

YOUTH + COLLECTIVE IMPACT PILOT

In 2017, Search for Common Ground launched an initiative to apply the **collective impact¹ methodology to urban conflict in Jos North, Nigeria and central Colombo, Sri Lanka**. Our pilot sought to introduce a different way for organizations and individuals to work together on addressing and preventing violence in cities with significant youth populations. Unlike typical projects, where NGOs or donors drive the agenda and selectively invite stakeholders for participation at different stages, this approach puts the **decisionmaking power in the hands of the people most affected by and involved** in the issue- **across sectors**, from business, to government, civil society, and community members. **Young people share in decisionmaking**, reversing the “violence of exclusion”² they typically experience, despite being the majority population.

While other initiatives to apply Collective Impact within international development or peacebuilding efforts have focused on shared monitoring and reporting among peacebuilding organizations or strengthening the capacities of civil society organizations for collective action, Search’s initiative focuses on **youth-inclusive**, cross-sector collaboration and decisionmaking between the **parties most affected by and involved in urban conflict**.



SPARKING GREATER COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN CENTRAL COLOMBO, SRI LANKA & JOS NORTH, NIGERIA

The first two years of piloting focused on **developing and testing a model for youth-inclusive collective action at the community- and city-level**. Recognizing the risks of NGO-ization of youth participation with the growth of the Positive Youth Development and Youth, Peace, and Security fields, Search sought a model that would incentivize **longer-term impact-oriented action, address unequal power dynamics** between generations and between international and local actors, **and promote collaboration across sectoral silos**. To date, the **most significant changes sparked by these initiatives have been in the attitudes and behavior** of institutions and individuals towards 1) collaboration and 2) ownership.

The first year of piloting in Jos and Colombo focused on **cultivating trust across a number of divides undermining progress** on physical and structural violence in these cities, including generational, sectoral, and insider-outsider dynamics. Given the history of foreign-funded interventions in both cities and their influence on local markets and expectations, much of the first year also focused on **building buy-in for a different way of operating**. Community members, institutional stakeholders, and local civil society were initially skeptical and even resistant to the concept of Collective Impact. Search invested considerable time and resources upfront to building trust and creating an inclusive process for local ownership through dedicated local coordinators.

¹ The collective impact model, initially articulated by John Kania and Mark Kramer of FSG Consulting in 2011, advocates for collaboration across organizational and sectoral silos for greater collective impact. Search’s methodology builds on the [latest iteration of the “collective impact” model](#) as well as CDA Collaborative Learning Projects’ [“Framework for Collective Impact in Peacebuilding.”](#)

² Young people around the world describe the exclusion and mistrust they face by institutions and decisionmakers as structural and psychological violence, which they experience as a “violence of exclusion.” See the 2018 UN-commissioned study [“The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security.”](#)

— END VIOLENT CONFLICT —

Belgium · Burkina Faso · Burundi · Central African Republic · DR Congo · Ethiopia · Guinea · Indonesia · Iraq · Jerusalem · Kenya · Kyrgyz Republic · Lebanon · Liberia · Macedonia · Madagascar · Mali · Morocco · Myanmar · Nepal · Niger · Nigeria · Rwanda · Senegal · Sierra Leone · South Sudan · Sri Lanka · Sudan · Tanzania · The Gambia · Tunisia · United States · Yemen

As a result, both initiatives have:

- **Created their own identities, shared vision, and intergenerational leadership groups** across divides, adopting their own names as “Jos Stakeholders Centre for Peace,” and “We Build Colombo Together”
- **Identified key gaps and leverage points for collective action** based on locally-led system analyses and research on the interconnected dynamics behind urban conflict
- **Mobilized over 40% of costs for collective action from local resources**, for joint efforts ranging from revitalizing hundreds of city-wide community development councils, to new dialogue and collaboration between security agencies and youth in hot-spot communities, to school rehabilitation and scholarships, and advocacy to improve collaboration through regional and national policies and positions
- **Supplemented start-up funds with volunteering and in-kind donations** such as meeting venues and refreshments, CSR partnerships with local businesses, aligning activities from other existing projects with the new shared visions, and volunteering time and energy to reach out to communities and new members, to promote the work through media, and to organize and facilitate joint activities

Follow these hyperlinks for additional details on the [Jos Stakeholders Centre for Peace](#) and [We Build Colombo Together](#).

Jos Stakeholders Centre for Peace (JSCP):

- Formally-registered network** as of December 2019
- 39 representatives from **religious institutions, business, civil society, academia, government, local communities**
- Over 50% of members represent youth**
- Members elected leadership team, **five-person advisory board of trustees, working groups** to coordinate joint activities
- Collective action targets **key gaps and leverage points** including: hate speech targeting religious groups, ineffective substance abuse prevention, mistrust between communities and security agencies, and exclusion from governance
- Secured two local grants for collective action engaging religious leaders to reduce hate speech and mobilizing young people around elections to prevent violence

We Build Colombo Together (WBCT):

- Informal network of approx. 150 members across **state, private companies, community and civil society** at various levels
- Core leadership team of 12 members, **approx. 60% youth**
- Collective action targets gaps and leverage points including: **ambiguity** over future land ownership / housing, **stigmatization** of poor communities, and **growing disconnect and distrust** between *private & state actors* and communities, *ethnoreligious groups*, and between *urban communities and formal markets*
- Facilitated more than **12 new collaborations between state, private sector, and communities**, including revitalizing the city's community development committees with Colombo Municipal Council to **empower 330+ community leaders representing an estimated 50% of the city's resident population**

LESSONS LEARNED IN PILOTING

In both initiatives, members use regular reflection and feedback mechanisms to connect learning with collective action. [CDA Collaborative Learning Projects](#) joined Search's initiative as a learning partner in 2017 and published a [learning paper on the pilots in January 2019](#). Key lessons identified in the paper and over the past year include:

- In polarized contexts, an **incremental process of trustbuilding** with various small-group and intra-group consultations and dialogues *must precede any joint analysis or collective visioning* by diverse stakeholders.
- Small-scale funding, in-kind donations, and volunteer efforts for joint activities are *essential for building local ownership and independence* but *insufficient to sustain collaboration* among various stakeholders. Active **engagement largely hinges on the credibility, convening, and dispute resolution skills** of a *dedicated, paid coordinator*.
- Despite growing recognition and emphasis on youth participation among civil society, youth participation in *decisionmaking and leadership* of community-led and locally-led initiatives likely requires **proactive stewardship**.
- *Aspirational visions around wellbeing* have been more effective in creating a **sense of unity and catalyzing collaboration** in polarized contexts than targeted problem statements. **Language around conflict and violence** may actually make common understanding *more difficult*.
- The **identities (e.g. ethnic, religious, gender, insider-outsider)** of the organizations and staff involved in initiating Collective Impact in conflict contexts are *key to their ability to convene diverse groups and build trust*.
- While programmatic flexibility is imperative to Collective Impact, it also *creates uncertainty* for stakeholders who are more familiar with predefined project objectives and timeframes. **Connecting the theoretical process of long-term collaboration to tangible quick-win activities** was key for buy-in to a new way of operating.

STRATEGY FOR BUILDING EVIDENCE & IMPACT

Search launched these pilots with limited funding through our Children & Youth division's core grant, intending to **test our assumptions around youth participation and see whether the initiatives would take root and transition to local ownership**. In both locations, the initiatives have begun this transition - in Jos, the initiative has formally registered as a network and is opening its own bank account after securing two local grants. In Colombo, though the network remains informal, several corporate and public offices have aligned long-term budgeted initiatives with WBCT's agenda. However, neither initiative has been able to secure adequate resources or funding to sustain "backbone" coordination or rapid unplanned actions in response to emerging crises (such as the Easter attacks in Sri Lanka). At the start of 2020, we are at a **critical turning point for both learning and sustainability**:

→ **Sustaining progress**: Search is committed to supporting and accompanying the initiatives in the transition to true local-ownership by continuing to provide "backbone" coordination until the networks are able to do so themselves. This entails a **dedicated coordinator in each location and operational costs for convening stakeholders and organizing joint activities**.

→ **Building evidence**: This initiative is part of Search's **learning agenda to advance knowledge and evidence around youth, peace, and security**. Documenting learning and evidence on youth participation and Collective Impact is a priority for the pilots going forward. Lines of inquiry include:

- *What is the impact of youth participation in community- or city-level decisionmaking on peace and security?*
- *What are the key elements for meaningful youth participation in intergenerational Collective Impact?*
- *What are the best methods for transitioning Collective Impact to fully local- and youth-inclusive ownership?*
- *How can we best measure local, youth-inclusive ownership of Collective Impact initiatives?*

→ **Scaling impact**: Search proposes to **expand the local "backbone" teams** for additional organizing and communication capacity to support high-leverage joint activities responding to emerging issues and crises. These additional investments would enable the initiatives to reach greater scale within their cities and facilitate institutionalization of Collective Impact approaches by providing greater proof-of-impact.



LEADERSHIP & CAPACITY IN YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING

Search for Common Ground (Search) is one of the largest conflict transformation organizations in the world. Since 1982, we have led programs around the world to help societies channel their differences away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions, with young people as key partners. Our long-term programming in 43 countries and network of over 1,200 partners around the world enabled Search to reach over 700,000 direct participants and 50 million people through media programs in 2016, in many of the world's most challenging conflicts.

Since establishing our Children & Youth division in 2002, Search has led the field in working with young people as partners for peace. As a founding co-chair of the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, we have convened UN agencies, NGOs, youth-led civil society and others to create what is now known as the youth, peace and security agenda. In close partnership with both young people and power-holders, we innovate at the edges of peacebuilding practice and bring what we learn into the mainstream. This approach has seen considerable results in recent years, including the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018).

CONTACTS

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For more information on Search for Common Ground's programs, please visit the following links:

www.sfcg.org
www.sfcg.org/children-and-youth/