

2021 Annual Report

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

Introduction

SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

Search for Common Ground (Search) is an international organization working to transform the way the world deals with conflict. Since 1982, we have led programs around the world to help societies move away from adversarial approaches to dealing with differences and towards collaborative solutions. In 2020, our long-term programming in more than 30 countries and a network of over 800 local partners have enabled Search to reach hundreds of thousands of participants in many of the world's most challenging conflicts.

THE COMMON GROUND APPROACH

The **Common Ground Approach** is a set of broad operating principles that guide and support Search's work around the world. We work to shift communities from intergroup hostility to community-level cooperation in business, law, media, etc. The Common Ground Approach recognizes that changes must take place across the following five areas: the perception of the self, the perception of "the other", the perception of the issues, the transformation of the relationship, and the transformation of the process.

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES

In our work on Sustainable Business Practices, Search applies the Common Ground Approach to transform conflict between communities, local government, and the private sector, in accordance with the Voluntary Principles. In countries experiencing conflict, post-war struggles, political and social upheaval, and economic insecurity Search crucially works to ensure that socio-economic development is felt by all. Our work, oftentimes implemented with private sector partners, makes a critical contribution to stability which is a prerequisite for long-term investments by the private sector and a foundation for socio-economic prosperity.

(A) Commitment to the Voluntary Principles

Within the Voluntary Principles Initiative

Since March 2020, Search for Common Ground has served as a representative of the Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI) NGO Pillar in the VPI **Steering Committee**. In this capacity and along with the other Pillar representatives, Search liaises with other members as regards executive decisions for the VPI and acts as a point of contact for communication and exchange with the Secretariat. In parallel, Search has also served on the Board of Directors of the Voluntary Principles Association.

Over the same period, Search has also served as the **Chair of the NGO Pillar**, in which capacity Search manages the business of the Pillar, arranging and convening monthly meetings of Pillar members and ensuring record-keeping and follow-up. Search has also coordinated ad hoc exchanges with NGO and other members on several issues around external outreach in line with the Voluntary Principles and internal VPI coordination, for example on a joint Corporate and NGO member [statement regarding policing and respect for human rights](#).

Search has participated actively in the member **verification review processes** throughout 2020, including as a lead reviewer for Woodside Energy's verification review in July.

In Search's global programming

Using the Common Ground Approach, Search puts the Voluntary Principles in practice by working alongside communities, companies, public authorities, and security forces to mitigate conflicts and address root causes of instability using four pillars of intervention:

1. Building a company-wide commitment to meaningful stakeholder engagement;
2. Informing and empowering local communities;
3. Creating effective mechanisms for dialogue, collaboration, and dispute resolution
4. Building local government capacity to be more transparent, communicative, and effective at promoting sustainable community development.

Each of these four pillars is accomplished by engaging public and private stakeholders, committing for the long-term, engaging all sides with equal respect and compassion, grounding work in the local culture, taking interventions to scale, and utilizing social entrepreneurship as a tool.

(B) Procedures

Search completed its last verification process in 2019 and looks forward to engaging in the next verification review process next year.

(C) Promotion of the Voluntary Principles

Report on Sustainable Business Practices in Tanzania

In 2020, Search for Common Ground published an [extensive report](#) taking stock of progress made under Search's partnership with Acacia Mining/Barrick Gold in Tanzania's Mara and Shinyanga regions. The report focuses on a programme implemented by Search throughout 2018 and 2019, continuing a partnership with Acacia/Barrick that started in 2011. Based on the findings of an external evaluation, the report outlined the significant return on investment in peacebuilding for Acacia, with a consistent drop in incidents across mine sites, and drew lessons learned for investing in sustainable business practice. Surveys showed that the program interventions were positively associated with an increase in feelings of social cohesion, safety around the mine site, and trust towards the police and Acacia security. The surveys also recorded community perceptions that Acacia and the police had a better understanding of their needs than in previous years and that acts of violence and human rights violations from Acacia and the police had decreased significantly. Further, a strong majority of community members reported feeling empowered to participate in peaceful conflict transformation and that they had the necessary tools and platforms to do this. The report also highlighted that perceptions of safety around mining sites lagged behind real decreases in recorded injuries, fatalities, and grievances, indicating a need for greater action to raise awareness of security gains made.

To maximize dissemination and ensure these findings can inform wider efforts to ensure implementation of the Voluntary Principles, Search organized an interactive learning session on the DME for Peace platform where Carlotta Fassioti, DM&E Specialist for East Africa at Search for Common Ground, led a discussion on "Building Peace through Sustainable Business Practices: What We've Learned". A [recording of the event is available here](#).

Joint Statement on Policing & Human Rights & Webinar on Security, Human Rights, and the Treatment of National Minorities

In summer 2020, in a context of demonstrations around the world condemning police brutality and systemic racism in public security institutions, Search worked with VPI members across the Pillars to determine an appropriate response drawing on the insights offered by the Voluntary Principles.

Search contributed to the organization of a webinar on "Security and Human Rights and the treatment of national minorities" in June 2020. One of the speakers was Kemi Olowoofayoku, an Associate with Search for Common Ground's Central and East Africa Program, where she supports teams working with police, military, and private security in Tanzania, Kenya, South Sudan, and elsewhere on implementation of the Voluntary Principles and respect for human rights within counter-terror and security sector efforts. Kemi Olowoofayoku and the other speakers shared their experiences and efforts regarding the human rights performance of security institutions. The

webinar was open to the public and promoted on the Voluntary Principles website and via Search's networks. A [recording](#) is available on the Voluntary Principles website.

Search also played a leading role in coordinating corporate and NGO members on the publication and promotion of a [Joint Statement on Policing and Human Rights](#) published in July 2020. The statement draws on members' experiences in improving the human rights performance of private and public security providers and shares best practices.

Joint evidence submitted regarding the United Kingdom's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy

In August, when the Government of the United Kingdom announced a brief open call for evidence on its Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, Search mobilized partners in the UK Voluntary Principles Working Group and co-authored a Joint NGO-private sector submission around conflict and business, together with BP, the Centre for Security Sector Governance, International Alert, Shell, and Tullow Oil.

The submission contains an explanation of the Voluntary Principles and their goals, as well as recommendation on the UK's involvement with Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives. The submission also reported on the results and transformative business practices stemming from the cooperation of VPI members, including the increased peace and resiliency fostered by Search's work with Barrick Gold and Acacia Mining in Tanzania.

(D) Country Implementation

Guinea

In late 2020, Search launched a new project on "Improving Dialogue and Accountability Mechanisms around Mining-related Conflicts in Siguiri" in Guinea. Funded by the Société AngloGold Ashanti, the project will continue throughout 2021 and into early 2022 with the aim of preventing and managing specific conflicts related to the SAG mining site, improving social cohesion, and strengthening mutual trust, accountability, and collaboration between all stakeholders in Siguiri.

As part of this, Search will be supporting the effective running of a Conflict Prevention & Management Task Force. In 2020, Search identified and installed members of the Task Force at community and prefecture levels. The establishment of such a Task Force was one of the actions agreed following violence related to the expansion of the Siguiri gold mine in 2015, however the effectiveness of this Task Force has so far been below expectations, prompting Search's intervention to support its revitalisation.

Sierra Leone

Since January 2020, Search has been implementing a project on “Strengthening Transparency and Accountability for Mining Communities in Moyamba and Kono Districts” in Sierra Leone, funded by the German Development Agency. The overall goal of the project, which runs until mid-2021, is to contribute to building trust and accountability in the mining sector, which has been a long-lasting challenge in Sierra Leone.

The project also aims to strengthen the ability of civil society and community-based organizations, local authorities, and mining companies to collaborate around equitable mining in rural mining chiefdom as well as to improve communities’ access to information about mining and environmental and social issues related to the mining sector. The project uses a community-driven approach, creating platforms and opportunities for civil society organizations (CSOs) and community based organizations (CBOs) to engage large- and small-scale mining companies, stakeholders, and citizens in favor of improved services in the target districts.

Strengthening capacity of local CSOs & CBOs

In May, Search convened nine local CSOs and four CBOs as part of a mapping exercise to understand the work, capacities, and reach of organizations in the two districts, with a particular focus on youth organizations and ensuring gender and geographic balance. One-on-one interviews were also conducted with local authorities to understand their views about the CSO-CBO landscape and their role in promoting advocacy around mining governance.

From the convened organizations, two CSOs and four CBOs were selected as core partners under the project. Search has been working closely with these partners to assess and respond to any capacity strengthening needs to increase the ability, confidence and legitimacy of the CSOs and CBOs to advocate for better management of the mining sector. In August, Search conducted dedicated capacity building trainings for 100 participants in Moyamba and in Kono in Financial Management, Project Management, Community Mobilization, Administration, and Non-Adversarial Advocacy Techniques. Following the training, Search recorded a 28 point increase in knowledge across the training content among participants in Moyamba (from 52% to 80%) and a 22 point increase in Kono (from 57% to 79%).

Dialogue on Community Action Plans

Working with the six local partners, Search conducted introductory meetings and baseline analysis discussions in four chiefdoms in Kono and Moyamba Districts. These meetings convened 160 participants, including community stakeholders, chiefdom and district authorities, and representatives from four mining companies. During the meetings, participants were introduced to the project’s context, objectives, and expected outcomes, and to the complementary roles of the mining, chiefdom, district, and community stakeholders in the implementation of the project.

In September, Search organized community meetings in the four chiefdoms to develop Community Action Plans (CAPs) where citizens identified issues related to mining governance and put forward

solutions. Follow-up meetings allowed citizens, local authorities, and mining companies to examine the CAPs together to ensure they reflect the needs of the community. A series of Action-Oriented Town Hall Meetings, bringing together 320 participants in the four chiefdoms, have created a platform for mining companies, communities, and other stakeholders to jointly review the CAPs and find collective ways of solving community issues. Four Scorecard Follow Up Meetings in December allowed participants to assess progress in the implementation of the actions agreed at the Town Hall Meetings. Thanks to these efforts, mining companies and authorities are taking actions that contribute to promoting effective implementation of the Voluntary Principles, transparency, and accountability in the mining sector.

Radio “Bush Wahala” drama

To increase popular understanding of mining policies and promote inclusive and participatory decision-making processes, Search is also producing a radio drama series “Bush Wahala”, based in a satirical mining community called “Wunjei Town”. By the end of 2020, 20 episodes of the drama were produced and broadcast across 33 partner radio stations, including the two community radio stations in Moyamba and Kono, reaching an estimated 3.7 million people. The drama series has contributed to increased awareness about mining laws, contracting, corporate social responsibility and community needs.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Search also implements the Voluntary Principles by working directly with public security forces in contexts where they are involved in conflicts with civilian communities related to business practices like mining. Such is the case with the 18-month “Together for Security” project, launched by Search in September 2019 and financed by the United States Department of State. The project has been implemented in the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in areas where consultations with community members, representatives of the Armed Forces and National Police, and civil society leaders revealed disputes related to the mining and lumber industries among a range of key factors driving conflict between civilians and security forces.

In 2020, the project supported more sustainable, inclusive, and accountable civilian protection efforts in security operations and improved trust and engagement between civilians and security forces through facilitated dialogue, collaborative actions, capacity building, radio broadcasts, and other interventions.

“Tuungane Kwa usalama” Radio Programme

In April, Search started the production of its radio program “Tuungane Kwa usalama” (“Let’s Unite for Security”), which primarily focuses on facilitating dialogue around security issues relevant to communities, authorities, and industries in the South Kivu province. Participants in these broadcast dialogues included community members, heads of security forces, civil society actors, human rights defenders, and provincial authorities.

Local Proximity Security Councils

In November and December and working in close consultation with the Provincial Ministry of the Interior, Search installed new Local Proximity Security Councils (LPSCs) in five locations. The LPSCs provide a space for government, security actors, and civilians to come together and address joint security and peace challenges facing their zone. To reinforce their effectiveness as a platform for dialogue and collaboration, Search is training members of these five LPSCs, as well as those of two other LPSCs previously installed in the province, on conflict transformation, conducting local security diagnostics, creating security plans, and rolling out joint initiatives. In 2021, Search continued working with the CLSPs on community-security service engagement activities such as the town hall meetings, a security and human rights forum, and solidarity activities.

(E) Lessons and Issues

As part of a new long-term **Global Policy & Outreach Strategy**, Search will engage with at least one global industry as a principal target for advocacy efforts. To inform this work, Search conducted research in late 2020 on the current and potential constructive role of the extractive industry in promoting people-centred security and alleviating conflict dynamics in line with the Voluntary Principles in countries where Search is working.

During 2020, with the increased recourse to digital communication tools, Search invested in capacities for running effective and engaging **virtual outreach and discussion events**. These have proven useful in engaging existing and new audiences across borders on the 'why' and 'how' of implementing the Voluntary Principles, and Search will be looking to build on this success in 2021 and beyond.