Sylvie, the President of the Coordination of Women’s Associations and NGOs of Mali, knows firsthand the struggles women face when it comes to being included in peace processes. “Women, from the bottom to the top, are not involved in peace processes. Yet they have fought and are still fighting to be involved,” she says.

But Sylvie didn’t let this obstacle hold her back. Thanks to funding from UNPBF, through the “Anbe Gnokon Bolo” Project, Search for Common Ground (Search) partnered with UNICEF to finally give the boost Sylvie and others needed to take part. Among other things, the project created peace clubs to strengthen dialogue on security issues and engage youth more fully in peacebuilding.

“Together with other women, youth, and au-
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Authorities, I became a member of a peace club in Bamako and received training in conflict prevention and transformation,” Sylvie says. For her, the training was invaluable. “What helped me the most were the experiences of conflict resolution, successful or not, that everyone shared,” she explains. With everyone bringing their share of experience and knowledge, “resolution is now done as a team.” No one is left out, no matter how severe the conflict. “We mediate together until we find a solution,” says Sylvie.

By supporting peace club members in organizing community mobilization activities, Search helped them directly apply their new conflict management skills in their communities. The club’s efforts included holding community dialogues and giving communities, particularly youth, an additional platform to voice their security concerns, needs, and recommendations. These meetings also allowed all stakeholders to reflect on preventing and responding to conflict.

“The training has taught me to maintain a neutral stance, which allows us to go further in our initiatives,” Sylvie explains. She took her role as mediator and president of a women’s group further by teaching girls everything she had learned. “They are present at all our activities. We never go out without them. It’s up to me to set an example for others to follow,” she says.

But Sylvie’s work is not limited to teaching and mediating. She tackled challenging issues head-on, such as gender-based violence. “In cases of rape, victims are sometimes encouraged not to press charges, to settle out of court in the name of community solidarity. This has a huge impact on the victim,” she says. “So we try to eliminate that kind of pressure. We appease the community while putting the victim back at the center of the decision-making process.”

Sylvie knows that women can no longer be bypassed, and this goes for both sides of the violence chain. “What men forget is that it is our children, our husbands, our brothers who are killed. At home, we have the power to influence our own. We cannot forget women when in many countries, it is thanks to them that there are ceasefire agreements,” she reminds us.

With Sylvie at the helm, women in Bamako can be sure to make great strides toward peace. Her actions speak louder than words, and she doesn’t shy away from taking them. “We visit conflicting parties, not as a substitute for the authorities, but to prevent further tragedy and raise awareness on conflict prevention among young people. I want to open up the discussion on acts of violence so they do not happen again.” Sylvie’s story is a testament to the power of one woman’s dedication and passion for bringing about positive change.
Women in Farmer-Herder Conflicts

Mrs. Uziel’s Mission: Empowering Women for Conflict Resolution

Nigeria’s farmer-herder conflicts have been intensifying over the past decade, with economic and environmental factors at the heart of the issue. Population growth, infrastructure development, and land privatization have deprived herders of grazing areas, while climate change and related desertification have driven them to migrate south. As a result, competition for land and water resources between herders and farmers in the Middle Belt region has increased, leading to insecurity and violence.

The Impact of Conflict on Women:

Women have borne the brunt of this cyclical conflict, experiencing insecurity and limited access to their farmlands. Many women have been left traumatized and unable to sustain their livelihoods due to the competition for scarce resources. Despite this, women like Mrs. Wonasato Uziel have emerged as powerful peacebuilders and agents of change in their communities. Their voices and perspectives are critical in conflict resolution efforts.
The Power of Women in Conflict Transformation:

Mrs. Wonasato Uziel, a teacher and member of the Community Security Architecture Dialogue (CSAD), is a shining example of the power of women in driving positive change. Utilizing knowledge gained from the COMITAS project, she has engaged women in conflict resolution, peaceful coexistence, and gender-based violence prevention. Through her efforts, she has formed a group of women who meet regularly, providing them with training on Alternative Dispute Resolution, reconciliation, and entrepreneurship. The group has grown in size and attracts women who seek to engage productively and improve their lives. Mrs. Uziel also facilitates dialogue among women from farming and herder communities, creating opportunities for them to discuss issues of dispute and find collaborative solutions.

The Role of the COMITAS Project:

The COMITAS project, implemented by Search for Common Ground, Mercy Corps, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and financed by the European Union’s Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), empowers local actors, like Mrs. Uziel, to mitigate conflicts between farming and herding communities in Adamawa State. The project strengthens traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and builds the capacity of local actors to prevent and resolve conflicts. By establishing and training Community Response Networks (CRNs), the project mobilizes appropriate response channels based on early warning signals and engages relevant actors at the local government area (LGA) or state level. Additionally, the project facilitates intra- and inter-community dialogues to promote social cohesion and develop natural resources management action plans.

The Way Forward:

As we celebrate the resilience and strength of women in Nigeria, Search for Common Ground recognizes the importance of supporting their efforts in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Mrs. Uziel’s leadership in the COMITAS project demonstrates the power of local actors to take ownership of their peace and security. By building capacity and strengthening traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, we can promote a sustainable and peaceful coexistence between farming and herder communities. Initiatives like COMITAS are working towards a brighter future for all, where women are at the forefront of driving positive change. As Mrs. Uziel put it, “After the first engagement with Search, I realized it was important to involve the women in my community. The group started with a few members and is now growing every month.”
The town of Ouahigouya, situated in northern Burkina Faso, has been increasingly plagued by inter- and intra-communal tensions, violent extremism, violence, and human security risks, causing fear and insecurity among many communities. However, in February, the winds of change were blowing. They carried the sound of more than 500 participants from eight different communities who gathered for a community solidarity event organized by Search with the support of the municipality of Ouahigouya. The event was a beacon of hope in a conflict-torn region and showcased the significant role that women can play in peacebuilding.
The event brought together more than 300 women from different communities, demonstrating their commitment to peace and their willingness to take an active role in contributing to more cohesive and just societies. As primary caregivers in many communities, women are uniquely positioned to shape attitudes toward peace and conflict. Their access to networks and relationships that men do not have makes them effective bridge-builders and dialogue facilitators between communities in conflict. Moreover, women are often the most affected by violent conflict, making them more invested in finding solutions to end it.

The women of Ouahigouya have shown that they are not only victims of violent conflict but, above all, agents and leaders of change. They have taken the lead in promoting peaceful coexistence through art and culture, highlighting the importance of creating opportunities to build bridges across differences and to imagine a new, inclusive, and peaceful future. Fati-Bintou, a participant, echoed the sentiment of many women present, emphasizing their shared commitment to building community resilience and promoting peaceful coexistence. “We believe that unity brings strength, and we aim to work together to set an example of cohesion for future generations who must also strive for peace and harmony,” she said.

The event in Ouahigouya highlighted the crucial role of women in peacebuilding efforts. It is essential to recognize their unique position and empower them to lead the way to peaceful coexistence within communities. Initiatives that challenge gender stereotypes and empower women through training and education in conflict transformation and peacebuilding, as well as leadership and advocacy skills, are critical. Providing women access to resources, such as funding and information, can further support their participation in peacebuilding efforts. In addition, involving men and community leaders in the process can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women’s engagement in peacebuilding efforts.

With generous funding from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany and Denmark, through the PATRIP Foundation and the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), the women of Ouahigouya have worked to promote social cohesion for a more inclusive and just society. Together with men, they have also shown that hope, unity, and collaboration can be achieved in the most difficult times. Let us continue to learn from their example and give them the space and resources they need to pave the way for more equitable societies.
Hamsatou Ousmane - A Widow, A Leader, A Change Maker

Hamsatou Ousmane is a name that resonates with hope and inspiration in the women's group “Kautal Koyé” of Mainé Soroa. She is a 43-year-old widow, a mother of six, and the group’s president. Hamsatou’s story is one of resilience and determination of a woman who has overcome immense challenges to emerge as a leader and a catalyst of change.

Originally from Niger, Hamsatou was married to a man from Damasak in Nigeria, where she ran a small business processing paddy rice into flour and sold spices. However, her life took a tragic turn when her husband died in the 2012 cholera epidemic. Left to fend for herself and her four children, Hamsatou persisted in managing her business. But in 2013, the sudden attack on Damasak by Non-State Armed Groups forced her to flee with her family.

Back in Niger, Hamsatou found solace and a new purpose by joining the “Kallo Karayé” Project initiated by Search for Common Ground (Search) and funded by the United Nations.
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High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Project created women’s groups composed of returned, refugee, and host community women to bring them together to strengthen social cohesion and promote the protection and social integration of IDPs, refugees, and returnees. Hamsatou became the president of her group in Mainé Soroa and received training in associative life, women’s leadership, and the Common Ground Approach. She made great use of this training, surpassing the group’s objectives and enabling the financial empowerment of many women in the group.

“I often wonder how different my life would be if I hadn’t been involved in this project,” says Hamsatou. “I might have had to beg to feed my four children. But today, not only am I supporting them, but I have also taken in two more children from my deceased sister. All six children are now in school, and my income allows me to cover their education and health costs. I am deeply grateful to Search for these skills that have given me hope that my children can dream and succeed like their peers.”

Under Hamsatou’s leadership, the Kautal Koyé women’s group engaged in Income Generating Activities (IGAs). They processed peanuts, extracted oil, and sold their by-products. The group also set up a “tontine” system, making weekly financial contributions that allowed them to self-finance and financially support individual economic initiatives. They also set up a solidarity fund to help other members experiencing financial difficulties. Furthermore, the profits generated by collective IGAs were converted into equipment or fattened livestock.

Today, the Kautal Koyé women’s group has a sum of 200,000 Naira (about $325) in its fund, along with two bags of peanuts, two bags of millet, and four sheep. They continue to fatten these animals to sell them, approaching the Tabaski festival. Hamsatou is now proud of her status and the knowledge she has gained thanks to the Project. She teaches other women in her community how to process peanuts and hopes to continue being an agent of change in her community while supporting the socio-economic development of women in Mainé Soroa.

Hamsatou’s journey is a powerful reminder that even in the face of immense challenges, one person can make a difference. Her story is an inspiration to all those who believe in the transformative power of women’s empowerment. By investing in women like Hamsatou, we not only promote gender equality but also contribute to the socio-economic development of communities. As we celebrate Hamsatou’s achievements, let us remember that countless other women like her are waiting for the opportunity to unleash their full potential. Let us work together to ensure their voices are heard, their dreams are realized, and their resilience is celebrated.