LEBANON 2022 - 2023

Search for Common Ground (Search) works in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North America to transform the way that the world deals with conflict: away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions. Our mandate is to bring about a vision of a shared future rooted in a mutual pluralistic acceptance of the “the other” at all levels of society.

OUR GREATER LEVANT STRATEGY:

In 2018 we made a conscious decision to program around the natural boundaries of the world’s biggest conflicts as opposed to focusing on country borders. Our work in Syria falls under our ten-year Greater Levant Conflict Geography Strategy (2020-2030) that identified Syria as an epicenter of conflict dynamics within and around it, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Under this strategy, we are:

- **Catalyzing popular demand for meaningful reconciliation.** We do this through:
  - Regional perceptions surveys on reconciliation issues;
  - Supporting development of national agenda on reconciliation issues;
  - Memory and memorialization;
  - Facilitating return/intergradation of combatants;
  - Moving local reconciliation into national events; and
  - Supporting public engagement in transitional justice processes.

- **Capitalizing on IDP and refugee population movements to shape social norms around diversity and inclusion.** We do this through:
  - Conflict sensitivity in humanitarian response;
  - Equipping an array of key leaders in the Common Ground Approach (CGA);
  - Catalyzing collaborative processes to enable joint problem solving; and
  - Utilizing the media to create platforms for diverse voices around preparations for return.

- **Advancing inclusive and responsive governance, particularly in those geographic areas which have been resilient to violent conflict.** We do this through:
  - Identifying and linking key champions in government to engage in informal networks that lead to collaboration opportunities and institutional change;
  - Equipping key stakeholders in broader public engagement and collaborative problem solving;
  - Developing citizen led collaborative accountability mechanisms;
  - Facilitating dialogues and collaborative action between women and youth civil society leaders and government officials; and
  - Establishing replicable models of citizen participation in decision making.

- **Enabling young women and men to independently develop multi-dimensional identities.** We do this through:
  - Engaging with key youth-led formal and non-formal organizations to enable collaboration among young men and women;
  - Transforming social norms and addressing gender inequalities and stereotyping; and
  - Engaging with institutions that shape identity

- **Catalyzing broad inclusion in the brokering and implementation of political agreements in the conflict geography.** We do this through:
  - Building strategic partnerships with key top-level facilitators (both track I and II) to identify opportunities for broad-based public engagement in political processes;
  - Building constituencies for peace;
  - Promoting UNSCR2250;
  - Promoting UNSCR1325;
  - Enabling political actors and negotiators to effectively facilitate public participation in crafting political agreements; and
  - Employing track II dialogue tools to build relationships among leaders on conflict dividing lines.
• Transforming external power engagement towards collaboration for peace. We do this through:
  • Developing a network of actors from the L7 who have a keen interest in the Levant;
  • Connecting disparate track I and track II initiatives already underway in the Levant;
  • Building shared interest and coalitions that create partnerships among key actors around economic, security, environmental and cultural programs.

**WORK THROUGHOUT LEBANON:**
We began our work in Lebanon in 1996 working with grassroots communities, children and youth, women, networks of local civil society partners, local leaders, national media actors, government departments, security officials, municipalities, social influencers and other stakeholders.

**OUR PROGRAMMING PILLARS:**

- Reconciliation & horizontal cohesion
- Inclusive governance
- Political processes & negotiations.

**OUR THREE OVERARCHING STRATEGIES INCLUDE:**

- **Dialogue.** We train community leaders, women, youth, CSOs and then using our dialogue-to-action approach support locally-led facilitation for decision-making on divisive conflict issues;

- **Media.** Through radio, television, theater, and social media, we support local producers to develop content that sparks local conversations, builds understanding across dividing lines, and highlights marginalized perspectives, complementing small-group dialogue with social consensus-building; and

- **Community Action.** We accompany media and dialogue processes with real-world collective-action aimed at sustaining social cohesion. Examples include early-warning systems to jointly document and address security threats, community-led collaborative initiatives, trainings and capacity building, social and cultural activities including sports and arts, and many more.

**CURRENT AND MOST RECENT PROGRAMS:**

**Prevention of violent extremism (PVE) and reintegration program:**
Given the threat of VE, deterioration of conditions in Lebanese prisons, and increased cases of recidivism, we implemented a program that focused on PVE and reintegration in and outside Lebanese prisons. Employing our four PVE programming pillars - prevention, disengagement, enabling state responses and amplifying new narratives, we worked with local CSOs, youth, media, National PVE Unit, Internal Security Forces (ISF), Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and Ministry of Interior (MOI). The program fostered collaborative engagement of government departments, prisons administration and national CSOs. A total of 100 inmates, 20 ex-inmates, 24 governmental PVE-Unit stakeholders and 53 security officials were trained in conflict transformation, our PVE approach and on topics such as the Mandela Rules. A media campaign that included screening of an award-winning reintegration documentary in communities and universities was done to shift community perceptions towards the reintegration of ex-inmates. A tailored disengagement and rehabilitation manual for Lebanese prisons was also developed and shared with the PVE Unit and prison administration for their continued use. This was also followed by a training of psychologists and case workers on its use.

- 100 inmates & 10 ex-inmates trained
- 53 security officials trained
- 24 PVE units stakeholders trained
- Prisons taskforce established
- Prisons based conflict manual developed
- 3 local initiatives for ex-inmates implemented
- Award winning reintegration documentary viewed by over 1 million people
Social cohesion and Stability program:
In response to tensions and social cohesion challenges, in particular between refugees and host communities, we launched a program in 2019 that promoted social cohesion amongst and between host communities and refugees in the country. Using our multi-pronged approaches - capacity building, dialogue, community initiatives, social media influencer activities and media campaigns - we built the capacity of mediators, women and men, social influencers, media actors and CSOs in leveraging the media and strategic communication tools to foster social cohesion. We engaged with 29 youth, nine social influencers and conducted 210 dialogues. Our #OneAct campaign done in direct response to Beirut blast had over 1 million engagements on social media. About 93.1 percent of surveyed participants in the program’s final evaluation stated that the intervention changed their beliefs towards others.

Inclusive governance program:
In 2017 we launched a multi-year inclusive governance in Wadi Khaled, a northern border town with Syria. The program contributed to more inclusive and participatory governance in Wadi Khaled. The program built the capacities of a network of nine municipalities to be amenable to the inclusion of women and youth in decision making processes in the municipalities. An array of activities that included trainings and capacity building for women, youth and municipal officials; dialogues, roundtable meetings, town halls and joint collaborative community initiatives targeting municipalities, women and youth were implemented. Based on an external evaluation, about 91 percent of project beneficiaries considered the project effective in contributing to increased representation of marginalized groups in addressing local needs. A total of 20 joint initiatives involving municipal officials, women and youth were co-designed and implemented. These included rehabilitation of some culverts, street solar lighting, rehabilitation of water sources, women’s gym and library among others. Due to the project, municipal officials reported an increase of 15 percent tax paying by residents in Wadi Khaled.

Gender program:
Violence against women and girls (VAWG), sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), present big challenges for Lebanon and it is impossible to talk about conflict, lack of stability and social cohesion without addressing the scourges of VAWG and GBV. In 2019 we launched our multi-pronged gender program that seeks to reduce VAWG and GBV, including child marriage and intimate partner violence. The program is doing this through improving GBV prevention and response mechanisms and breaking gender stereotypes using the media. Key to the program is our “partners for justice” approach that is creating and promoting young men and men to be allies in fighting VAWG and GBV and promotion of positive masculinities. The program provides capacity building in gender equality and equitable masculinities, youth-led research, youth-led community trainings, youth initiatives and multi-media campaigns. The program engaged 21 media professionals, 16 youth-led organizations, 30 youths and completed a participatory youth led research. Various trainings and capacity building that include in media for social change, Program Ra were conducted. A media campaign that was launched as part of the program reached over 3 million engagements on social media. Over 20 collaborative grants were implemented throughout the country. A survey carried out in communities where campaigns were implemented revealed that 92 percent of targeted participants reported a change in attitudes towards the permissibility or justification of VAWG.
Youth engagement program:
With a bulging youthful population yearning, not only to be engaged but to take a driving seat in the development and political processes, as well as, leadership in the country, it is important to create opportunities and platforms for meaningful engagement of young people in Lebanon. In 2021, in collaboration with our Jordan office, we launched a joint program aimed at empowering youth in both countries to utilize and govern online and in-person youth platforms as a means of collaboratively tackling issues impacting them. Leveraging our Youth-360 approach, we built the capacities of youth through training and mentoring programs to enable them to develop online engagement platforms as well as meaningfully engage in non-adversarial ways. In addition to the youth platform, the youth are implementing about a dozen joint collaborative community initiatives throughout the country.

Freedom of religion and beliefs program:
In a context where issues and conflicts take sectarian and religious lines, it is important that religious freedoms and religious engagement programs are implemented to foster social cohesion and harness and amplify the role of religious actors as unifiers and voices of moderation and coexistence in communities. Since 2020 we have been implementing a program aiming at strengthening understanding of ideas through regular, constructive engagement between various actors working on religion and sectarian identity. This is enabling collective advocacy to increase religious freedom in Lebanon. A key stakeholders mapping was undertaken under the program and a series of meetings aimed at establishing a common understanding of freedom of religion. This will be followed by a series of roundtables seeking to deepen understanding and collaboration across sectarian divides.

Peace Education program:
Anchored on our CVE approach we have been providing children and youth with non-formal education to support their resilience to violence under our various peace education programs in Lebanon in the past as well as in Syria. Our programs have focused on peace education, life skills, critical thinking, conflict resolution, and work readiness, as well as extra-curricular activities based at youth centers and schools. These centers were safe spaces for the youth to learn and share, develop constructive skills and relationships, as well as positive opportunities to self-develop and engage in society. The programs also included accompaniment of the youth by case managers and capacity building on identifying drivers and factors of VE and response to community-based committees. They also included small grants and collaborative initiatives by these committees in collaboration with the youths. Such programming is so critical at this juncture in Lebanon as children and youth are most vulnerable in the multiple crises the country is going through with many dropping out or being unable to enroll in schools and a lot facing violence, including SGBV.

Cultural heritage and protection program:
In a country as diverse as Lebanon, there is a growing need to highlight and embrace the rich heritage within communities as the legacy of conflict lingers. Search has promoted sustainable cultures of peace and social cohesion through conflict transformation, multisectoral programming, as well as the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. In MENA, Search has honed its expertise in cultural heritage and religious engagement initiatives. In Lebanon, our past projects included using cultural heritage preservation as a resource for young people to build bonds across social and sectarian dividing lines.
OUR STRENGTHS:

- One of the few INGOs working on peacebuilding, stabilization and social cohesion in Lebanon since 1996, with an impartial reputation and proven track record in conflict transformation;
- We have strong collaboration with ISF, MoI, MoJ and other government departments that enable us to establish government champions to support peacebuilding;
- A network over 100 local partners, over 200 trained local leaders and insider mediators and media actors;
- Extensive experience working with municipalities and municipal officials;
- A unique CGA applied to various domains;
- A unique media expertise that enables us to reach out and amplify voices of many people; and
- A diversity of partnerships with civil society, marginalized communities such as LGBTQ, local leaders, insider mediators, INGOs and development actors.

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