



Search for  
Common Ground

AISBL

# GLOBAL IMPACT REPORT 2024

*44 million voices  
for peace*



**HOW TO CITE THIS REPORT:**  
Dembélé, Limou and Abdalrahman, Samah,  
2025. "2024 Global Impact Report: 44 Million  
Voices for Peace". Search for Common  
Ground, 2025. [[https://www.sfcg.org/annual-  
impact-report/](https://www.sfcg.org/annual-impact-report/)] Search for Common Ground.



<b>The Urgency of Peace: A World at a Crossroads</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>Understanding Our Impact: How To Read This Report</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>Our Strategy: Locally Rooted, Globally Connected</b>	<b>09</b>
How a changing world shifts Search's perspective	09
Search's response: from local to transnational drivers of conflicts	09
<b>The Future of Peacebuilding</b>	<b>09</b>
Search in 2024: A Review of Programs	
Connecting community leaders to institutions remained at the core of strategies	10
Summary of top observations	11
<b>Diving into Search's impact in 2024</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Who did we work with in 2025?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Global Trends</b>	<b>13</b>
Violence	14
Agency	15
Legitimacy	17
Polarization	19
Investments	20
<b>Case studies</b>	<b>22</b>
Case 1: Common Ground USA	22
Case 2: Sri Lanka - Youth Act Project	24
Case 3: Mali	26
Case 4: Sudan & Peace Talks	28
Case 5: Women's Leadership in Pakistan	30
<b>Meeting the Moment in Europe</b>	<b>32</b>

In a world grappling with escalating conflict and division,

# Search for Common Ground is demonstrating the power of community-led peacebuilding.

In 2024, Search initiatives reached 44 million people, providing essential resources and fostering dialogue across divides. This report highlights key achievements, lessons learned, and the urgent need for continued investment in peace.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible by the frontline peacebuilders who build peace every day across the globe, including Search staff, partners, and stakeholders. The evaluation was produced by the Strategy Team of Search for Common Ground. Lead authors Limou Dembele and Samah Abdalrahman coordinated across all of Search's teams, and led the case studies highlighted in the report. Special acknowledgment goes to the Mali, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and USA teams for their engagement throughout the process.

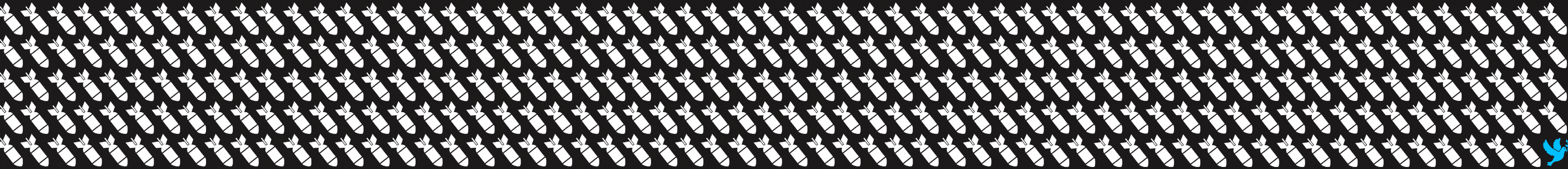




THE COST OF WAR:

\$2.4 Trillion Invested in War and Militarized Approaches

2.3% of global GDP



SEARCH'S INVESTMENT

\$70 Million Invested in Peace

.003% of what we spend on war

RESULTS:

Almost 13% of the world's GDP: countries with the most conflict have had consistent deterioration of their economies over ten years.<sup>1</sup>

213,203 conflict-related deaths and 1 in 8 people worldwide are exposed to violent conflict.

80 million people remain displaced due to conflict or natural disasters.

RESULTS:

900+ staff and 838 organizations working in partnership with...

181,000+ leaders and community members building agency with...

44 million+ people to create the future they want to see.

Up to \$138 in social return on investment per \$1 invested.

Up to 62% reduction in people feeling violence is necessary for them to protect their interests.

26 million people facing food insecurity and famine access.

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Economics & Peace. Economic Value of Peace 2021: Measuring the global economic impact of violence and conflict, Sydney, January 2021. Available from: <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources>.



= 100 USD INVESTED IN WAR



= 1 USD INVESTED IN SEARCH AND PARTNERS



# The Urgency of Peace: A World at a Crossroads

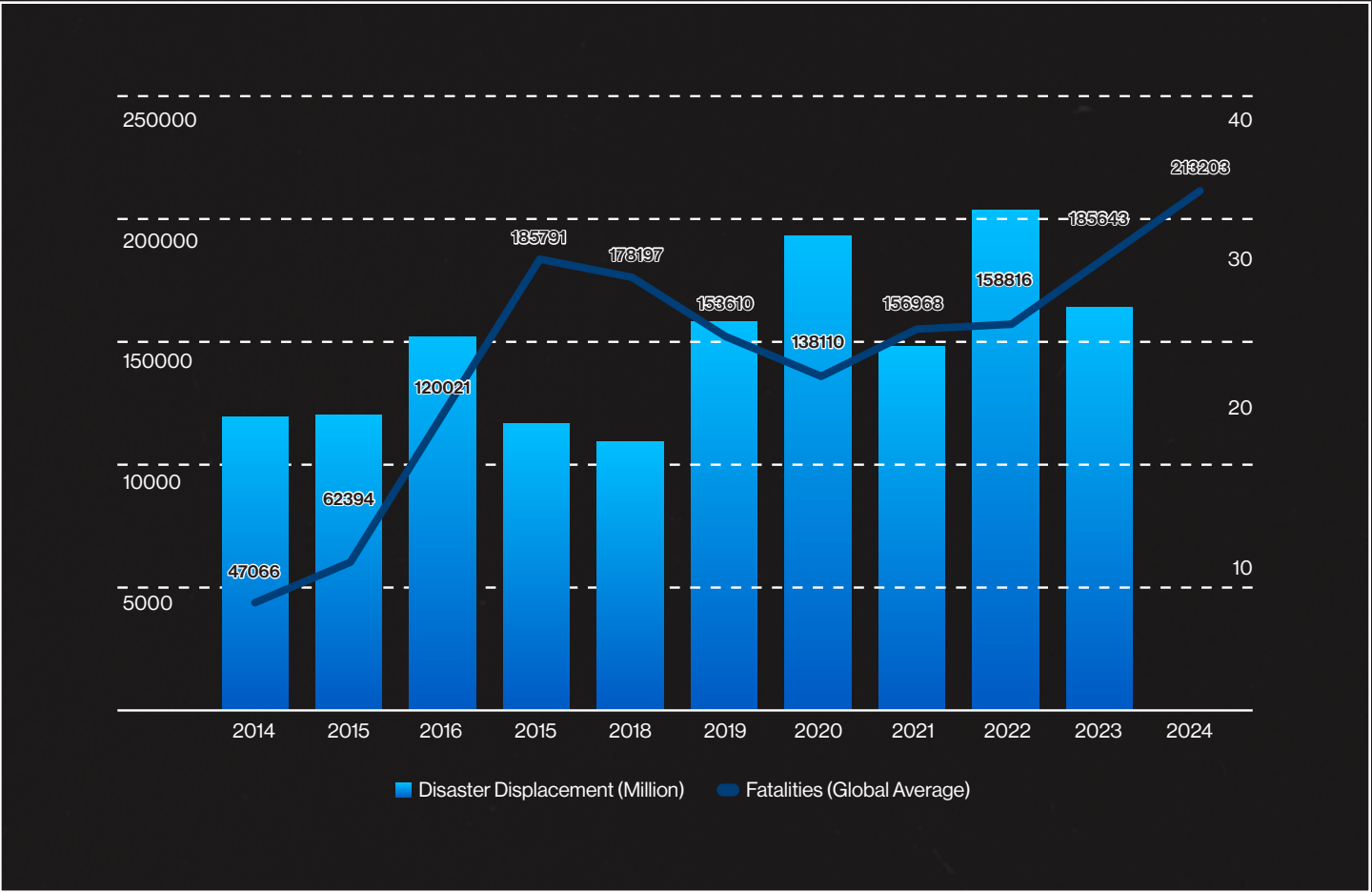
2024 was a year of unprecedented challenges. Rising polarization, increased violence, and diminishing agency left communities around the world struggling to cope. Conflict events increased by more than 25%,<sup>2</sup> with one in eight people worldwide exposed to violence.<sup>3</sup> Traditional approaches are not enough. We need innovative solutions that address the root causes of conflict and empower communities to build lasting peace.

This year saw more elections and leadership changes than any other year. Still, trust in business, government, media, and non-governmental organizations stayed stable,<sup>4</sup> indicating that elections alone do not drive people's confidence in their systems. At the same time, nearly 40% of people surveyed in 2024 approve of hostile activism like online attacks, spreading disinformation, violence and property damage (and 53% of youth between 18 - 34 years old).<sup>5</sup> These trends show deep societal polarization, which is associated with widespread grievances and drives mistrust. The Global Peace Index (GPI) 2024 highlights a 0.56% deterioration in

peace, with Gaza and Ukraine as the primary drivers of that decline.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, 80 million people remain displaced due to conflict or natural disasters, and the flow of displacements remains challenging as rates have consistently increased over the past decade. Fatalities have surged more than fourfold from 47,066 people in 2014 to 213,203 in 2024 - the devastating toll of intensifying violence.

Military expenditure has shown alarming interconnections with displacement and conflict-related fatalities, each amplifying the other. It reached a record \$2.443 trillion in 2023, marking a 6.8% real-term increase and the ninth consecutive year of growth. Spending rose across all regions for the first time since 2009 - 2.3% of global GDP.<sup>7</sup>

The urgency of peace has never been more apparent. Amid escalating conflicts, deepening polarization, and diminishing agency, peace is not just an aspiration but the foundation for global stability and sustainable development.



<sup>2</sup> ACLED, "Conflict Watchlist 2025," (2024, Year). <sup>3</sup> ACLED, "Conflict Index: December 2024," 2024. <sup>4</sup> Measured in 28 countries by "Edelman Trust Barometer", 2025. <sup>5</sup> Ibid. <sup>6</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, "Global Peace Index 2024," June 2024. <sup>7</sup> Tian, Nan, Diego Lopes da Silva, Xiao Liang, and Lorenzo Scarazzato. "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2023." SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2024.

**Fatalities have surged more than fourfold from 47,066 people in 2014 to 213,203 in 2024 — the devastating toll of intensifying violence.**





# Understanding Our Impact:

## How To Read This Report

This report is more than just numbers; it's a story of transformation. To truly understand the impact of the work peacebuilders do, Search is using the Peace Impact Framework to analyze how conflicts are changing in the multifacted ways that people experience them. The framework does not only focus on direct violence, but also measures the often-overlooked signs of peace that are essential for creating lasting change:

### VIOLENCE:

Are we reducing physical and direct violence?

### AGENCY:

Are we enabling individuals to take action in their communities?

### POLARIZATION:

Are we building trust across divided people?

### LEGITIMACY:

Are we shaping institutions to build trust with people they serve?

### INVESTMENTS:

Are we mobilizing resources for peace?



## The data used in the report draws from three types of information:

### LIVED EXPERIENCES:

perspectives of people directly affected by conflict.

### ALIGNED MEASURES:

a set of indicators aligned with global standards.

### EXPERT OBSERVATIONS:

insights from frontline peacebuilders.

This report includes data sampled across 164 projects in 37 countries in 2024. You will find quantitative data, insights, and case studies that demonstrate the process and impact of Search's investments. By understanding our impact, we can work together to create a more peaceful world.



# Our Strategy:

## Locally Rooted, Globally Connected

### How a changing world shifts Search's perspective

While Search's programming converges into one goal - that people can live in safe, healthy, and just societies - our understanding of the global forces that shape our strategy has shifted in line with recent trends. Our focus has moved from exploring what works or what opportunities exist to focusing on the perils preventing people from living in safe, healthy, just societies. We have adapted our focus from international systems and institutions to global and regional competitions that escalate national conflicts and drive military expenditure. While the COVID crisis has ended, concerns over trust in institutions and disinformation have grown, and we are seeing demographic shifts that come with forced migration and refugee crises. These evolutions have fundamentally changed how we approach impacting the most consequential conflicts.

### Search's response: from local to transnational drivers of conflicts

Search for Common Ground has reinforced its commitment to creating safe, healthy, and just societies. The strategy is based on the belief that peace is possible, even in the most challenging environments. To adapt to the challenges teams at Search have increasingly faced, Search leaned in on its strategic position as a locally rooted, globally connected organization. This means:

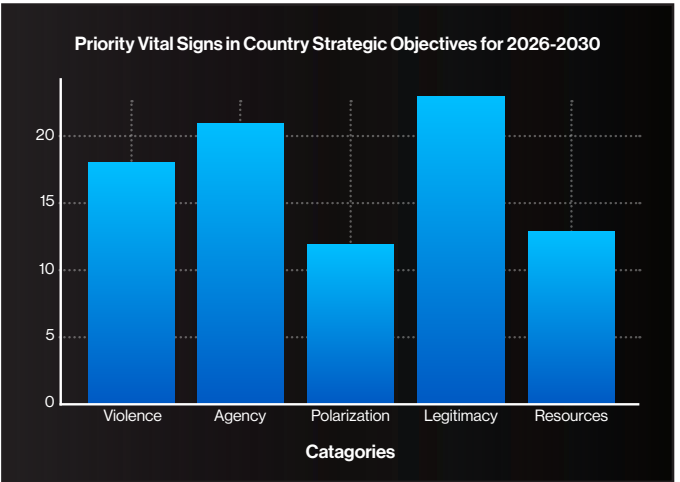
- **Recognizing transnational drivers:** All country program strategies now explicitly highlight regional or international power dynamics as conflict drivers.
- **Engaging leaders operating locally, amplifying their global impact:** Search invested in local communities to lead peacebuilding efforts and brought new people to this space. At the same time, teams have connected these actors to global networks, amplifying their influence and driving systemic change.

- **Remaining Multipartial:** Search works with everyone who has a stake in the conflict, regardless of their background or beliefs. By removing barriers to engagement, they have created space for dialogue and meaningful collaboration.

This evolved approach has helped Search maintain relevance and continue to pinpoint what - beyond treating symptoms - will cure a rising epidemic in violent conflict.

### The future of peacebuilding

In 2025, Search for Common Ground committed to deepening its impact and expanding its reach. This impact report serves as a foundation for Search's next five-year strategy to be set this year, examining the most effective applications of the Common Ground Approach and where more investment may still be needed. In 2024, teams focused their strategic objectives for the years ahead most often on transforming legitimacy of institutions, agency of people, and experiences with direct violence.



To address conflict holistically, teams focus most commonly on the following key issues: youth marginalization, shrinking civic space, resource scarcity, fragmentation and polarization, and geopolitical rivalries and external influences.



# Search in 2024:

## A Review of Programs



In 2024, Search deepened its commitment to measuring the real-world impact of its work. Thirty-one country programs used the Peace Impact Framework to track progress, informing the global strategy review for 2025. Before diving into the results, it is important to understand how they achieved impact. The Common Ground Approach (CGA) defines the way peace practitioners and community members can transform conflict with a set of powerful principles and tools to support. All programs maintain a commitment to connecting people across divides, supporting multipartial collaboration, and finding non-adversarial solutions to conflict. However, what they do to achieve these results varies greatly across contexts.

### Engaging community leaders through multipartiality was a major focus of 2025

Multipartiality, or engaging all sides of a conflict, is integral to Search’s peacebuilding efforts. This includes expanding programs that safeguard freedom of religion or belief, fostering inclusive dialogue to bridge divides, and leverage international advocacy to bolster local peace initiatives. This work was shown to strengthen peacebuilders’ agency and reduced hatred and negative perceptions that harm communities’ social cohesion.

### [Religious freedom and engagement expanded](#)

In 2024, programming on the freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) expanded, signifying the growing importance of religion as a pillar of multipartiality. The data confirmed that engagement with religious actors using the Common Ground Approach effectively influenced peace leadership at both grassroots and institutional levels.

### [Mental health and psycho-social support expanded](#)

Teams strengthened mediation work at the community level by providing capacity strengthening and mentorship for a wide range of “insider mediators” who resolve conflicts from within their own communities. This work included mental health and psycho-social support components to build resilient and sustainable peace leadership.

### [Global influence of grassroots actors broadened the scop of local peacebuilding](#)

In active conflicts, Search amplified a grassroots approach by mobilizing small numbers of influential people to reach beyond national decision-makers to a broader set of international actors. International advocacy was crucial for creating conditions where local peace initiatives could survive. Strategic international engagement allowed for a new way to imagine local participation in building peace.

### Connecting community leaders to institutions remained at the core of strategies

Many of Search’s programs in 2024 fostered greater legitimacy between institutions and their people through inclusive dialogue, non-adversarial advocacy, and operationalizing local conflict resolution structures and mechanisms.

### [Formal networks strengthened youth and women-led peacebuilding](#)

Last year many teams intensified strategies to reinforce the capabilities of the youth, women, local

leaders, and civil society organizations (CSOs). They brought together diverse stakeholders to take collective action for peace and security to enhance their voice.

### [Advocacy through formal channels continued to be a priority](#)

Particularly in non-active conflict settings, teams chose non-adversarial approaches to advocacy to develop common goals between members of crucial institutions and civil society actors, such as: religious freedom, minority rights, and equal access to resources.

### [Support to structures directly addressing violence continued](#)

Specific conflict resolution structures proved beneficial in tackling violence and security concerns. Many local and community-level initiatives focused on violence prevention or reduction and Search supported the creation of mechanisms that could be used systematically to support this effort.

### Traditional and digital media engagement has changed

Search’s influencing efforts are evolving to leverage digital peacebuilding and media channels to create multi-sector partnerships that establish safer environments both online and offline.

### [Digital peacebuilding and media programming used for awareness-raising](#)

Several teams invested in targeted campaigns to raise awareness around critical social issues, including protection initiatives in marginalized communities, women’s rights programs in conflict-affected regions, anti-political violence messaging, and interventions addressing social exclusion in divided communities. These media and digital programs tend to focus on awareness-raising and have shifted away from deeper normative shifts that made up much of Search’s media work in years’ prior.

### [Multi-sector partnerships creating safer environments](#)

Several projects targeting technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) in Asia and East Africa demonstrated a commitment to multi-sector collaboration. These initiatives engaged diverse stakeholders, including regional NGOs providing front-line support services, government agencies responsible for digital safety policies, private technology companies implementing platform safeguards, and media organizations promoting digital literacy. These actors collaborated on fact-checking, monitoring, information-sharing, and the development of referral systems to handle cases.

### Provision of humanitarian assistance to strengthen social cohesion

This year, a new area of growth for Search emerged, influenced by Search’s previous merger in 2023 with Preemptive Love Coalition: enhanced capacity to respond to acute humanitarian needs. Search’s efforts supported people through rapid response and relief initiatives across Latin America, East Africa and the Middle East, getting support to people and community leaders who needed it most when they needed it most.<sup>8</sup>

### Summary of top observations

1. Individual and collective agency emerged as the primary focus in conflict transformation processes across all contexts.
2. Advocacy led by youth and women achieved significant success when teams employed a combination of approaches to explore and influence conflict dynamics, convene opposing parties, and shift power to under-represented groups.
3. To break the cycle of violence in active conflict zones, it is essential to invest at the grassroots level and work on restoring the legitimacy of institutions that serve the community.
4. Media programming remained important, but recent programs have resulted in a decreased emphasis on addressing polarization, especially in active conflict situations.

<sup>8</sup> Examples include: a food distribution initiative in an IDP camp in Juba, South Sudan, where they reached 100 households (800 to 900 people); 2) 8,520 hot meals delivered to 52 children in a vulnerable community located in Zulia State, Venezuela through a Mobile Canteen; 3) 200 hygiene kits distributed in Chihuahua, Mexico, water assistance to 48 migrants in El Paso, and food assistance to 1,742 people in Chiapas and Chihuahua; and 4) School supplies to 356 children in Juarez, Chihuahua.



# DIVING INTO SEARCH'S IMPACT IN 2024

Search operates in 37 countries to foster safe, healthy, and just societies, adapting its approach based on conflict intensity and context. To showcase key achievements and impacts, we highlight results in acute conflict environments,<sup>9</sup> allowing us to discern Search's contributions and effectiveness in various contexts with available resources. This analysis utilizes the Peace Impact Framework and relies on a mix of standard indicators and qualitative observations from practitioners and affected communities.

## ALL SEARCH COUNTRIES

**37** countries, of which 25 are in Active Conflict

**60%** of global fatalities in 2024

**80%** of global IDPs in mid-2024

<sup>9</sup> These countries were identified by assessing rates of death, displacement and refugee migration, and any major crisis events such as a political coup d'état, act of war, etc. These countries are often experiencing significant levels of humanitarian crisis.

# WHO DID SEARCH WORK WITH IN 2024?

**164**

active projects during 2024.

## SEARCH SUPPORTED:

**181,444 people** in 2024 (approx. 9 men for every 10 women), **838 civil society organizations** working in conflict-affected areas, and provided **140 subgrants**

That community engaged **41,001,507 people** across radio, television, social media and other outreach.

## Global Trends

### ALIGNED MEASURES

#### VIOLENCE

% of people that feel safe walking alone around the area they live. \*not measured in acute conflict settings.

**56%**

**58%**

**3%**

#### AGENCY

% of participants that believe they can make a positive difference in their community.

**48%**

**77%**

**61%**

#### LEGITIMACY

% of participants who are satisfied with services they seek from authorities. \*not measured in acute conflict settings.

**65%**

**100%**

**54%**

#### POLARIZATION

% of the population who believe it is acceptable to use violence to protect their interests

**21%**

**13%**

**38%**

This data illustrates the progress of key Peace Impact Framework (PIF) measures monitored in Search's intervention countries in 2024. Agency was measured most consistently across programs, reflecting an investment in empowering individuals to engage directly with conflict. While agency was the most common measure, the programs themselves did not focus on agency alone, and often had outcomes related to other aspects of peace, even though they were not originally measured in a project. For example, the ripple effect of agency to other vital signs like polarization was evident in several programs. Populations affected by Search programs targeting polarization were 62% less likely to believe that violence was necessary to achieve their goals.



Most teams did not assess their impact on violence at the population level during active conflict, as the design and resources of most programs are geared toward targeted impacts. Overall, the data highlights the effectiveness of approaches, but underscores the need for additional data to better understand Search's role and impact on larger conflict dynamics.

VIOLENCE

For the purposes of this report, the violence category in the Peace Impact Framework refers to direct or physical violence. Five countries measured a PIF violence indicator this year. Teams focused on people's perception of their own safety, and data showed just over 3% increase in the population feeling safe walking alone around the area they live (between 56 and 58%).<sup>10</sup> Other outcome results were captured from four countries experiencing acute conflict.<sup>11</sup> Many teams had programmatic approaches that addressed violence without measuring impact on violence reduction directly. Security and logistical challenges<sup>12</sup> in active conflict zones hindered project implementation, including restricted access, flight cancellations, and natural hazards. These disruptions, along with risks to personnel, complicated efforts to engage local authorities and ensure cooperation for resource rehabilitation, which is essential for strengthening peacebuilding initiatives in unstable settings.<sup>13</sup>

Community engagement drove conflict resolution and violence reduction: a proof of collective agency and collaboration across dividing lines

Community engagement contributed to conflict response, and in some cases these successes led to breaking the cycle of violence, restoring security and the provision of basic needs for community members. In these cases, the agency of local actors and peacebuilders was key to stopping or preventing violence.<sup>14</sup> When community members, local peacebuilders, and security actors worked together to reduce crime and prevent the infiltration of armed groups, community members were more likely to join these initiatives and help maintain social cohesion in fragile and interconnected communities.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, active collaboration between groups involved in physical violence was noted as a trend predicting the end of violence.<sup>16</sup>

Investing in local mediation was crucial for establishing legitimacy in efforts to reduce violence

We observed similar successes in communities where local mediators were actively engaged. Investing in Insider Mediators to proactively address intercommunal conflicts built trust and recognition among community members. In some areas, this created a sense of safety that allowed residents to resume their economic activities.<sup>17</sup> This approach to tackling violence and insecurity also attracted support from other actors, both national and international, which helped communities enhance their resilience. The trust established between community members and institutions also proved to be a marker of successful outcomes in violence reduction. Notable achievements included the commitment of state actors to support community efforts to address security challenges.<sup>18</sup>

Context sensitivity widens our perspectives to addressing violence across settings

In addition to supporting community dialogues to stop violence and address security issues across neighbouring locations.<sup>19</sup> Search's approach to conflict sensitivity to orient humanitarian assistance in active conflict settings helped prevent the escalation of communal violence and conflicts between host communities and IDPs.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, community-developed indicators for peace revealed the complex, multifaceted nature of monitoring violence. As an example, in Sri Lanka where violence indicators were co-defined with community members, the number of religious conflicts (including targeting place or worships), as well as conflict around social and environmental issues were signs that needed to be looked at to observe a reduction of violence.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Data from Chad, Zimbabwe, Myanmar, Mozambique, South Sudan. <sup>11</sup> DRC, Niger, Sudan, South Sudan. <sup>12</sup> Security risks, theft of materials, and lack of coordination among stakeholders are severely affecting project progress. <sup>13</sup> One example is the context in Northern Mali, where tensions over illegal water connections in Ménaka and Gao were straining water distribution systems. <sup>14</sup> Case DRC, Sudan, South Sudan. <sup>15</sup> The security situation in Gabi and Guidan Sori has improved thanks to a number of measures. Cases found in Niger, DRC, South Sudan. <sup>16</sup> Example: Mediation case farmer/herders, involving ethnic minorities in Niger, inter-ethnic collaborations in various communities vulnerable to violent attacks in DRC. <sup>17</sup> Case study. Intercommunal conflict between Peulhs and Boudouma in N'Guigmi/Successful Resolution: The mediation effectively resolved a tense conflict, with both communities praising the process. Economic activities and income increased, with traders able to stay open late without fear. Community Initiative: The mediation inspired the communities to take ownership by organizing a follow-up meeting and creating a peace agreement, ensuring long-term peace and accountability with merchants reporting being able to maintain their activities late at night without fear. <sup>18</sup> Programming in East and in DRC - CGA training accessible by police officers led to increased feeling of safety among the population. <sup>19</sup> DRC. The Banyamulenges feel safe travelling between Mikenge, Itombe and Uvira, thanks to the absence of clashes since a retreat in November 2023. This situation has improved peaceful cohabitation between different communities, notably the Banyamulenges, Balifuru and Babembe. The road is used for family visits and trade, particularly with the Bashis. <sup>20</sup> Chad, South Sudan In Bentiü, mediators and conflict monitors de-escalated water-related tensions.

Investing in People to Reduce Violence:

How Does It Work?

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), rising tensions between the FARDC and the armed group in Twirwaneo affected the livelihoods and security of the community. The team focused on supporting local leaders and communities to resolve immediate conflicts by helping them set up ad hoc committees that brought together FARDC and other local actors to jointly address criminal issues and improve security in the area. That investment in local leaders required building credible relationships with both groups, protecting people who came forward, and providing follow-up support. This was not an isolated case: similar results were observed in at least three other countries this year, where increased agency, mediation, and community action led to tangible solutions that improved the livelihoods of communities directly affected by violence.

<sup>21</sup> Examples coming from community developed indicator: "In the area where I live, the number of mosque attacks has increased in the last few years." In my community, number of riots based on rumours and hearsay has increased in the last year. The number of protests against local authorities has increased in the last year. GAM:I have witnessed higher number of conflicts due to environmental issues such as garbage dumping in the last few years.



AGENCY

In 2024, 22 countries committed to measuring agency in their programs.<sup>22</sup> With local organisations and peacebuilders to promote their ownership of solution-oriented initiatives to respond to conflicts and broader issues affecting social cohesion. This mobilization of key resource individuals and entities aimed to incentivize collective efforts by strengthening networks and making them inclusive and accessible for the most marginalized groups, whose feelings of powerlessness can increase during conflicts.

Key results were achieved through direct coaching and collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs), women and youth-led groups, community and religious leaders, state actors, and Track II members to advance peace and reconciliation. We observed an 80% increase in the agency of individuals in active conflict settings.<sup>23</sup> In other countries teams engaged similar groups, as well as private sector and technical experts, leading to a 60% increase in agency.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> 15 countries are acute conflict settings. <sup>23</sup> Data coming from participant data in active conflicts in Burundi, CAR, Iraq, Lebanon, Niger, South Sudan, Syria and more. <sup>24</sup> Data coming from participant data in Jordan, Kenya and the United States.



How context shapes agency for positive peace outcomes

Across all interventions, more participants believed they could make a positive difference in their communities.<sup>25</sup> However, in acute conflict settings there was a 42% decrease in action on critical issues, compared to a smaller 15% decline in non-active conflict settings. Context is key, as violence in active conflict zones disrupts social engagement and collaborative efforts. In countries like Iraq, Mali, and Nigeria, violent extremism and inter-community tensions hinder outcomes. Overall, investing in peace leadership skills has led to greater opportunities for large-scale collaboration on social cohesion and violence prevention, although our approaches remain consistent across settings.

Co-activating agency and legitimacy led to the greatest impact by fostering collective ownership of peace mechanisms

The achievements of 2024 were driven by the use of the Common Ground Approach (CGA) to empower leaders and community members in promoting inclusive governance, combating online violence, advocating for minority rights, and fostering peace. Search engaged a diverse range of stakeholders, including activists, journalists, community leaders, civil society organizations (CSOs), law enforcement, private sector representatives, tech companies, and human rights defenders. Collaborating with CSOs has proven effective to build agency and trust in peacebuilding processes. By supporting their internal governance, management systems and capacity to address issues such as social exclusion, discrimination and access to justice, CSOs are better equipped to serve vulnerable communities.

In active conflict settings, promoting community ownership of peacebuilding not only reduced conflict but also fostered solidarity to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of those involved, essential for achieving lasting peace.<sup>26</sup> Enhancing local competencies in identifying and monitoring micro-conflict dynamics resulted in more frequent successful mediation of tensions related to ethnicity, gender, and access to resources.<sup>27</sup>

Investing in non-adversarial advocacy empowered leaders to take actions that strengthened social cohesion, reduced tensions, and built resilience while

addressing the needs of marginalized groups and restoring access to critical resources. This approach helped stabilize communities and prevent further exclusion and conflict.<sup>28</sup> Through multi-sectoral peacebuilding, youth groups and community leaders have established a multi-generational network to seek solutions for maintaining peaceful, multicultural societies, with some initiatives extending beyond geographic boundaries.<sup>29</sup>

This approach not only reflects legitimacy but also nurtured community leadership by creating opportunities for trust and collaboration with institutions. However, in non-active conflict settings, involving state actors at local and national levels in contexts marked by mistrust can worsen power imbalances and hinder participation and dialogue.<sup>30</sup> It is vital to consider intersectionality and its effects on the sense of agency for excluded and marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities, women, and youth. The leadership skills fostered by the CGA promote inclusion and effective participation. Furthermore, Search has integrated safeguarding and feedback mechanisms throughout its interventions to enhance accountability and responsiveness.

Peace leadership gained credibility and scale through media- based interventions

Investing in youth-led media programming has enhanced leadership roles in fostering social cohesion and promoting prosocial behaviors. This initiative not only sparked entrepreneurship and peace dialogues but also improved relationships within communities. The media programming positively influenced leadership and intergenerational trust, contributing to stronger social cohesion.<sup>31</sup>

In war contexts, enabling community engagement in peace and security has been crucial for fostering agency. Media engagement and awareness-raising efforts amplified the voices of affected populations, strengthening local solutions, particularly those led by women and youth. These initiatives empowered community leaders to create pathways for dialogue and peace across divides.<sup>32</sup> However, navigating complex political environments in highly mediated international conflicts presents challenges, such as unequal resources for advocacy, varying opportunities to enhance agency and legitimacy, and obstacles to cross-border collaboration due to movement restrictions. Power imbalances must be managed carefully to prevent mistrust, exclusion,

and conflicting goals among partners.

Media campaigns can either exacerbate or mitigate polarization in politically sensitive contexts, often placing peacebuilding actors and leaders under strain due to limited capacities. These challenges highlight the difficulties that local CSOs face in addressing intersectionality and promoting CGA leadership in active, politically sensitive war zones, emphasizing the need for coordinated, context-sensitive communication strategies.<sup>33</sup>

In non-active conflict countries, we have noted progress in addressing cyber sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and improving responses to online violence. This success reflects the growing capacity among communities and actors to tackle technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) and other forms of online violence, which can contribute to social unrest. Strengthening response systems is vital to prevent conflict escalation and support affected individuals.<sup>34</sup>

LEGITIMACY

Based on data from 11 countries, analysis on institutional legitimacy highlights three key areas of impact: inclusive decision-making, mediation, and the recognition of women in leadership roles. The data revealed a decline in the perception of inclusive and responsive decision-making among participants, dropping from 42% to 32.8%. This decline is particularly influenced by participants' perceptions in one intervention supporting freedom of religion or belief in Kenya, Nigeria, and Mali. Conversely, when examining another indicator to gauge satisfaction with provided services by institutions, there was a significant increase from 65% to 100% among participants.

Strengthening legitimacy through inclusive decision-making

Institutional legitimacy strengthens when governance structures actively include diverse voices, ensuring that policies and decisions address the needs of all community members. Interventions fostering legitimacy focus first on inclusive decision-making by facilitating direct engagement among local authorities, communities, women, youth, and marginalized groups.

One key achievement that exemplifies this process

is the co-creation of governance solutions through participatory consultations. In Sri Lanka, women-led governance clubs provided platforms for women to voice community concerns and influence policies on gender equality, domestic violence, and economic inclusion. In another case, community consultations directly shaped local responses to women's safety concerns, ensuring that authorities recognize and address issues like cyber harassment. However, maintaining inclusive decision-making requires more than local participation; it demands advocacy that bridges grassroots concerns with policy changes, ensures accountability, and dismantles systemic barriers. In Sudan and Palestine, advocacy efforts integrated women's concerns into national agendas, enhancing their role in governance. In Kenya and Nigeria, strategic advocacy efforts were able to counter disinformation that put interfaith collaboration at risk. By strengthening inclusive decision-making at both local and policy levels, we fostered governance systems that are more legitimate, accountable, and truly representative, empowering marginalized voices to shape their own futures.

<sup>25</sup> This includes direct participants. Population data is included in the figure but not worth mentioning given the limited number of projects referenced this indicator. <sup>26</sup> Putting this here, in case useful: The interfaith network of trained religious actors in Doruwa Babuje community (Bokkos LGA, Plateau State) has initiated a farming project to support the less privileged and vulnerable in the community. The harvested crops are shared with the needy. This initiative strengthens community ties by promoting solidarity, regardless of religious differences. <sup>27</sup> EWR and HRSM, Niger, South Sudan, CAR. Peace committees: DRC, Tanzania, Insider Mediators. <sup>28</sup> The Kaya community regaining access to the forest for worship and livelihood activities exemplifies how communities can overcome barriers and reclaim agency in non-active conflict zones (see log). Add advanced tolerance and religious inclusivity Add Indonesia YLIC advocacy training Youth Training on Conflict Resolution, engaging human rights defenders, training to Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). / add PVE results in Kenya, Tanzania/ add SL confrontational debates to constructive collaboration between different community groups, such as the Sinhala and Tamil communities in Sri Lanka, is an achievement that significantly reduces potential flashpoints for conflict. Also the Youth Act Project (case study). <sup>29</sup> Example from Kyrgyzstan - also involving the Uyghur diaspora. Track II initiative is the creation of a multi-generational network of leaders and analysts from Central Asia, which enhances conflict analysis, policymaking, and regional cooperation. This network, consisting of policy analysts, NGOs, media, and government advisors, addresses common security challenges collaboratively. The initiative also successfully integrated emergent experts/ also add Kenya - advanced tolerance and religious inclusivity. <sup>30</sup> Example from Sri Lanka in Monaragala. <sup>31</sup> Based on internal documentation and donor engagement materials related to a youth-focused regional initiative discussed with the Bezos Family Foundation in early 2022. The initiative builds on a previous phase of youth-led peacebuilding work and includes cross-border connections, youth-led advocacy, and targeted support for marginalized youth. <sup>32</sup> Examples from Palestine, Israel and Sudan. <sup>33</sup> Divergent Capacities: Israeli women have made strides in policy and grassroots action due to their stronger networks and advocacy skills. In contrast, Palestinian women, constrained by the occupation and limited access, focus more on local community engagement and find cross-border collaboration challenging. KFF001 USA San Antonio, Philadelphia Challenges in Faith Leader Cooperation: It has become harder to bring Jewish and Muslim leaders together due to being stretched thin, with potential controversies surrounding cooperation and representation. Movement Restrictions: Severe travel and movement restrictions, particularly from Gaza, severely limit Palestinian women's ability to participate in joint initiatives or travel for advocacy efforts. <sup>34</sup> Based on internal program documentation for an initiative focused on enhancing digital safety and reducing technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) in East Africa. The project engages civil society, service providers, and legal and tech professionals to strengthen cross-sectoral responses to TFGBV and foster safer, more inclusive online spaces for women and sexual and gender minorities.



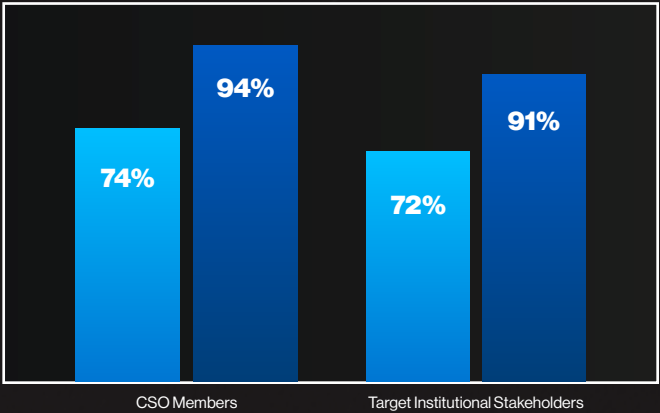


## Advancing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) & Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agendas

In 2024, Search's commitment to **inclusive peace and security** was reinforced through strategic investments in WPS and YPS agendas. Through targeted strategic **capacity-building programs**, over 150 CSOs members and Institutional stakeholders were trained on UNSCR 1325 & 2250, leading to tangible outcomes such as policy advocacy with local authorities, increased participation in decision-making, and cross-sectoral peacebuilding collaborations. In **Iraq**, these groups played a key role in post-conflict governance by advocating for inclusive policies. In **Lebanon** and other countries, local mediation initiatives amplified their roles in conflict resolution and national dialogues. Digital advocacy has also been shown to support women and youth to engage in peacebuilding despite security constraints.

## The Impact

Participation in peace and security initiatives among CSOs members rose from 74% to 94%, and 91% of target institutional stakeholders plan to make investments in strengthening women and youth participation in peace and security, up from 72%.



## Mediation as a Pathway to Institutional Legitimacy

Mediation served as a key mechanism for bridging divides and building institutional trust. Insider mediators, youth groups, and local leaders played crucial roles in resolving disputes and fostering cooperation between communities and authorities. By facilitating community-driven solutions, mediation enhanced institutional credibility, reduced polarization — especially in conflict-affected areas — and strengthened local dispute resolution mechanisms.

In Niger, mediation efforts successfully addressed governance disputes, reinforcing institutional legitimacy. Formalized Conflict Resolution Committees provided sustainable governance solutions, while ongoing capacity building and mental health support helped mediators remain effective in their roles. Through structured dialogue and trust-building, mediation proved to be a powerful tool for promoting inclusive and accountable governance.

## Recognition of Women in Leadership as a Measure of Institutional Legitimacy

The increasing recognition of women in leadership roles served as a strong indicator of shifting institutional legitimacy for many teams. Women advanced institutional legitimacy through policy advocacy, direct participation, and in mediation. In Kenya, religious women advocating for rights were appointed as Community Health Service Providers, resulting in the formal reporting of 16 previously unaddressed cases of sexual and gender-based violence. In Sri Lanka and at least one more case, women leaders successfully shaped policy agendas, ensuring that governance structures addressed gender-specific challenges.

In another location, female mediators and three women in police offices tackled cyber harassment, prompting authorities to take action to protect women's digital safety. Meanwhile, women-led advocacy in Sudan and Palestine influenced national and international peacebuilding agendas. Through women's engagement and recognition in long established institutions, the institutions themselves became more representative, accountable, and responsive to needs of all.

## POLARIZATION

Polarization was analyzed based on data from 10 countries, including 6 in acute conflict settings. Measuring polarization can be challenging due to political sensitivity or security risks. Instead, most teams tracked indirect and positive indicators, such as increased solidarity or collaboration. One program where the same indicator was measured across four countries indicated a 35% reduction in the acceptability of violence against those from another group (from 20% to 13%), but there were not enough other projects measuring similar indicators to establish a clear pattern.

## FoRB programming successes: revealing the need for stronger legitimacy

Search's Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) programs significantly reduced inter-religious hostility, negative perceptions, and acceptance of violence. In Nigeria, interfaith collaboration on important topics to communities rose from 58% to 81%, highlighting the critical role of religious actors in bridging divides. A clear example is the interreligious network in Doruwa Babuje, Bokkos LGA, Plateau State who launched a farming initiative to support the

less privileged. By fostering solidarity across religious lines and promoting self-sustainability, this effort strengthened community bonds and showcased the effectiveness of interfaith cooperation in addressing social challenges.

In Kenya, FoRB programming achieved significant progress in promoting religious inclusion and legal recognition. The Kaya religious community, historically marginalized, gained formal recognition in interfaith dialogues and stakeholder engagements, enhancing their influence in broader religious discussions. Additionally, in June 2024, a major legal milestone enabled the Kaya community in Mrima, Kwale County, to regain access to their sacred forests after years of bureaucratic restrictions. This breakthrough, facilitated through sustained engagement with the Community Forest Association and Kenya Forest Service, allowed elders to resume worship practices and enabled Kaya women to gather firewood, improving their livelihoods. The increasing involvement of women and youth in the Kaya religion further signals a shift toward greater inclusivity within the faith, reinforcing institutional legitimacy.

However, Mali's stagnant religious collaboration levels (1% improvement) and Iraq's decline in positive perceptions of marginalized groups (56%

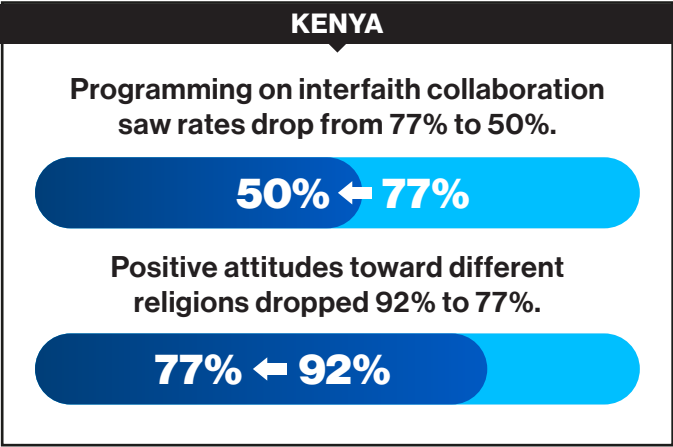


to 51%) indicate persistent grievances that sustain polarization. While Search programs fostered dialogue and cooperation, these findings highlight the need for sustained efforts to ensure deeper social integration and truly tackle the challenge of toxic polarization.

Addressing life-threatening divides: the intersection of violence and polarization

Polarization fuels hostilities and is related to higher acceptance of violence towards an opposing group. However, have not yet found a clear relationship to that of collaboration between groups. Kenya's programming on interfaith collaboration saw rates drop (77% to 50%) and positive attitudes toward different religions drop (92% to 77%), even as acceptance of violence declined significantly (24% to 14%). Sri Lanka community initiatives saw collaboration increased (42.3% to 78%), yet residential segregation remained high (with many still living in ethnically homogenous neighborhoods, only slightly decreasing from 50% to 48.8%, limiting daily interactions), showing that co-existence does not necessarily translate to deeper integration or reduced discrimination. These findings highlight the complex relationship between polarization measures a reduction in beliefs that violence against a group may be necessary does not necessarily mean inclusion of that same group. In DRC efforts to ease ethnic tensions and community-based conflict resolution improved intergroup collaboration (5% to 82%), showing a case where violence reduction mechanisms influenced polarization (rather than the other way around).

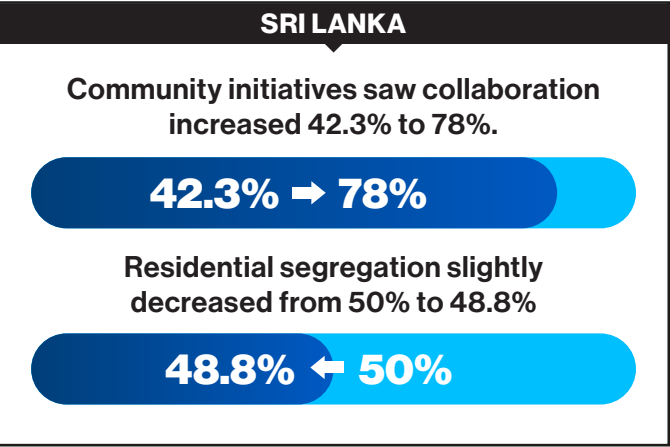
The Complexity of Measuring Polarization



Polarization is fluid and context-specific, requiring adaptive, multidimensional measurement approaches. Teams thus far have opted for collaboration measures that fit their context, or acceptance of violence. However, we have no data on perceptions of how groups treat each other, which is another important indicator of toxic polarization that dives deeper into how people feel marginalized. These findings emphasize the need for interventions designed more directly for polarization, and scaled to operate on a level that polarization operates - at the level of societal norms and discourse.

INVESTMENTS

Search's commitment to monitoring the effectiveness of peace investments relies on gaining an understanding in dollar (\$) value of time and resources invested into both peace. A report from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on conflict prevention<sup>35</sup> highlights the significant returns on investment in prevention policies, with estimates ranging from \$26 to \$75 per \$1 spent in countries without recent violence. For nations that have



experienced recent conflict, the return could be as high as \$103 per \$1 spent. Search's programming aligns with these findings. By focusing on prevention strategies, inclusive advocacy, and community-based mediation, Search teams directly contribute to the kind of policy recommendations emphasized by the IMF, which not only address the root causes of conflict but also promote long-term stability.

Investing in lasting peace: mediation and advocacy can drive structural change

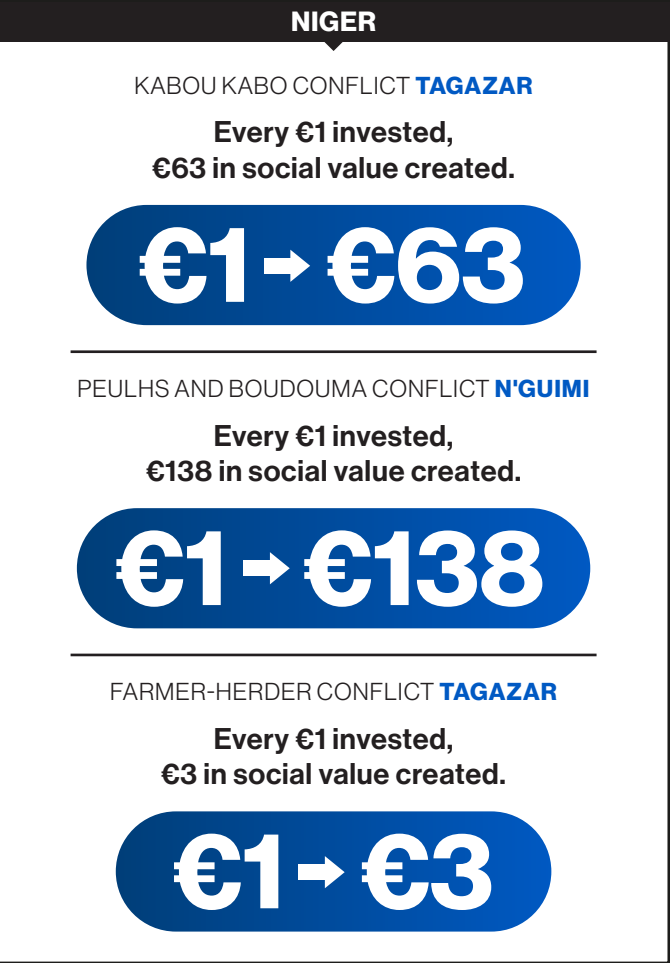
Programs produced tangible results demonstrating that peacebuilding is an investment. In particular, mediation and inclusive advocacy were likely to result in structural commitments from state actors to sustain peace efforts. These decisions were stimulated by the effective results in operationalizing mediation and conflict monitoring efforts at the local level, whether in the form of community peace committees or through the amplification of a network of local organizations advocating for peace and security.

Community-based mediation creates social value and longer-term commitment to peace

The outcomes of programs on violence also point to the fact that there is a link between ending violence and being able to maintain economic well-being.<sup>36</sup> In this regard, investing in security and mediation is an incentive for local peacebuilders, community members, NGOs, and state actors. We found that there is value in investing in mediation led by the community. Social Return on Investment calculations showed that peacebuilding efforts enabled communities to contribute to their own amounts of social value.<sup>37</sup> This social value includes reduced violence, stronger social bonds, community cohesion, resilience and increased institutional commitment to sustain these efforts, all of which were outcomes community members reported had monetary value to generate further investment.

Further, investments in early warning and response mechanisms and mediation structures represent an investment in peace.<sup>38</sup> In South Sudan, efforts in Bor where displaced people were relocated to higher ground during intense flooding improved living conditions through early warning and response systems. Peace committees also mediated water

disputes, enhancing local security. In Western Equatoria, civil society networks are helping resolve conflicts between the Azande and Balanda groups and farmer-herder disputes, with political leaders committed to addressing these issues through legislation in parliament. Investing in **civil society structures also allowed for more effective responses by government** in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and one other case. They began to work through enhanced networks with government, which elevated their collective peacebuilding capacity and gave them a platform to address local governance challenges and access to resources to expand their work.



<sup>35</sup> Mueller, Hannes, Christopher Rauh, Benjamin R. Seimon, and Raphael A. Espinoza. 2024. "The Urgency of Conflict Prevention – A Macroeconomic Perspective." IMF Working Paper No. 2024/256. International Monetary Fund. <sup>36</sup> Based on intervention where the mediation strengthened solidarity among Kabou-Kabou drivers, improving their communication and work conditions. It also enhanced relationships with local authorities and police, leading to economic gains, including higher incomes for authorized drivers. Economic and Social Benefits: Job creation occurred, particularly for young people who returned to become drivers. Security improved, with fewer accidents and crimes due to better regulations and visible legal drivers. <sup>37</sup> Kabou Kabou conflict in Tagazar. The social return on investment (SROI) is 1:63, meaning for every EUR 1 invested, EUR 63 in social value was created. Case 3: Intercommunal conflict between Peulhs and Boudouma in N'Guigmi Successful Resolution:1:138, meaning for every EUR 1 invested, EUR 138 in social value was created. Case 2: Farmer-Herder conflict in Tagazar The social return on investment (SROI) for this case is 1:3, meaning for every EUR 1 invested, EUR 3 in social value was created. The mediation inspired the communities to take ownership by organizing a follow-up meeting and creating a peace agreement, ensuring long-term peace and accountability. <sup>38</sup> Based on youth peacebuilding programming in South Sudan supporting the development of a national strategy on Youth Peace and Security and institutionalizing youth participation in peace processes.



# WHEN INCLUSIVE ADVOCACY LEADS TO LOCAL INVESTMENT IN PEACE

In Niger, efforts to improve advocacy management and tools have strengthened the advocacy skills of the organization's members, supporting them with clear administrative and financial procedures to better address conflict. Bridging members of marginalized communities with ministers and financial authorities in budget allocations ensured collaboration would focus on where needs were the greatest. The Ministers of Justice and Finance considered the results of a budget analysis from participants and identified specific areas for intervention.

Relationships like these can take time to develop. In December 2022, two multi-stakeholder dialogues were held in Gabi and Guidan Sori, which led to recommendations for improving the fight against criminal trafficking groups, implementing territorial security measures, and combating armed group infiltration. Two years later, inclusive peace committees were created and demonstrate a commitment to long-term peace and security.<sup>39</sup>



## CASE 1: The Case of the Resilient State Project in Pennsylvania, USA

When polarization<sup>40</sup> and the acceptability of violence<sup>41</sup> are on the rise, anticipating and responding to growing tensions and harmful narratives is critical to foster community safety and prevent escalation into violent conflict. This is the context in which Common Ground-USA (CG-USA) operates in Pennsylvania (PA), USA. Concerns of political violence are especially acute in this state, which experienced an assassination attempt on the former president and scapegoating of immigrant populations in 2024 alone.

The team engaged politically diverse leaders from different sectors like agriculture, business, civic, education, faith, healthcare, nonprofit, and veterans —all of whom wanted to understand political violence and leverage their relationships and influence to reduce it. They included leaders and communities often untapped because their sector is not engaged, because they feel excluded ideologically, or because their leadership is less institutional. While there are a myriad of causes they could engage in, leaders have said they felt inspired by the focus on addressing relevant issues together to advance our shared humanity.

Two leaders embodied this approach and inspired others to join in: Gene Barr, a known conservative and the former head of the PA Chamber of Commerce, and Abe Amorós, currently with the PA Municipal League, a known liberal, and a former labor leader. They have appeared many times together to debate policy disagreements on PA news channels and even made a joint appearance on Pennsylvania Newsmakers through the project to promote the need to find common ground and leave violence aside amidst political disagreements. However, Gene and Abe shared candidly how new this was for them: engaging in cross-partisan work to keep violence out of public life, rather than advocating for policy goals. Other members, knowing their previous reputation as an antagonist duo, spoke to how moved they were to see this “unconventional marriage” and how impactful they thought these surprising appearances would be. This highlights the power of symbols, amplified in the media, to shift broader perceptions and attitudes.

Beyond their joint public TV appearances, Gene continued his media appearances on *This Week*

in Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Cable Network and other platforms to advocate for nonviolence and lowering the temperature in the 2024 election season. Abe's engagement has also continued. In early October 2024, he delivered a handwritten note to the State Senator Camera Bartolotta (R) to thank her for her public displays of solidarity with the Haitian community of Charleroi in the wake of President Trump's inflammatory comments. Gene was among the few people who had reached out to her to encourage her to make a public statement on this issue, which was seen as a courageous stance in such a polarized moment.

The power of public discussion and media were also displayed through the “All We Share” media campaign, offering hopeful narratives to counteract the prevalent sense of division across the nation. The campaign was piloted in five Pennsylvania counties —Adams, Allegheny, Cumberland, Lancaster, and York—to prepare for the wider national campaign. The media campaign was designed to shift polarization and agency in a tense moment, grounded in risk assessments and shared through the member network. The campaign increased feelings of warmth towards the opposing political party (+ 4.3 points on a 101 point scale)<sup>42</sup>, and decreased affective polarization (- 6.5 points on a 101 point scale). The team and its partners also support these anti-violence models in other US states like Arizona, Ohio, and Texas, and aim to move it to a national scale in the future.



*Gene and I have appeared in several television shows regarding business and labor unions and, while we defend opposite views, I continue to have a sincere admiration and wholehearted respect for him. He has always promoted his views articulately and I never felt disrespected by him in any way. In fact, by practicing active listening, I have also learned more about his views.*

*I look forward to more collaborative opportunities with him to demonstrate how those with opposite political views can speak and interact with respect and civility.*



<sup>39</sup> Based on a programming in Niger focusing on civil society- led accountability and justice sector reform as part of efforts to strengthen the social cohesion in fragile settings. <sup>40</sup> Yost, Berwood A. 2023. “Demographic, Attitudinal, and Electoral Changes in Pennsylvania Partisans Since 2000.” Franklin & Marshall College Poll, July 13, 2023. <sup>41</sup> Kleinfeld, Rachel. 2021. “The Rise of Political Violence in the United States.” Journal of Democracy 32 (4): 160–76. <sup>42</sup> The campaign would have been the 8th most effective intervention at increasing outparty warmth in the Stanford's Strengthening Democracy Challenge (SDC), and the 9th most effective intervention at reducing affective polarization in the SDC. About the Strengthening Democracy Challenge: “One of the largest experiments on American politics ever conducted - crowdsourced more than 250 ideas aiming to reduce support for undemocratic practices, partisan violence, and/or partisan animosity. The Stanford Polarization and Social Change Lab research team, along with scholars from Cornell, MIT, Northwestern, Columbia, and the University of Pennsylvania, tested 25 of the most promising treatments on a diverse sample of more than 32,000 American partisans.” - Press Release | SDC, 17 October 2024.





**CASE 2: From Advocacy to Action:**  
**Batticaloa's Youth Transforming**  
**Community Well-Being**

In Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, youth are confronted with persistent inequalities, political exclusion, and deep-seated intergenerational mistrust. Youth unemployment rates in Batticaloa are 10% higher than they are nationally, over 30%,<sup>43</sup> while young people struggle to navigate the rising cost of living, an education system failing to meet their needs, and a growing sense of disempowerment among many. Voter turnout among young people during the last election was only 32%,<sup>44</sup> and the region faces intensifying disputes over land ownership and growing tensions between minority ethno-religious

communities, particularly Tamils and Muslims. The Easter Sunday attacks only further strained relationships among ethnic groups and hindered efforts toward unity.<sup>45</sup>

Young people engaged through advocacy training, experiential learning, and inclusive collaboration transformed from excluded community members to proactive leaders able to influence local decision-making. CGA enabled them to effectively address challenges, include marginalized voices in decision-making, and broker long-term collaboration. They overcame challenges like political resistance by using diplomatic strategies and building relationships with diverse stakeholders. They demonstrated that non-confrontational methods can lead to long-term solutions.

**How Did It Work?**

*"Advocacy is not all about confrontation; it's about working together"* - Youth Leader, Batticaloa

A non-adversarial approach to advocacy fosters cooperation and constructive communication, rather than confrontation. This approach allowed young peacebuilders to move forward despite obstacles, demonstrating that non-adversarial methods lead to more sustainable and successful outcomes. It highlights the power of cooperation in achieving long-term solutions.

*"Strategic networking is key to advocacy success"*  
- Youth Leader, Batticaloa

Stakeholder identification, relationship building, and mobilising the right people at the right time have been essential in overcoming obstacles and getting outcomes. The initiative started with small steps, but the young people learned over time to tackle larger community issues. With persistence and planning, change was achieved, and it has left its mark on the community.

*"I never had the courage to talk to the local authorities. Now I can articulate our community problems and negotiate"* - Youth Leader from Batticaloa

*"Confidence comes from action and experience."*  
- Youth Leader from Batticaloa

The success of this youth-led campaign has not only increased water availability but has also inspired neighboring communities to adopt similar youth-led advocacy models to address local issues. This approach, emphasizing stakeholder involvement, partnerships, and non-adversarial strategies, has proven replicable. The project's success has inspired neighboring communities to adopt similar youth-led leadership models for addressing grassroots challenges.

*"The community now believes in us and looks at us as good leaders. We are no longer youths with ideas; we are leaders who are making a difference."* - Youth Leader from Batticaloa

and leadership eventually garnered support from key religious leaders, fostering broader interfaith cooperation and teaching of religious tolerance.

**YOUTH**  
**STRENGTHENING**  
**THEIR**  
**LEADERSHIP**

**92.8%**

TOOK ACTION ON THEIR  
OWN TO ENGAGE IN THEIR  
COMMUNITIES.

**85.6%**

FELT EMPOWERED TO  
CREATE REAL CHANGE

**RESULTS OF YOUTH**  
**CAMPAIGNS:**

IMPROVED WATER ACCESS IN  
KARADIYANAARU.

BENEFITTED OVER **400 FAMILIES**  
AND REDUCED RISK OF WATER-  
BORNE DISEASES.

ADDRESSING IMMEDIATE NEEDS  
LIKE WATER ACCESS NOT ONLY  
IMPROVES HEALTH BUT ENABLES  
YOUTH TO FOSTER TRUST AND  
CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT.

<sup>43</sup> Department of Census and Statistics. 2024. [Sri Lanka Labour Force Statistics Quarterly Bulletin, First Quarter 2024](#). Colombo: Ministry of Finance, Economic Stabilization and National Policies. <sup>41</sup> Kleinfeld, Rachel. 2021. "The Rise of Political Violence in the United States." *Journal of Democracy* 32 (4): 160-76. <sup>44</sup> Roof, David J. 2023. ["State-by-State Youth Voter Turnout Data."](#) Center for Economic and Civic Learning, April 7, 2023. <sup>45</sup> National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka. 2024. [The Landscape of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Batticaloa | 2023-2024](#). Colombo: National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka.





**CASE 3:** [Inter-faith collaboration fueling peaceful development: The story of Mansour Cissé](#)

Under 35 years old, Mohamed Mansour CISSE is the President of the Islamic League of Students and Pupils of Mali (LIEEMA) in Tombouctou and a

member of the Intra-Religious Exchange, Reflection, and Dialogue Framework for Peace. Working with Search, he recognized common challenges shared by both Muslim and Christian communities, particularly imams and pastors. Committed to fostering peace, he took the initiative to engage with Catholic and Evangelical Christian communities, establishing a youth association to promote interreligious dialogue and prevent violent extremism.

In the region of Timbuktu in northern Mali, religious actors struggle to manage interreligious tensions. Despite successes in specific communities, the fragile dynamics are evident, as online violence and extremist attacks targeting Christians persist. Social media has amplified polarization, disinformation, and trolling in recent years, and religious leaders and the media play pivotal roles in shaping the trajectory of these divides. Several partners<sup>46</sup> organized a training and mentorship to support religious actors to dispel rumors, particularly those suggesting that the state provides subsidies to certain communities over others. The partnership also engaged actors to create

opportunities for interaction, such as the Diocese of Mopti opening the pilgrimage to representatives of both Muslim and Protestant communities.

It is in this context that Mansour Cissé began to drive his own peacebuilding initiative. Despite initial resistance from influential religious figures, Mansour successfully founded LIEEMA, an association focused on peace and solidarity with young Christian and Protestant peers. Their perseverance and leadership eventually garnered support from key religious leaders, fostering broader interfaith cooperation and teaching of religious tolerance.

**How Did It Work?**  
**FOR MANSOUR, THE**  
**INGREDIENTS TO SUCCESS ARE:**

*“Respect and Clarity: It’s important to respect everyone, clearly communicate goals, and be patient in the process.”*

*“Social media can challenge peaceful coexistence between religions, but its impact can be reduced by maintaining close connections.”*

**COMMUNITY IMPACT:**

**A new youth association for members of different religions to participate in their community, supported by both state and religious institutions.**

**79%** of the community reported positive behavior towards marginalized groups, a **30%** rise since 2022.

**89%** of community members noted a positive shift in attitudes towards those with different religions, a **16%** increase since the project’s inception.

<sup>46</sup> Partnership included Search-Mali, Réseau Islam Population et Développement (RIPOD), Mouvement des Cadres et Responsables Chrétiens du Mali (MCRC), Jeunesse en Mission and Tearfund.



CASE 4: Women at the Negotiation Table:  
Bridging Divides for Humanitarian Access  
in Sudan

Context & Background

For decades, Sudanese women have been at the forefront of peace efforts, despite being systematically excluded from formal negotiations. The conflict in Sudan, exacerbated by the April 2023 fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has led to large-scale displacement, food shortages, and escalating humanitarian needs. In August, Sudan was named at high risk for 26 million people to experience famine, largely due to lack of access to resources and aid. Against this backdrop, **Sudanese women peacebuilders stepped into leadership roles**, negotiating access for humanitarian aid in some of the country’s most volatile regions.

Negotiating Hope in South Kordofan:  
Women’s Leadership in Action

A powerful demonstration of women’s agency occurred in South Kordofan, where a group of women working with Search opened blocked roads for humanitarian access. The closure of key roads due to armed conflict cut off six diverse communities from essential supplies, including food and medicine. Despite security risks and resistance - both from armed groups and within their own communities - these women built trust and navigated complex political dynamics. Knowing the dire consequences, the women engaged both the SPLM-N (Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North) and the RSF in negotiations:

- With SPLM-N, they negotiated to secure medical supply routes from Kadugli to Dilling.
- With the RSF, they negotiated to obtain permission for goods and commodities to move from Al-Obied to Dilling.

Women at the Geneva Peace  
Talks: Breaking Barriers in Formal  
Negotiations

At the Geneva peace talks in August 2024,

- 14 Sudanese women delegates participated in negotiations, consulted by mediators and international actors. This marked the **first time Sudanese women were formally included** at this level of negotiation, with 5 of the 14 women under the age of 35, setting a precedent for future engagement.
- Humanitarian Access Secured: Their recommendations helped broker an agreement to open the Adré border for aid and guarantee humanitarian access across the Dabbah Road from Port Sudan.
  - Protection Commitments: The RSF agreed to a code of conduct on conflict-related sexual violence, a direct outcome of women’s advocacy.

Women’s peacebuilding efforts in Sudan must be sustained and scaled. The Sudanese women’s delegation continues to:

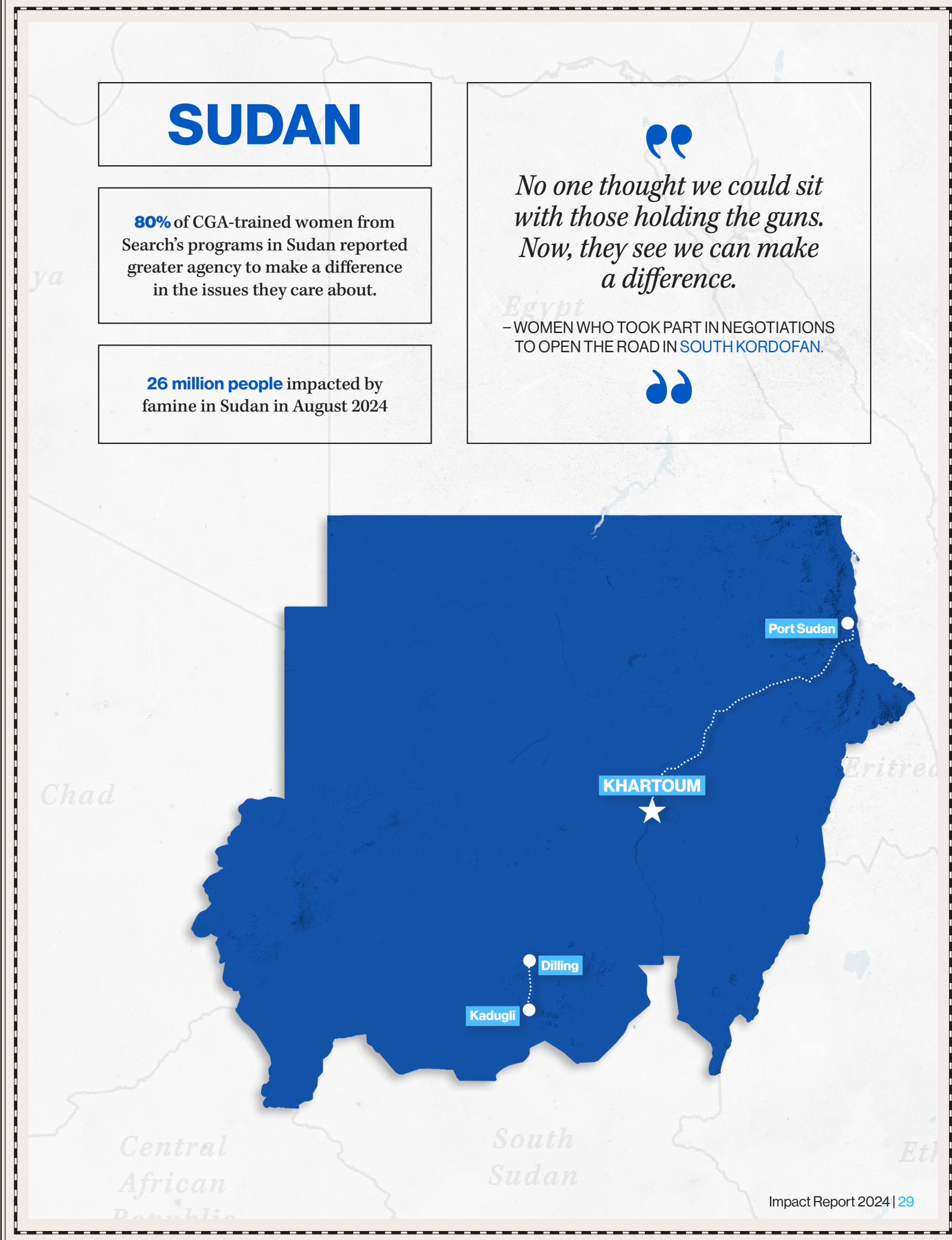
- Engage with international mediators to ensure sustained peace efforts.
- Build a structured governance model to strengthen women’s place in future peace talks.
- Expand their grassroots networks to amplify local voices in national negotiations.

“

*Our work might seem small, but doing nothing is not an option. Every initiative prevents a worse reality, and every step forward strengthens the resilience of my country.*

– NAGAT SULIMAN, [SEARCH-SUDAN](#)

”





CASE STUDY 5: Women's Leadership in Pakistan

Pakistan is positioned at a geopolitical crossroads, bordered by Afghanistan to the west, India to the east, and China to the north. The country experiences tension from multiple fronts: domestic conflicts, economic struggles, and competing ideologies all shaping people’s imagination of the future. Amidst these various challenges, women in particular face discrimination and violence, with very limited space to shape what happens and what decisions are made affecting their lives. Search established a support network across Pakistan among women peace advocates and key stakeholders involved in conflict resolution and transforming violent extremism. The network equipped women with the skills and confidence to address violent extremism, enabling their contributions to policy and decision-making.

“When there was a negotiation going on, women were not present. There was not a single woman in a peace committee<sup>47</sup>... There was not a single woman in a gender committee in any [government] department. There are no women in schools many areas. There is no woman who is a nurse or caretaker or health worker in many areas. That’s why this project came into being. We visualized it, we conceptualized it, and we implemented it. And now, more than 18 women are now in peace committees, nominated by the district and government for their position.” - Shahid Rahim, Search for Common Ground

Media played a crucial role in this transformative journey. The team harnessed the power of storytelling, creating documentaries, radio programs, and animated content that showcased the

achievements of women involved in peacebuilding. These narratives not only amplified their voices but also inspired others, creating a ripple effect that extended beyond geographical confines.



*We are at 226 million people. And 51% are women. So this is the clear cut answer. If you exclude women from every walk of life - any walk of life - in Pakistan out of 226 million, what you will get?*

- SHAHID RAHIM



The political landscape in Pakistan is turbulent, making sustained advocacy for women's rights and peacebuilding initiatives precarious. But by fostering inclusive dialogue, adapting strategies to cultural contexts, and actively involving marginalized groups, the initiative demonstrates the potential for transformative change within Pakistani society. In Pakistan, the journey toward peace and empowerment is ongoing. The team's work stands as a testament to resilience, collaboration, and the unwavering belief in a brighter future. They transformed adversity into opportunity, weaving a rich tapestry of change that not only embraced women but also included all marginalized communities. Their story is one of hope—a reminder that even amidst the shadows of conflict, the light of progress shines bright, illuminating the path toward a more inclusive and peaceful society.

- ▶ Involving groups highly discriminated against, to ensure their inclusion in solutions for reaching people affected by disasters and impacted by services.
- ▶ 75 women trained as peace advocates
- ▶ 33 community action plans reaching over 13,200 men and women across Pakistan: events created a variety of visibility for women ranging from sports galas to multi-country dialogue between Afghan and Pakistani women.



<sup>47</sup> This is in reference to district-level peace committees in Pakistan that play a crucial role in promoting peace and resolving conflicts at the local level. These committees often comprise religious leaders and community elders but frequently lack adequate representation of women.

A case addressing pay inequities within the healthcare sector is now in process in the High Court.



# Meeting the moment in Europe

We work hand in hand with key institutions to help them see the value of our approach and to become champions of peacebuilding. We do that by bringing the lived experiences and learnings from our country programmes to the places where key policy decisions are made in Addis Ababa, Amman, Abuja, or Brussels. Our European headquarters are a key center of our policy efforts, where we engage policymakers, the private sector, and development actors to support sustainable business practices and conflict-sensitive approaches through evidence-based policy advocacy. Here are a few examples of our 2024 activities.

## Supporting Development Stakeholders to Mainstream Conflict-Sensitivity

In Belgium, we actively engage in awareness-raising initiatives and collaborate with various Brussels-based development stakeholders, including NGOs,

civil society organisations (CSOs), the Belgian development agency Enabel, and civil servants from the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2024, we organised three conflict-sensitivity training sessions, reaching a total of 59 participants. These included representatives from Plan International Belgium, Belgian-funded members of the CSC Niger, and approximately 30 diplomats in training at the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The goal of these sessions is to equip development actors with the knowledge and tools to design, implement, and monitor aid initiatives in a conflict-sensitive way (ensuring their interventions do not exacerbate existing tensions but instead take into account the conflict dynamics in their areas of operation). Given Belgium's strategic focus on conflict-affected regions, these trainings were highly valued by participants.

## COP29

While people worldwide are vulnerable to climate change, its impacts vary depending on the available adaptation mechanisms. In fragile regions, dependence on natural resources can intensify competition over scarcity, potentially escalating into conflict if not addressed. Conversely, in conflict-affected areas, the capacity to adapt to climate change is often limited. Addressing climate adaptation and peacebuilding together is therefore crucial: environmental challenges can be a source

of collaboration across divides, with peace ultimately enabling effective climate adaptation.

Search, together with peer organisations, attended COP29 in Azerbaijan, working to integrate peace into the climate agenda. We co-drafted and broadly disseminated a position paper, and hosted an event addressing the challenges and potential solutions for advancing climate action in fragile states. While the newly established Loss and Damage Fund after COP29 is a crucial step for supporting vulnerable countries and promoting peace, we must continue to push for solutions that both cut emissions and foster peace.

## Effective Engagement in the Sahel

Amid grave humanitarian needs, complex security challenges, and a shifting political and civic space in the Sahel, the EU and its Member States have struggled to be aligned on an effective response. The Search for Common Ground teams are focusing on what solutions remain possible in the region, bringing fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to the table.

To implement sustained, people-centred and conflict-sensitive EU engagement in support of local populations, Search for Common Ground has led a collaborative effort to connect decision-makers in Brussels with the expertise of civil society and peacebuilders in the region. As part of the Just Future Alliance, we coordinated efforts among colleagues and partners in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, as well as NGOs in Brussels from various sectors working in and on the Sahel. We ensured that recommendations were grounded in local analysis, prepared Sahelian experts to engage with EU decision-makers, and created platforms for direct advocacy, including dozens of advocacy meetings and a major conference gathering over 100 experts from EU institutions, Member States, international and Sahelian NGOs, and think tanks in Brussels.

While acknowledging the challenges, we remain focused on opportunities and pragmatic responses. These efforts have helped put grounded, fresh perspectives and practical solutions at the centre of discussions on renewed European approaches to the Sahel. Building on our learnings, we will continue to work on enhancing our impact in 2025.

## Strengthening Religious Engagement

With religion playing an important role in the majority of people's lives, Search has long recognised the importance of working with religious actors to promote peaceful coexistence. Although not a faith-based organisation, we consider ourselves 'religiously literate' and run a number of projects across the world aimed at empowering religious actors—including religious leaders, but also influential men, women and youth without formal leadership roles—to be positive agents of change in their communities.

Another sphere of this work has been to sensitise policymakers on the importance of religious engagement, and show them how they can engage with communities in ways that do not jeopardise their impartiality or instrumentalise religious actors. Search has produced a number of policy briefs outlining recommendations for donors, decision-makers and practitioners including on the [role of religious actors in democratic processes](#)—a topic which is all the more relevant in 2024 as over a third of the world went to the polls—based on concrete examples and lessons learned from our programming.

Throughout our work, we have also connected religious actors and EU policymakers, equipping each with the skills necessary to effectively communicate with one another, and helping create space for better understanding of mutual priorities and possible joint areas for action. Although this remains an issue with many sensitivities for all parties, we have begun to see positive results and remain committed to building trust and relationships that benefit conflict-affected communities.

## Celebrating the 30-Year Anniversary of Search AISBL

In November, the Search Brussels Headquarters celebrated its 30th anniversary. The Brussels team commemorated this milestone by hosting a photo exhibition showcasing a snapshot of our work across the decades and the globe for our partners and supporters. The night was spent toasting to the hard work of our colleagues and board, reminiscing on 30 years of peacebuilding across a variety of projects, and enjoying our time together.





