



SEARCH FOR
COMMON GROUND

BUILDING SOCIAL COHESION IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT:

IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES, MEASURING PROGRESS, & MAXIMIZING RESULTS

About

Search for Common Ground (Search) undertook this endeavor in partnership with Facebook in an effort to build on existing knowledge of the relationship between building social cohesion and outcomes in peace and conflict. This report is the first in a series of learning pieces conducted with support from Facebook and other partners. Research was authored by the Institutional Learning Team, including (in alphabetical order) Aisalkyn Botoeva, Chhavi Kotwani, Adrienne Lemon and Omar Salem.

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SECTION 1:

WHY DOES SOCIAL COHESION MATTER?

Promoting social cohesion in conflict-affected societies is a critical component of efforts to end violent conflict.

But, what is social cohesion?

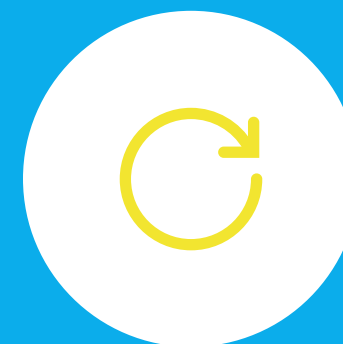
Emile Durkheim first characterized social cohesion as the interdependence between individuals in a society in 1897, and subsequent thinkers have added to and amended this understanding. A multidisciplinary debate about social cohesion continues among scholars and practitioners today, but there is relative agreement that social cohesion encompasses the rights and agency of individuals, feelings of belonging and trust, and the legitimacy and inclusivity of institutions.¹

We can imagine social cohesion in practical terms as energy binding a society together. It facilitates interaction and shapes the way people move through the world in relation to one another. Societies with low cohesion may display high levels of polarization, a low sense of belonging, and little confidence in leaders. In cohesive societies, citizens are more likely to engage with local governments and institutions instead of expressing indifference, more likely to reduce disparities in income and unemployment, more likely to address problems collectively, and more likely to have a sense of belonging in the places they live.^{2,3,4}

That binding energy, however, does not create a healthy society on its own. It is influenced by economic, political and sociocultural factors that determine the overall health of a society, like justice, violence, development or freedom. So it is possible

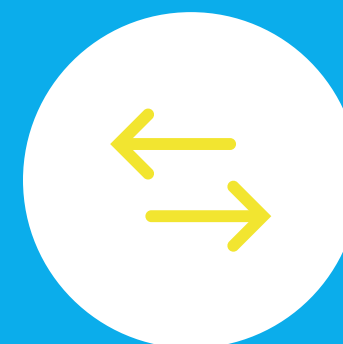
for cohesive societies to have ineffective justice mechanisms, or to exclude and marginalize those seen as 'outgroups'. It is also possible for societies to have high levels of economic opportunity and entrepreneurship with low levels of cohesion.

Social cohesion signals the investment people have in the social contracts that bind them together: individuals' power to influence their societies, their willingness to engage on important issues with other groups, and their ability to shape decision-making with authority figures.



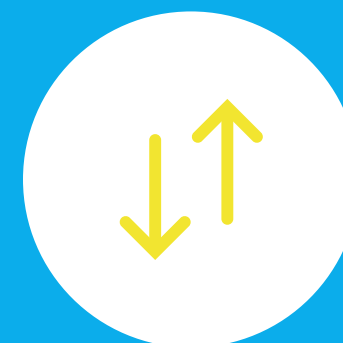
AGENCY IN COLLABORATION

An individual's freedom to pursue and influence the goals or values in society that they regard as important.



HORIZONTAL COHESION

Relationships across horizontal dividing lines that reflect trust, accountability, and transparency, with all sides equipped in transforming conflict without violence.



VERTICAL COHESION

Relationships between individuals and those who govern them, reflecting trust, accountability, transparency, with all sides equipped in dialogue and collaboration skills.



When we study social cohesion, we get a clear sense of whether people feel they have mechanisms and choices available to them beyond violence.

SECTION 2:

**WHAT IT LOOKS
LIKE TO BUILD
SOCIAL COHESION**

This report reviews five years of Search's social cohesion programming to examine the most effective measures for understanding success, and what long-term impact looks like.

About Search for Common Ground

Search's mission is to end violent conflict. Instead of tearing down an existing world, teams focus on constructing a new one. The organization is engaged in **conflict transformation**, seeking to change the everyday interactions between groups of people in conflict, so they can work together to build up their community, choosing joint problem-solving over violence.

Social cohesion is just one of the concepts that provides a vision of what teams are working towards, focusing on what they want to build, rather than just what they want to end. It sits alongside several other concepts. When appropriate, Search promotes social cohesion through a wide variety of interventions that are tailored to each context and look to address root causes.

Building Social Cohesion

There are three broad approaches that Search builds towards for **conflict transformation**, and that are being assessed in the report: **DIALOGUE**, **MEDIA**, and **COMMUNITY**.

The activities themselves are diverse, with approaches made to fit the context and the conflicts taking place.



DIALOGUE

Dialogue is about bringing people together across dividing lines to discover and achieve shared goals. By embedding inclusivity, those traditionally in power can work with those without a platform, often women and youth.

Building social cohesion through dialogue looks like...

- Young leaders training to develop skills and confidence to work with local leaders in CAR to address issues that are important to them.
- Women mediating conflicts in Yemen, alleviating the strain on overstretched local institutions and finding new roles to lead within their culture and communities.

MEDIA

While a dialogue affects dozens, media programming holds the power to impact millions. Media can stir thoughts and discussions across a whole society creating visibility for new ideas, challenging the status quo, and using emotion to capture the attention of diverse audiences.

Building social cohesion through media looks like...

- A reality TV show showcasing young community leaders who compete to be Tunisia's next President, and go on to work with the government on joint initiatives.
- A social media platform in Kyrgyzstan, where young people overcome taboos to have honest conversations about the influence of violent extremism in their communities.

COMMUNITY

People need safe spaces to work out their conflicts at the local level. Divided communities, neighbors, and families can unpack tensions with programs that allow people to experience a shared humanity.

Building social cohesion through community looks like...

- A series of soccer matches in Nepal between police and young people who are ready to build relationships and build confidence between one another
- A participatory theater event in Ethiopia with hundreds of families gathered to see men and women challenge gender norms through art.

Questions About Social Cohesion Programming

Not all conflict transformation programming is designed solely for the purpose of social cohesion. For example, some programs aim to stop current outbreaks of violence, facilitate access to justice where it has been denied, or reorient the priorities and interests of actors fueling conflict. But, this report hones in on social cohesion specifically to understand the advantages and shortcomings of such an investment, trying to unpack questions like:

- **How are new possibilities and cooperative action across dividing lines developed, owned and defended by the parties to the conflict?**
- **How are healthier relationships across dividing lines fostered? Do they feed into healthier, safer and more just societies?**
- **What reweaves the fabric of societies torn apart by violence and polarization?**
- **What supports a stronger aspiration for collaboration and change in social norms about the acceptability of violence?**





SECTION 3:

MEASURING SOCIAL COHESION

This report includes results from a cross-section of 22 projects at Search that took place over the past five years across Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

This report includes results from a cross-section of 22 projects at Search that took place over the past five years across Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The projects were selected to represent different geographies, approaches to building cohesion, and a diverse set of stakeholders in conflict. The team examined patterns across the projects, and then picked 4 case studies to better understand the challenges and results of investing in social cohesion. In the case studies, past participants and project organizers shared their experiences to unpack what has lasted and what has been most challenging about these types of investments.

As yet, there is no perfect measure of social cohesion, as this work does not easily lend itself to linear causal pathways.⁵ Policy makers, practitioners, and scholars have long recognized that cohesion in the sense of collective solidarity and shared sense of belonging, may also coexist with norms and values of hierarchical and exclusionary nature, such as xenophobia, ethno-nationalism and regionalism.⁶ To address this, development interventions or government policies may provide opportunities and build some social groups' capabilities while neglecting others. Such interventions arguably promote justice, but unintentionally cause ripple effects that upset social cohesion.

Recognizing the theoretical and methodological challenges of measuring social cohesion, we set out with an agenda of studying the related components of the broader concept. The varied methodologies and measures generally serve to capture one of the three categories previously identified: agency, horizontal cohesion, and vertical cohesion. They also generally focus on the area relevant for the specific dividing lines and issues of focus. This means that while a nation might overall have a high rate of "trust in neighbors" and "trust in police," we are not looking for the national average. Most of the populations analyzed are not based on national lines, but based epicenters of conflict between pre-identified sub-groups - specifically targeting relationships that cross the many dividing lines of conflicts that may stem from socio-economic, gendered, racial, ethnic, religious, political or other cleavages.

We can measure collaboration, interaction, and perceptions across these specific groups to have a closer look at the fissures in this binding energy. And, we measure individuals' preparedness and willingness to engage in vertical and horizontal relationships. To best examine these elements, most projects measure awareness, attitudes and perceptions. Behavior is actually a difficult and lagging

measure for cohesion. A person who feels they are able to trust and depend on their police does not necessarily call on them regularly. Therefore most projects prioritized attitudes and perceptions that give us a sense of what people *feel* about these relationships, rather than relying on the actions that take place as a result.

When measuring cohesion we look for the strength of it (or level of engagement), and we use positive and negative measures to indicate progress. In several cases, we found that populations' signs of positive cohesion increased at the same time that negative indicators of cohesion also increased, or at the same time that violence was occurring. We balance these by understanding the tensions within cohesion measures. Historical injustices matter, and when newly empowered individuals or groups exercise their agency, their actions cause acute tensions, or cause further polarization in the shorter and longer term.⁷ Mitigating factors that fuel tensions like surges in violent conflict or economic downturns can also create dips in one type of cohesion while people continue to strengthen cohesion on other fronts.

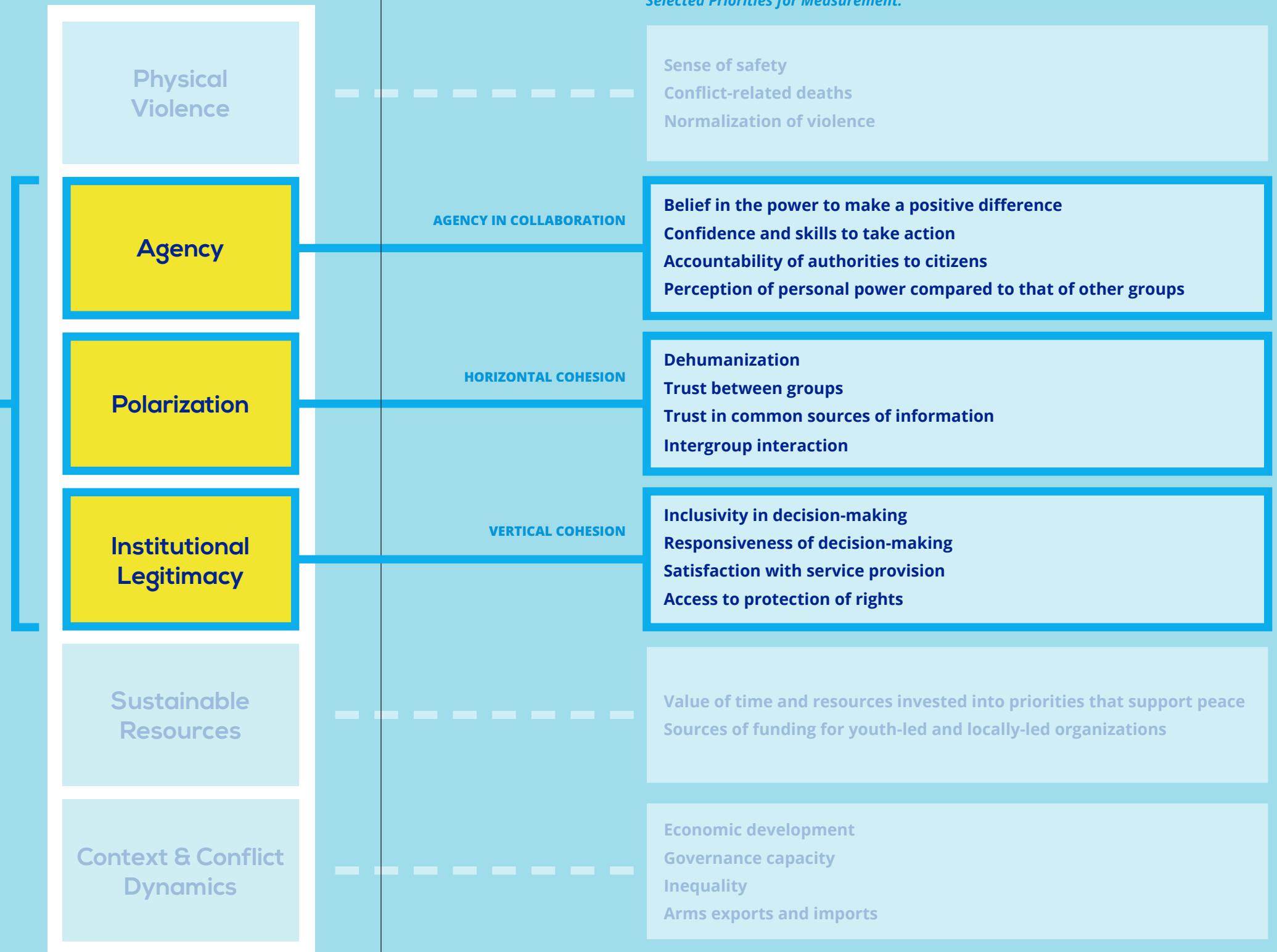


MAPPING SOCIAL COHESION IN SEARCH'S FRAMEWORK FOR MEASURING PEACE & CONFLICT

To conceptualize social cohesion as something that interacts with these other important measures of peace, Search uses a framework for peace and conflict that consists of six core themes to measure whether a society is safe, healthy and just.

This approach ensures that we understand social cohesion as one concept that feeds into a much broader understanding of peace. It is not the end goal. We can measure social cohesion and then understand it alongside other concepts to capture their interaction, and be clear about the specific types of change we achieve.

Social Cohesion



If you are interested to learn more about the methods behind this research, see our methodology in the [Supporting Materials](#) of the report.

SECTION 4:

RESULTS OF A SOCIAL COHESION APPROACH TO TRACKING VIOLENCE

Reactions to conflict (how conflict can end)?

1. Confrontation-Fight: Win/Lose, My solution
2. Avoiding-Flight: Lose/Lose, No solution
3. Accommodating: Giving-in/Lose/Win, Your solution

How conflict ends

1. Confrontation-Fight
2. Avoiding-Flight
3. Accommodating
4. Compromise
5. Celebrating

AGENCY IN COLLABORATION

Do people feel they have the power to influence what they care about?

A core component of social cohesion requires that people feel they have power to influence issues they care about without violence.

Community members, religious leaders, government actors, members of civil society organisations and others—all of them benefit from having the skills and confidence to mediate, facilitate discussions, and identify conflict drivers.

MEASURING AGENCY

To assess individual transformation, Search programs look at people's sense of belonging, their confidence in their knowledge and skills, and behaviors that shifted throughout the project.⁸ Across the evaluations, certain methods were most commonly used to measure agency.

→ **Longitudinal analysis with participants** allowed teams to track individual changes in confidence, skills or ability to affect change after participating in activities.

→ **Population surveys** tracked attitudes about identity, use of violence, and non-violent forms of interaction. In most cases, direct questions about attitudes and perceptions demonstrated trends over time effectively, and these surveys included other peace measures relevant to the context, as well.

→ **Outcome harvesting** was also used in several evaluations in addition to survey or longitudinal analysis. Participants in projects were contacted at the end of the project to identify unintended ripple effects—both positive and negative—related to cohesion and peace more broadly.

CHALLENGES TO MEASURING AGENCY

→ People are transient in conflict-affected societies. Following individuals who have gained skills through a particular training, for example, can be difficult in areas where the movement of people is highly dynamic, such as refugee or IDP camps.

→ For targeted measures of agency, experimental approaches that test capabilities and choice-making of participants and non-participants are the most effective, but also tend to isolate agency from other aspects of conflict. Surveys are often chosen for their ability to test a broader set of measures at once.

→ Feeling empowered to affect change in one place does not automatically translate to such empowerment in another, meaning that at times where displacement was high, some measures of agency also dipped extensive

ON AVERAGE, PROJECTS THAT BUILT INDIVIDUAL AGENCY RESULTED IN:

- A 10% increase in the level of comfort using skills to resolve conflict non-violently, among project participants, from 59 to 69%
- A 34% increase in confidence to participate in local governance, from 18% to 52%
- A 50% increase in confidence of women and girls to be economically independent, from 25% to 85%, in programs where gender was specifically targeted

COUNTRY CASE:

DECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY & VIOLENCE IN SOUTH SUDAN

In 2013, South Sudan erupted with large-scale violence, just two years into its journey as the world's newest country.

Following an alleged coup d'état, President Salva Kiir and Former Vice President Riek Machar split the forces of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) along ethnic lines, deepening existing ethnic divisions. After peace agreements in 2015 and 2018, there remains little progress in healing divides and addressing grievances of South Sudanese people. Interethnic violence still plagues South Sudan, especially where scarce resources and overstretched institutions have perpetuated reliance on violence and retaliation to solve disputes.

Of all the factors the team explored, identity—and specifically the way people identified themselves in comparison to others - was deeply linked to their views on violence. Starting in 2014, Search partnered with young radio producers and community organizers to create spaces for people to confront their identities and how they have intertwined with issues that matter to them.⁹ People began to interact more across tribes, accept them more as their neighbors, and even in marriages. However, waves of killing and displacement also setback cohesion. In 2017 people began to support violence again, particularly in Bor where death from conflict increased by 85% compared to years prior.¹⁰ Despite these challenges, people continued to

interact at increasing rates throughout the years, and support for violence decreased again in 2018 and 2019. The case served as an important lesson that for social cohesion efforts to work, people need multi-year sustained efforts that support them to reimagine their identities and the choices linked with them. As media programs continue, it is clear they need to continuously focus on the sections of the population most disengaged, to further unpack the relationships between agency and violence that need to be addressed.



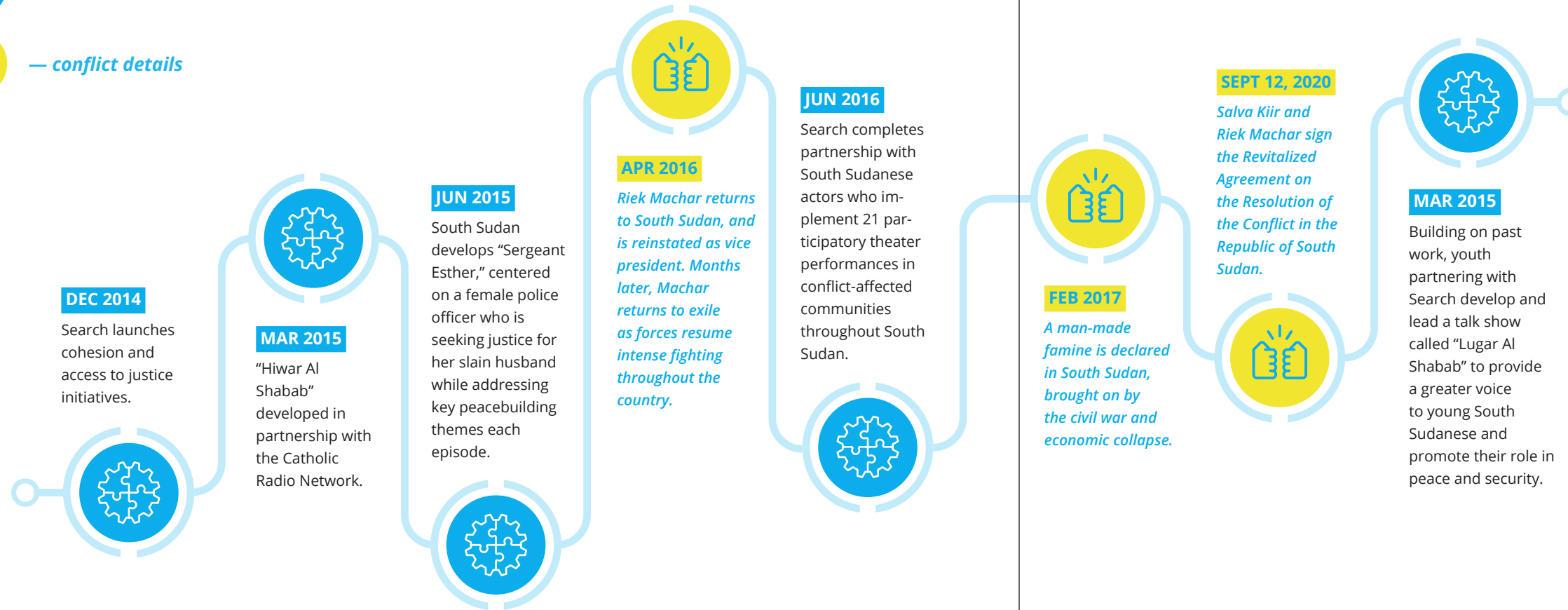
South Sudan Timeline:



— social cohesion effort



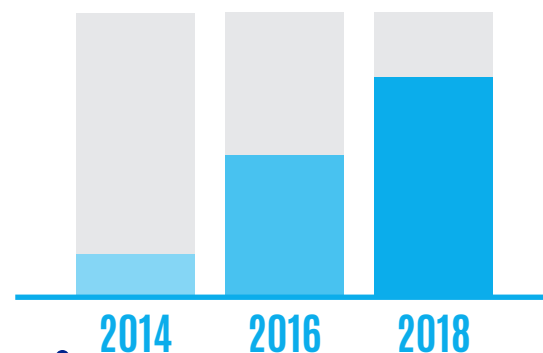
— conflict details



From 2014–2018:



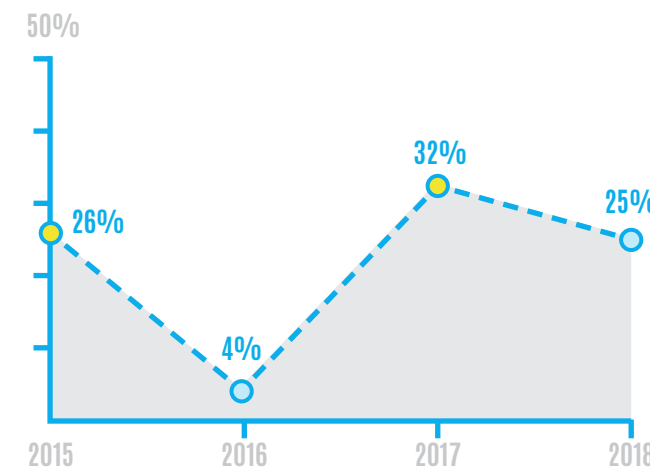
91.2% of those surveyed reported resolving conflict through peaceful means. Only **36%** of respondents had reported to have done that before projects began.



16% (2014), **53%** (2016), and **81%** (2018) of people surveyed who saw their national identity their most salient identity over their tribe, clan, language, or village.



11% more people expressed having trust in other tribes.



Acceptability of violence towards other tribes decreased, then increased, and then decreased again in coordination with violent attacks.

Approach:

The Search team aimed to increase individual agency and horizontal cohesion across identities, so that people felt they had new avenues to be heard, and began to feel more connected to those in other tribes. Population surveys compared the relationships different communities had with violence, using a social cohesion index measure in yearly surveys.

DIALOGUE

→ Peacebuilding training

Designed to empower people with the skills to identify and address root causes of conflicts.

MEDIA

- Radio dramas
- Talk shows
- Public service announcements

Broadcast in multiple languages to highlight diverse voices of those working for peace.

COMMUNITY

- Participatory theater
- Livelihoods training

Art creates an avenue to address difficult issues like gender-based violence and cattle raiding.

HORIZONTAL COHESION

Are people willing to trust and rely on others outside of their groups?

Inclusive and mutually-respectful interactions across social groups are the driving force of positive change. "Social trust" across communities or nations has become a strong predictor of critical outcomes related to economic development and well-being like economic growth, life satisfaction and mental well-being.¹¹ In conflict dynamics, trust serves as a better predictor than positive attitudes for understanding how people behave toward another group.¹² The majority of Search evaluations used measures of trust to unpack how relationships are developing between groups.

MEASURING HORIZONTAL COHESION

Several projects used indexes to measure trust, or asked direct questions about trust. Direct questions about trust and collaboration can be challenging to use accurately, but show similar trends compared to less direct questions like indexes built to test trust in different everyday scenarios.

→ **Likert scale** measures of attitudes and norms associated with horizontal cohesion, looking at trust, collaboration and interaction across groups.

→ **Grounded models** of indicator development are particularly useful when looking at horizontal cohesion, to balance some of the preconceived notions about trust that do not always translate into survey models effectively. In a grounded model, community members identify changes they want to see across dividing lines. Affected communities often provide new insights for how 'success' in building cohesion can be framed in terms of the everyday experiences of a community.

→ **Social network analysis** and relational data collection have also been used by teams to objectively measure structural changes within community networks, ingroup-outgroup dynamics, and information flows.

CHALLENGES TO MEASURING HORIZONTAL COHESION

→ Population-wide measures of horizontal cohesion are fragile, and the general trends of a broad population do little to explain what choices need to be made to shift it effectively. These types of surveys require high levels of representativity and disaggregation to find pockets of outliers that do not align to the general trends. It is also easy to miss small groups that feel particularly marginalized or disconnected from society if the questions are not present in the questionnaire. That is why surveys and social network analysis is more effective when conflict epicenters are chosen in the sampling frame.

→ Developing indicators for cohesion with community members needs to be done keeping in mind that stereotypes and polarization may affect or be built into expectations for change. Subgroups therefore need to be carefully identified and understood so that the patterns in this type of qualitative data are accurately understood.

ON AVERAGE, WHEN PROJECTS WERE DESIGNED TO IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS:

- 29% more of those surveyed were ready to reconcile with conflicting groups, from 44% to 73%
- 16% increase in those surveyed that trust people in different ethnic or tribal groups, from 38% to 54%
- A 17% increase in men's acceptance of women in leadership positions in institutions, from 56% to 73% for programs focused on gender
- 21% increase in women feeling capable to lead in those same roles (this was at 29.25% at the beginning of projects)

COUNTRY CASE:

CREATING AVENUES FOR DIALOGUE IN THE FACE OF VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Central Nigeria has seen intensifying violent clashes between largely Christian farmers and predominantly Muslim herdsman of Fulani ethnicity.

Limited access to arable land and unreliable water resources, political instability, and security concerns are forcing pastoralists into new communities in search of adequate pasture to feed their cattle. Farmers accuse the herdsman of failing to control cattle and damaging crops, and in turn, the Fulani accuse farmers of cattle rustling. This has led to constant clashes along ethno-religious lines which have cost thousands of lives. The conflict has also begun to affect regions beyond the Middle Belt, with disputes arising in Northeast, Southeast and Southern Nigeria where communities have not historically hosted migratory pastoralists and find themselves unprepared to handle land disputes as they arise.

With increasing violence, Search aimed to transform each community's understanding of the other. In July 2015, Search brought farmer and herder communities together to discuss shared solutions to shared challenges, through dialogue sessions, cultural festivals, participatory theatre and radio programming to promote tolerance. Although we saw improved cultural understanding and the formation of effective community coalitions as a result, it was undermined to some extent by chronic violence in

the Plateau state, reflected in project participants reporting less cordial relations between farmers and herders compared to Nasarawa and Kaduna states, and also having less trust in security agencies because of their inability to prevent attacks despite having prior knowledge. According to participants, the project would be more effective if it directly addressed the issue of economic empowerment and provided access to alternative sources of livelihood opportunities to farmers and herders, and also involved high-level political actors who could prevent the potential escalation of violence in the upcoming elections. There were concerns raised about the sustainability of the project given the lack of funds for the activities of community-civil society-government platforms created as part of the project, but these are still in place today and active in their efforts to identify risks and de-escalate violence.



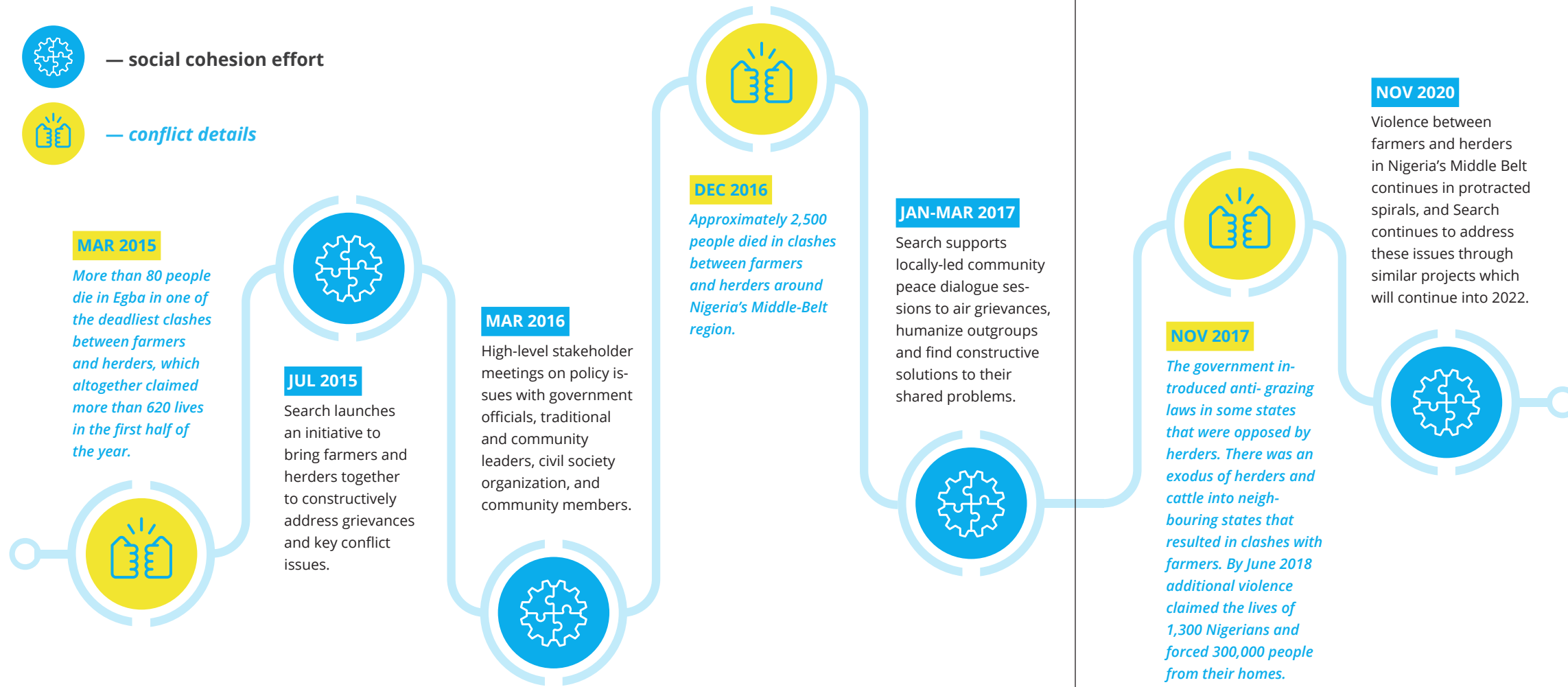
Nigeria Timeline:



— social cohesion effort



— conflict details



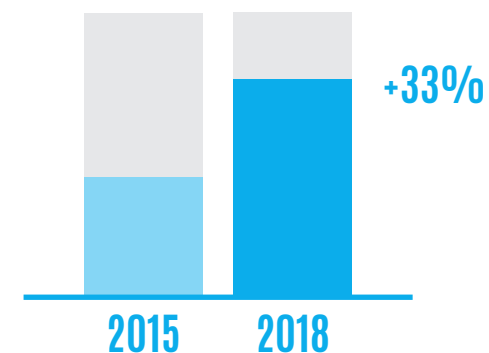
By June 2018:



75.4% of respondents reported that the facilitated dialogue sessions changed their opinion about the causes of tensions and violence in their communities.



96% of respondents said that arts-based cultural events like dance and drama had enhanced their understanding of the underlying reasons for farmers or the herdsmen choices.



77% surveyed said they had good relationships with people from the other group (farmers and pastoralists) (44% at the baseline).

Approach:

Search's strategy was to increase horizontal cohesion across identities through greater engagement and understanding between farmers and herders in order to reduce violent conflict. The team used population surveys to understand changes in the attitudes and perceptions of the groups.

DIALOGUE

→ Conflict transformation workshops

Convened diverse stakeholders to discuss early signs of violence and discuss shared problems.

MEDIA

→ Radio magazine

Promoted strategies for peaceful coexistence and diverse cultural narratives.

COMMUNITY

→ Participatory theater performance

Cultural events promoted understanding of the outgroup's lifestyle and culture.

VERTICAL COHESION

Do people engage differently with those in power?

People often have fraught relationships with the decision-makers and those in power, and adversarial approaches can quickly become the preferred (and sometimes only) method to engage one another. Search tackles these dynamics, by engaging both community members as well as local leaders in a dialogue through town hall meetings and peace committees among others. To understand their success, teams most often looked for people at the receiving end of policies to feel that they can access decision-makers and those in power, and for local government officials to improve responsiveness to those they serve within the bounds of the constraints they may face.

MEASURING VERTICAL COHESION

Community members' trust in institutions has been an effective measure of vertical cohesion, along with confidence measures, and preferred means of communicating with leaders. Teams also examine whether actors within these institutions understand, listen and respond to concerns of the people they serve.

→ **Outcome harvesting** was an effective method of identifying shifts in vertical relationships that are not easily predictable: policy shifts, inclusion of new people in existing mechanisms, and new initiatives. Qualitative tracking of outcomes also allowed for analysis of new and unanticipated conflicts that arose as a result of targeted cohesion efforts. In particular, gender inclusion work sometimes gave rise to new challenges in spaces that were traditionally for men, and needed to be addressed for processes to move forward.

→ **Surveys** measured trust in institutions by examining both the trust in the intentions of leaders, and the trust in their leadership (for example whether security forces can keep people safe, or whether government leaders are able to ensure access to services). In addition, longitudinal analysis with trained groups of authorities explored

whether those in leadership were more aware of, or more confident in fulfilling, their responsibilities to constituents.

→ Social network analysis and relational data collection were also useful within closed groups of leaders (for example, between civil society actors and government actors) to better understand how they coordinate vertically over time.

CHALLENGES TO MEASURING HORIZONTAL COHESION

→ Vertical relationships are often characterized as government and citizen relationships; however, power dynamics guide relationships across several decision-making platforms. Local leaders, government actors at local and national levels, police, military, elders, and more—all of the relevant groups need to be separated so that inclusion, representation and trust in decision-making can be measured accurately.

→ Shifts in leadership—and particularly government leadership—also make the impact of vertical cohesion difficult to track. As authorities transfer precincts or provinces, it often becomes challenging to measure the cumulative impact of cohesion efforts.

ON AVERAGE IN PROGRAMS, THERE WAS:

- A 19% increase in community awareness of important laws and policies they needed to know about to access government services
- A 32% increase in understanding of accountability for members of security forces
- 34% increase in local government officials' confidence in their capability to get things done (18 before, 52 after), partly due to their more consistent and regular interaction with community members

COUNTRY CASE:

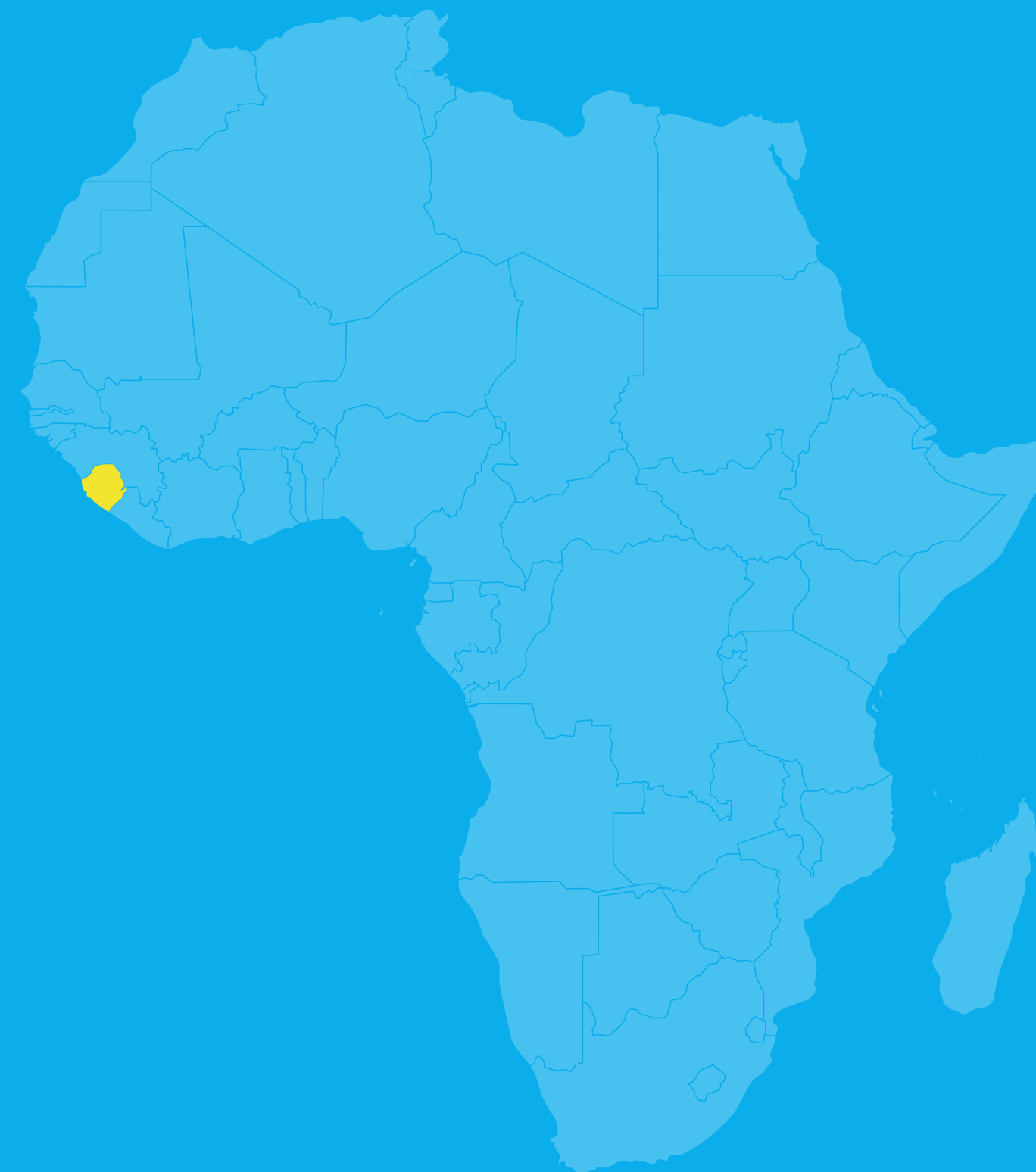
BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN ELECTIONS IN SIERRA LEONE

A decade after the end of civil conflict, the stakes of the 2018 elections in Sierra Leone were high, because despite solid institutions being in place, the political competition posed a risk of causing renewed divisions in Sierra Leonean society.

A strained relationship and polarisation between the major parties, highly personality-driven politics, recurrent ethnic mobilisation of voters, widespread corruption, vote buying, and mistrust among citizens were worrying trends that cast a shadow on the ability of the government to deliver free, fair and peaceful elections. Moreover, women, youth and other marginalized represented a group that had historically been relegated to the sidelines of the electoral process, posing a challenge to the credibility of the upcoming elections, and peace and democracy in Sierra Leone more broadly.

In response, Search programming took a holistic approach engaging communities (including women and youth), election management bodies, decision-makers (including political parties and parliamentarians), civil society groups and media, through a large community outreach effort and innovative, participatory tools to ensure that the electoral process responds to policy-driven

priorities, while defusing tensions related to political affiliations and identity politics. Although we saw an increase in the public's confidence in the National Election Commission's ability to count votes fairly in the aftermath of the project, there was a significant regional disparity between regions. Those in the northern region, the stronghold of the party that lost the elections, had much lower confidence in the electoral process than those in Eastern region, where satisfaction was much higher. Along with multiple incidents of political violence during the electoral cycle, this could potentially diminish trust in democratic processes moving forward. Future attention will thus expand the scope beyond the electoral cycle and shift greater attention toward groups that remain marginalized by government processes.



Sierra Leone Timeline:



— social cohesion effort



— conflict details

JUN 2016

Sierra Leone declared Ebola-free after the outbreak ends with 28,600 cases and 11,325 deaths, having impacted the healthcare system, the economy, and a severe breakdown in trust in the authorities.

JAN 2017

Search and partners create voter registration campaigns and outline citizen demands for good governance.

JULY 2017

Search and the Talking Drums Studio produce episodes of the Atunda Ayenda soap opera and editions of Uman for Uman radio magazine. These culminate with the Election Media Centre that broadcasted live election coverage in the network of 40 radio stations across the country.

AUGUST 2017

Search and its partners launch a people with disabilities agenda to promote the development and implementation of pro-disability policies.

FEB 2018

The run up to the elections is marked by political violence between supporters of two major political parties, voter intimidation by the police, and reports of ethnically-based clashes.

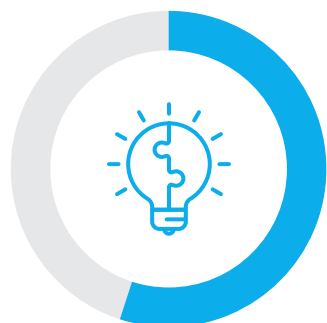
MAR-SEPT 2018

Search conducts training for newly-elected female officials to provide them with resources to understand and affect change in their new roles.

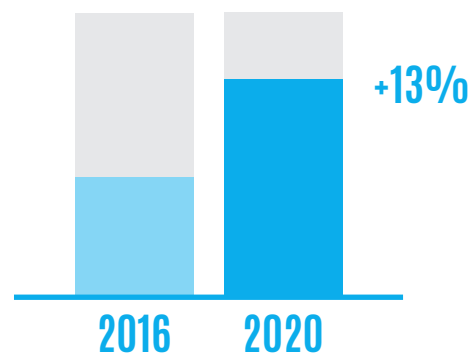
NOVEMBER 2020

Search continues its work with women leaders through an ongoing project focused on creating women-led initiatives promoting government accountability and social cohesion. Talking Drums studio has produced 100 episodes of the now popular soap opera and 100 editions of its radio magazine to date.

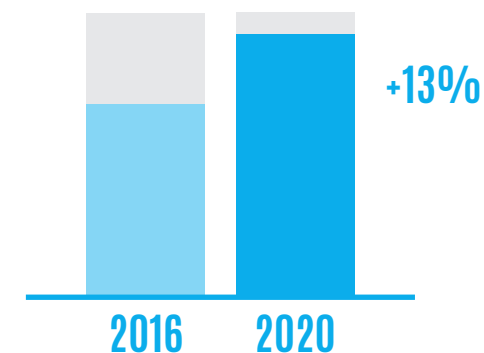
By the end of the election:



55% of respondents reported that their understanding of policy issues on the electoral and democratic process was improving, compared to 40% at the beginning of the project.



81% of respondents reported being confident that their votes would be counted fairly, in comparison to only 68% in the beginning of the project.



91% of respondents reported being satisfied with the democratic process compared to 78% at the beginning.

Approach:

Search focused on increasing individual agency and vertical cohesion by increasing citizens' awareness about their rights and responsibilities, and supporting the capacity of institutions to perform their duties. The team used survey monitoring and qualitative analysis of women and people with disabilities to understand knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of the electoral and democratic processes.

DIALOGUE

- Training government officials
- National Debate Committee
- Platform for people with disabilities

Designed to enable newly-elected government officials to execute their roles effectively, civil society actors to carry out post-election management, and create constructive platforms for people with disabilities to express their needs.

MEDIA

- Soap opera
- Radio magazine
- Social media
- Election Media Centre

Developed platforms to increase awareness about governance and raise women's voices. The Election Media Centre required coordination across news outlets to ensure accurate information was shared about elections.

COMMUNITY

- Youth peace clusters
- Security groups

Campaigns encouraged persons with disabilities, women and youth to register and vote.

SECTION 5:

HOW SOCIAL COHESION ENDURES

Social cohesion is a long-term investment.

In the span of the projects discussed in this report, there were fits and starts of violent conflict interspersed with encouraging and incremental changes among target communities and individuals.

After following up with six program teams and former participants from the programs, we discovered several aspects of these projects that endure today and some aspects that may pose challenges to the sustainability of cohesion.

MORE TRAINING CATALYZATION NEEDED

The idea that interventions were good, but not enough, presents a challenge to the prospect of social cohesion enduring. In follow up interviews with project participants, a common theme was that they would like others in their communities to have the same experience with a Search training that they had. Interviewees who were still using their skills often felt that their work could be stronger with more people like them - who had similar mediation or relationship building skills. In the case of mediators in Burundi, they thought their work would have avoided certain challenges and been made much easier by having judges, land commissioners and other government officials receiving the same mediation training.

SUPPORT AND COLLECTIVE ACTION GROUPS

In Burundi, the Duhuze Boze association of trained conflict mediators took it upon themselves to continue the work of land conflict mediation with no external support. They meet regularly to discuss cases and act collectively as mediators between courts and parties to the cases. "We realized that alone we could not be as effective in mediating conflicts as if we were regularly coordinating."¹³ This association continues to play critical roles in settling land conflicts which may otherwise escalate to violence.

LIVELIHOODS IMPACTING MOTIVATION AND LONGEVITY

Another clear challenge to positive changes in social cohesion enduring is that of livelihoods. Interviewees in South Sudan made it clear that it has been difficult to build their networks and positive relationships in their communities without consistent income. The Rabita founder is quick to point out, however, that the fact that they are an agricultural cooperative is in part why they have lasted and expanded. Similarly, in Nigeria the idea of addressing livelihoods was also raised as a potential challenge. While communities may have more access to information and platforms for dialogue, economic realities still pose a threat to the sustainability of positive developments. Economic well-being is not the same as social cohesion, but it serves as a mitigating factor threatening cohesion. Therefore training and resources that support concrete skills development, or facilitate collective goals that were already relevant and within reach of community members are good places to start to ensure long-term impact and support structures endure.

LOCAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

In Juba, South Sudan, women who attended a training on peacebuilding and livelihoods in 2018 created Rabita (Unity), a network that sits at an intersection of an agricultural cooperative and informal support system for women championing social cohesion in their neighborhood. "We can be supportive of one another; because if you are many, you can easily share in your happiness and sorrow and encourage one another in such times."¹⁴ They split labor and crop yields while implementing a higher mission to build better relationships in their community, especially among women. The network has now expanded into Mundri, and incorporates a sewing cooperative. Mundri and Juba are very heterogeneous communities in South Sudan, which has been challenging in a historical context

of interethnic violence and low trust. Yet, these women created a diverse group who not only look after each other, but go out of their way to reach out to their neighbors in times of strife and build relationships crossing divides between women and neighbors.

PLATFORMS FOR DIALOGUE AND INFORMATION SHARING

In Nigeria, community platforms created by the project have endured beyond funding and coordination of Search; they convene regularly to identify early signs of conflict and how to discuss how to de-escalate the situation. "Prior to the project, there was no such thing in these communities. That has also helped sustain the legacy, that has also helped sustain the objectives of the project, because we are in constant touch with them."¹⁵

In these cases, Search's activities catalyzed the passions of individuals to continue to build cohesion in their communities, equipped with skills and renewed passion to carry forward long-term change.

COUNTRY CASE:

STRENGTHENING LONG STANDING MECHANISMS TO ADDRESS CONFLICT IN THE GREAT LAKES

Histories of civil war and political upheaval forced many Burundians, Rwandans and Congolese to flee into neighboring countries or provinces, either living as displaced persons or refugees across the region.

With ebbs and flows of violent conflict over decades came outflows of refugees and inflows of returnees. “When we left the country, we knew where our houses were and came back to find no house or someone else living in them” one Burundian returnee commented.¹⁶

Land ownership disputes are a consistent driver of conflict in the Great Lakes region of Africa. They are frequently rooted in disagreements over familial inheritance, discrepancies of ownership delimitation, access to resources, and the rights of refugees to return. At their worst, these conflicts can escalate to outright violence. Search partnered with traditional leaders, civil society, local radio stations and government. Teams partnered with these traditional mediators across the region specifically because of their skills and mechanisms for conflict resolution. They worked with them to build on these skills and develop approaches specifically

tailored to land conflict, and then mediators shared information about their work with the population. We followed up on the experience of Bashingantahe mediators in Burundi, and community members who dealt with land conflicts in these same communities. Three years after the project ended, 2020 was a contentious election year in Burundi with many changes in local and national leadership. We unpacked how the relationships and structures built through mediation have endured.



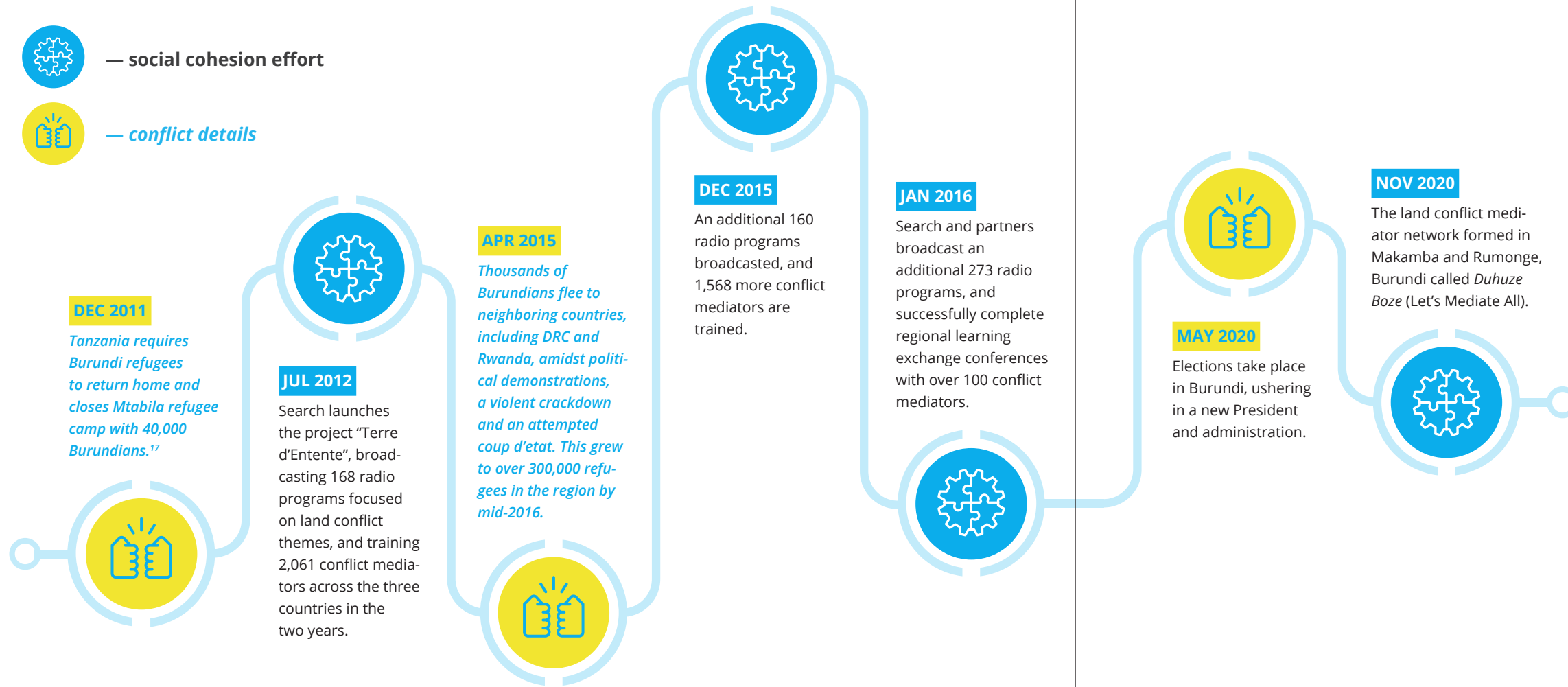
Great Lakes Timeline:



— social cohesion effort



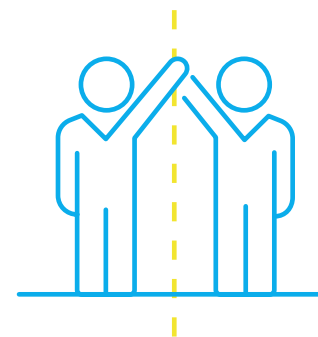
— conflict details



Long-term Results:



A strong network of local leaders, called Duhuze Boze, continue to resolve land conflicts across two of the southern provinces in Burundi, and attribute their existence to Search's activities years ago.



Two members of this network were vehement rivals from two communities, one returning and one who considered himself a resident, but they are now important allies in resolving land conflicts together.

“You would go to the bar, you’d see returnees sitting on one side and residents sitting on another, but now I don’t see that anymore.”

— a Burundian returned from Tanzania describing the transformation of relationships

Interviewees said that while land conflicts persist, they are largely a familial issue in Burundi now instead of a directly political or ethnic problem. Integration was the marker of this success.

Approach:

Search aimed to increase vertical cohesion by building capacity in local institutions and traditional leaders to resolve land conflicts. They hoped to ease horizontal tensions by providing an outlet for effective mediation on which they could rely without taking cases to court. The team used outcome harvesting and population surveys to understand changes in citizen perception and use of local mechanisms to resolve land conflict.

DIALOGUE

→ Mediation training

Built capacities of communities to resolve land conflicts peacefully through local structures.

MEDIA

→ Radio programs across the three countries
→ Video documentaries on land conflicts

Shared information about land rights, and created space to discuss issues related to land conflict.

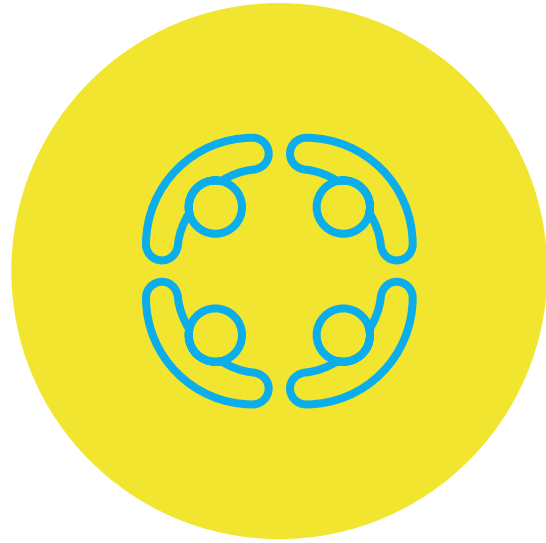
COMMUNITY

→ Regional learning exchange conferences with over 100 conflict mediators from the region

Mediators brought together in conference to share and learn from each others' experiences.

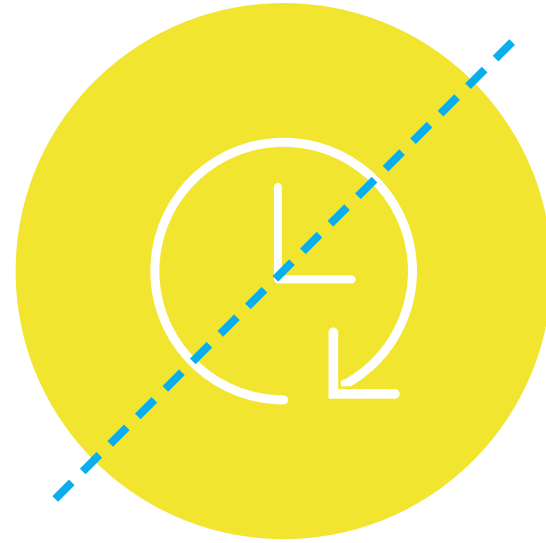
SECTION 6:

WHAT WORKS (& DOESN'T) WHEN INVESTING IN SOCIAL COHESION



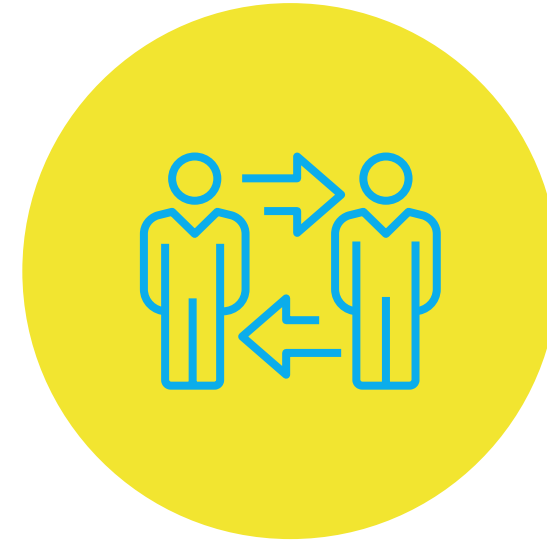
DO: Empower individuals to shape their communities

Search's investment in boosting skills and knowledge of youth, religious leaders, government officials and other community leaders in peacebuilding have shown positive results. Yet, studies have also shown that *values* of peace, tolerance and pluralism determine whether individuals and groups will use their obtained knowledge and skills.¹⁸ Values can be taught, and peacebuilding organizations ought to aim to shape them, and measure the changes in individual and collective values.



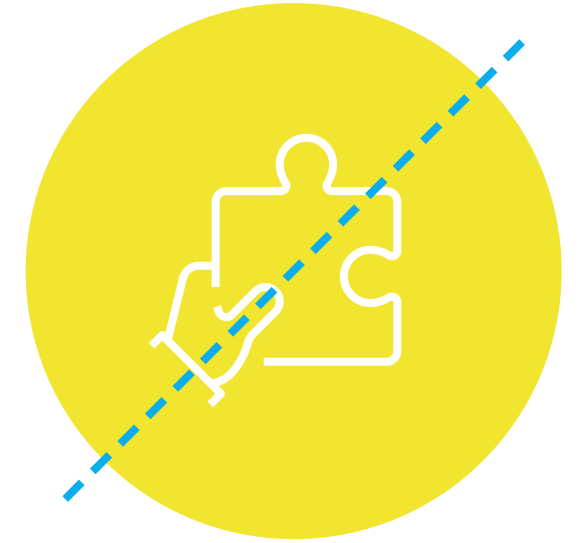
DON'T: Think about social cohesion in short-term cycles

Healing deep divides in conflict-affected communities is not a rapid process. Building cohesive communities requires sustained engagement over years or decades. Therefore, those investing in social cohesion should retire any assumptions that drastic society-wide changes can occur in short project cycles. Returns on investment in social cohesion will take time to realize; political upheaval and shifts in donor funding priorities can equally disrupt short-term gains. But, sustained engagement by donors, international peacebuilding organizations, and local champions can prevail to provide long-term dividends.



DO: Make room to foster & support positive, unintended results

Search's projects have often seen very encouraging spin-off initiatives that will help short-term changes endure into the future. When participants in one training form new neighborhood security groups, women's support networks, or take collective action, those who made the initial investment must discover ways to provide moral and tangible support so that those outcomes can flourish and take a life of their own.



DON'T: Focus on single measures of "success"

Cohesion needs to be measured in several ways to examine the sum of trust, attitudes, concrete behavior changes, and self-perception. In South Sudan, if researchers had only measured trust, we would have missed that participants' behavior continued to shift positively and stayed closely linked to an overall shift in identity—despite the incredible challenges.

SECTION 7:

WHAT'S NEXT AT SEARCH?

As is standard for ever-changing conflicts, new challenges and opportunities arise with changes in climate, technology, new forms of governance and activism—and what works to build cohesion and address violence evolves in turn.

In the current era of physical distancing and increased isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining “the glue” that binds individuals together in society has become an increasingly pertinent endeavor. As COVID plays out across the world, governing bodies in conflict-affected communities are all similarly struggling to provide services and maintain legitimacy faced with the additional strain of the pandemic. Search has oriented their attention to adapting to the changing context and conditions communities are facing.

Search continues to develop understanding of peace and conflict, and has identified priorities related to peace and conflict dynamics to further unpack in 2021.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- **Research reports.** You can read our short and long form reports that consolidate global lessons we are learning based on evidence generated from our programs and approaches.
- **Digital Platforms.** Engage in online discussions and digital conversations that join people from around the world,¹⁹ including local practitioners and influencers, who are addressing conflict through social cohesion.
- **Research Mapping.** We will be launching a mapping of our research to connect concepts in peace and conflict, and show how they build upon one another. *Refer to the Framework for Peace and Conflict under Measuring Cohesion on Pg __.*

ON SOCIAL COHESION

- **Tracking misinformation.** The spread of misinformation corrodes the trust between people, and between citizens and the institutions they rely on for services. We will publish and share research about how misinformation manifests, the motivations fueling it, and the risks it brings to COVID response for the rest of 2021.
- **The influence of media and social media programming on social cohesion.** Search will share the results of its real-time tracking of the effects of media and social media programming across six countries in Africa and the Middle East, and the lessons learned on trust-building during the pandemic. They will be available on [DME for Peace](#) and the Search website.
- **The impact of social networks.** In addition to our more common measures of social cohesion, Search analyzes social networks to map and measure relationships and flows of information between people. Search recently released a social network assessment on Sudan in October 2020, and will share additional cases in Spring 2021.

ON VIOLENCE

- **Creating cohesion in the world of social media.** Although conflict is often thought of as physical violence, social media also serves as a space where divisive content can fuel tensions that feed back into our physical world in the form of violence. Search is looking forward to continuing to partner with Facebook to identify the barriers to setting and maintaining social norms that create the online communities people want, and will be looking at how these norms relate to violence in several cases across the globe.
- **Understanding how investing in social cohesion impacts physical violence.** Search will dive further into the relationship between social cohesion incidents and intensity of physical violence. Reports produced in partnership with ACLED will be released in Spring and Summer 2021.

ON A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- **Diversifying our definition of peace.** Search is testing models to bring in more of the ways that people define peace for themselves into our understanding of complex concepts like social cohesion, peace, and justice. Our research will share how this impacts the decisions made in social cohesion programming in concrete terms, when diversity of peace is taken into account.





SUPPORTING MATERIALS

MEASURING SOCIAL COHESION

This research outlines what social cohesion is - how Search practitioners have measured it, where we see trends that track globally, and how people living in conflict understand the 'endurance' of the changes social cohesion programming can bring about.

MEASURING SOCIAL COHESION AND CONFLICT

Social cohesion, as a concept, is abstract. It overlaps with and connects with other concepts developed to unpack and identify aspects of society - in this case, in relationship to peace and conflict dynamics.

In order to identify the value of social cohesion and programming related to it, practitioners and researchers need to understand how it fits with other concepts that we consider, like violence, fragility, resilience, justice, reconciliation, and more. Each of these are complex ideas with multiple ways to measure them and compare their relative importance when making choices about the right ways to invest in safer, healthier, and more just societies.

Because this study examines cases from the past five years at Search, most projects do not align perfectly, and use sets of measures that are (rightfully) context-dependent and relevant for their specific cases. However interestingly, the measures fit well into the three outcomes for social cohesion: agency, horizontal cohesion, and vertical cohesion. Most measures also aligned closely with our six themes for understanding conflict more broadly. Search has a narrow set of measures within the six themes meant to align global measurement at Search from 2020 onward. Those measures we found in programs that align with the framework are outlined in the graphic above.

Thematic measures repeated across projects specifically relevant for Social Cohesion that we found are outlined as "additional outcomes" in the infographic. And those indicators and signs of cohesion that were defined in interviews and focus groups are outlined above, as well.

Together, the three sets of outcomes create a model for measuring social cohesion, and a template for comparing social cohesion and its value to other concepts. With this framework we can identify the unique value of each type of investment as we continue research.

MEASUREMENT APPROACHES IN THE EVALUATIONS

In population surveys, teams often experience drop-off of responses with too many questions. Therefore, large indexes for cohesion and longer hypothetical scenarios that ask people to choose what they would do in a given situation are accurate, they often require many more questions (and more complex questions) than people are prepared to answer. Direct questions actually did show trends effectively and allow for analysis of the differences across communities, change over time. Shorter and more direct questions also allowed teams to measure multiple aspects of peace more efficiently (while less perfectly), and that enabled analysis of the tensions between different types of cohesion and other factors influencing peace.

For the purposes of this review, all evaluations used included survey data that could be aggregated based on representative surveys. The statistics used in the report are descriptive, showing patterns across surveys conducted in different countries using similar measures that we were able to group. These do not claim with statistical significance that projects were the sole influencer of these shifts in data, and in fact in some cases like South Sudan's it is very clear that violence impacted the numbers dramatically year to year. The patterns are interesting, however, in that they allow us to understand whether cohesion programming generally does yield results. In fact, it does so consistently across different

types of measures related to agency, horizontal cohesion, and vertical cohesion. The main challenge being social cohesion is constantly recalibrating in relation to other aspects of a conflict.

Because of that, the unanticipated outcomes identified with qualitative methods provided effective data for teams trying to understand these competing relationships in real-time. The cases highlight some of these nuances in programs, and how focus specific subgroups did not create cohesion for all.

EVALUATION REVIEW AND CASE SELECTION

To answer these questions about social cohesion, the team began by conducting a review of Search's 163 project evaluations completed since 2015. The research team, led by Search's Institutional Learning Team in partnership with members of several country teams, narrowed this group of evaluations based on several criteria. In order to be included in the research, projects needed to be:

- Designed specifically for social cohesion (*and not primarily other types of peacebuilding*)
- At least one year long
- Focused on population or community-wide cohesion (*as opposed to cohesion within a smaller group of selected leader*)
- Organized with baseline and final evaluations that included representative samples of target population

This narrowed our sample to 22 specific cases of social cohesion programming. From there, evaluations were reviewed to look for patterns across the projects. The research team mapped patterns to look at the types of change, program targets, and specific themes covered. Results were grouped by theme and type to establish patterns in social cohesion work across the sample.

The mapping process aligned with Search's framework for measuring peace and conflict, which includes positive and negative indicators of cohesion, and examines the magnitude of each indicator. It was developed in 2019, meaning most of the evaluations were not

designed to align to it. Those indicators cross 6 core themes of measurement for peace and conflict, each with sub-indicators. Measures were grouped to identify those that aligned with this framework. Agency is one of themes, horizontal cohesion fits within the Polarization theme (including both positive and negative markers), and vertical cohesion fits within the theme of Institutional Legitimacy (which includes relational factors, but also includes functional markers of service provision across different levels of authority). Once measures were coded it was possible to identify the patterns across types of results, and what other types of conflict were measured against cohesion (most often violence and service provision).

PROFILE CASES

The team then chose 6 cases, selected across different geographic regions and to maximize representation of different types of programming. To draw contrasts between implementing social cohesion programs in different contexts, we selected four contexts for their comparable conflict dynamics as well as the very distinct or unique aspects affecting social cohesion and programmatic choices.

Projects chosen were in Lebanon, Nigeria, Nepal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and across the Great Lakes region in Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda. For case profiles the research team went back to participants and community members where the project took place. Due to challenges with COVID lockdown in Nepal and the explosion in Beirut, our teams were unable to finalize interviews for this report, but plan to include these cases as addendums to the report once it is possible.

The research team conducted 8 interviews with past program participants and four focus groups with members of target communities where programs took place. Interviews and focus groups isolated the personal experiences and reflections of participants, and their experiences after the project. It was an opportunity to understand what types of results continue to impact communities after the projects end, and to understand if these types of results matter (and why) for people living with conflict.

GLOSSARY

AGENCY

A individual's freedom to pursue and achieve goals or values that they regard as important

ATTITUDES

A settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something; influences someone's thoughts and actions

AWARENESS

Consciousness about what is and about what else is possible

CONNECTORS

Factors that bring community together

CULTURE

Collective beliefs, systems, myths and practices

DIVIDERS

Factors that divide the community

INSTITUTIONS

Governmental institutions and other structures, which can include networks, unions, associations, and other structures that influence, guide, reward and sanction human behavior and interaction

KNOWLEDGE

Information acquired through experience or education

LAWS & POLICY

Codified rules that govern society

MOTIVATION

A force that drives people to act

PERCEPTIONS

A person's understanding or interpretation of what he/she hears, sees, experiences

RELATIONSHIPS

Connections and interactions between individuals and groups

ROOT CAUSES

Underlying factors that create or enable conflict

SKILLS

Abilities—specific things that people are able to do

SOCIAL COHESION

The extent of trust in institutions and within society and the willingness to participate collectively toward a shared vision of sustainable peace and common goals.

SOCIAL NORMS

A context-specific rule or behavior that members of a community follow in the belief that others expect them to do so. It often implies incentives, rewards and sanctions. Social norms create accepted and expected behavior

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