transnational conflict geographies that Search will focus its efforts on over the next ten years.

Conflict in this geography has largely emerged from strategic competition among the world’s powers who all have vested strategic interests in the region. Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, and the United States and its NATO allies are all deeply engaged in the affairs of Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics. The forces at play are tremendous, the resources invested are prodigious, and the stakes are high.

As a result, peace and prosperity in the region are highly interdependent. Afghanistan has enormous potential as an economic corridor - a land bridge to the sea which connects Central Asia to the rest of the world. To realize the potential economic growth of the region, there is a need for diplomatic, social, and economic cooperation to promote stability, regional collaboration, and local agency.

Search’s overall mandate in this conflict geography is to unleash the agency of people, amidst large proxy conflicts, to become powerful forces for peace. We work with the people in state and non-state institutions as well as the public to build relationships across dividing lines and to reinforce the social fabric of their societies.

There are significant opportunities for Search in this geography. We have had some engagement in each of the five countries targeted and the region has a wide range of willing partners in civil society, government, and the private sector who will enable Search to create enduring changes with institutional buy-in. A vibrant youth sector in all countries will ensure that engagement with young people in each of the strategic pillars is a substantial part of our approach.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

1. **Create broad-based, top-to-bottom buy-in to the peace process in Afghanistan** fostering vertical integration into all aspects of a peace process which emerges, particularly ensuring youth participation and public engagement.

2. **Facilitate regional integration among Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan** through a combination of top-level track II work and community-based programming - including fostering economic ties - focusing on borderlands.

3. **Amplify the power of people to shape Uzbekistan’s ongoing reform efforts** promoting public dialogues on the unfolding political changes and developing channels for engagement in reform efforts.

4. **Advance inclusive governance which facilitates participation of traditionally marginalized minority groups in local power-sharing and decision making** forging relationships which enable local actors to break social and structural barriers to inclusions.

5. **Catalyze inclusive public dialogue to bridge the stark ideological divide around gender roles** catalyzing discussions on masculinity and heroism in popular culture, and facilitating inclusive public discussion on the role of women in the family and public life.

6. **Transform migration from a source of instability and division into a force for peace and social cohesion** harnessing the power of population movements to create strong and enduring connections across dividing lines.
KEY DRIVERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE

- **There is an unprecedented momentum to end the war in Afghanistan.** Afghanistan is living a precarious moment, intermittently frustrated by the opaque and exclusionary nature of the ongoing peace talks and hopeful that maybe this is their moment to bring 40 years of war to an end. With overwhelming war fatigue, a broad-based consensus seems to be emerging among the population in support of a peace process.

- **Despite living in authoritarian or conflict dominated environments, the expectations of participation have become increasing norm in the public.** Across the region, civil society and community activists are seeking channels for participation in the broad political events and decision-making processes which are unfolding. There is space for influence, to develop an ‘expand the tent’ model of inclusion.

- **A generation of young leaders in the region is organizing in creative ways to assert its voice and is in need of support.** From Kyrgyzstan to Pakistan, there are youth-led organizations which have emerged and are driving public dialogue on the most pressing and challenging issues of the day. There is immense potential to engage youth leaders across the region in all aspects of this strategy.

- **Women are organizing and driving people-to-people engagement at a regional level.** Some of the most dynamic work to develop people-to-people relationships between Afghanistan and other parts of this conflict geography is being pioneered by women in civil society. This lays the foundation for business and government cooperation across the region.

SEARCH’S VALUE ADDED

- **Positioning.** Search is powerfully positioned in Central Asia to engage both top-level and community actors in peacebuilding. We have a network of partners, who are able to access communities which would be targeted through this strategy, and subject matter experts who work with us on a regular basis. We have demonstrated an ability to engage and work with Russia and have the potential to build relationships with China. In Pakistan, we have a network of local partners we have worked with, and in Afghanistan, we can leverage our new relationships and emerging reputation as an organization with expertise in vertical integration in peace processes.

- **Programmatic Approach.** Our people-centered approach, focused on building social cohesion in combination with top-down and bottom-up work, is unique. The cornerstone of our work will be transforming people at all levels - including those in government institutions which are critical to regional cooperation - and ensuring the involvement of a cross-section of people in decision-making processes. By combining this work with efforts to engage in long-term social norms transformation, we can leverage our capacities to push the peacebuilding sector forward.

- **Expertise.** Our experience and learning in supporting peace processes - in Myanmar, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and elsewhere - will enable us to effectively implement programming to include citizens in the major political processes underway. Together with capacities to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue at all levels, cause attitudinal shifts through media, and in youth and peacebuilding, Search will be uniquely able to cause the changes articulated in this strategy.