

A group of five women are standing in front of a dark, horizontally-plank wooden wall. The woman in the center-left is wearing a colorful patterned dress with orange and blue motifs and a gold necklace. To her right is a woman in a purple and teal patterned dress. Other women are visible in the background, some wearing headwraps. The overall tone is serious and focused.

CONFLICT *Re*IMAGINED

SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND
2017 PROGRESS REPORT



“It’s a new beginning.
It helps us imagine what does not exist...
It has transformed us.”

- THANUJA, 31, SRI LANKA

1. ReTHINK

2016 was a transformational year. Some countries experienced deepening conflict, while others were blessed with rapid economic growth. Populism and ideological fracturing took the world by storm. In hindsight, these changes seem inevitable — but the world missed them. How?

It is because 2016’s upheavals had long been simmering. In fact, today’s civil unrest is hardly a sudden phenomenon. Its origins go back to globalization, new technologies, shifting market trends, and increased personal insecurity.

The 20th century was defined by similar disruption cycles, leading to one of the most violent ages of human history. Now, well into the 21st century, these patterns emerge in new forms — from Boko Haram to ISIS, from the Arab Spring to Brexit, from Ukraine to the United States. It’s a fact that every disruption of the status quo carries an increased risk of conflict with it. But while conflict may be an inevitable consequence of change, violence isn’t.

These lessons from the past are core to our vision for the future.

At Search for Common Ground, we recognize our own challenges in adapting to change. Over 35 years, we developed into the largest dedicated peacebuilding organization because of our unmatched set of tools, our ties with the communities where we work, and our evidence-based approach. While this remains true today, the crises of 2016 have laid bare that our 20th-century strategies must evolve to meet 21st-century challenges.

That’s why 2016 was the year we began looking forward — to rethink our role in the world. Our global staff of 600 came together to help shape a multi-year strategic plan and vision. We put everything on the table: from what we believe, to how we make our impact, to where we operate.

As part of this process, we identified 4 core goals:

- To tackle conflict not at a country level, but looking at wider, regional conflict systems;
- To formalize the *Common Ground Approach*, our unique set of strategies to transform violent conflict, so that practitioners and citizens alike can access and understand it;
- To help spur a global movement of citizen-peacebuilders;
- To rebuild fundamental architectures within our organization, in order to maximize organizational efficiency.

In the end, the last two years were about rethinking everything — not for the sake of Search, but for the sake of the impact we are equipped to make at this pivotal time in history. They were about ensuring that the tools we use aren’t simply repurposed from old conflicts, but designed for contemporary challenges. Most importantly, they were about doing everything in our power to make certain that the world looks back on 2016 and 2017 as a peak, not a catalyst, for 21st-century conflict.

Throughout this report, you will read powerful stories from across our global operations, showing that, despite our evolution at the operational level, we have never had a more inspiring year for programmatic impact. Because, at our core, we will never lose focus on what’s important – transforming destructive conflict and enabling the world’s women, men, and children to thrive.



Rebuilt

With this renewed vision and approach, we set out to reconstruct Search, from the heart of our programs to every system that supports them.



PAST

Our goal has always been to work ourselves out of a job. If we make lasting change in people's ability to deal with conflict constructively, they won't need us anymore. When we start working in countries, they're often embroiled in violence and turmoil. Now, many of the countries where we work haven't faced widespread violence in years. Conflict may still emerge, but those within it will be equipped with the skills to handle it without resorting to violence. Our work there is done.



PRESENT

We're increasingly shifting our focus to the most destabilizing geographies in the world. From Syria to the Great Lakes of Africa, violence often spills across borders and disrupts an entire region. That's why we are taking a wide-lens approach to conflict, working at the source of violence as well as on the downstream effects. Our new, multi-year strategic plan reflects this new mode of operating.



FUTURE

If we want to stop the next crisis before it starts, we have to build the skills to handle conflict in our global institutions. We're constructing a whole new approach based on 21st-century tools — virtual exchange, gamification, mobile apps — and learning from social and advocacy movements. We plan to shift global norms about conflict so that humanity can unite to solve its most pressing challenges. From policymakers to diplomats, parents to teenagers, we need everyone's help.

FOUNDATION

To power this programmatic renovation, we're investing in key systems and personnel across the organization.

We have begun restructuring our technical teams at headquarters to better support our peacebuilders on the ground. This means attracting new and diverse talent to help meet our ambitious goals and ensure world-class operations.

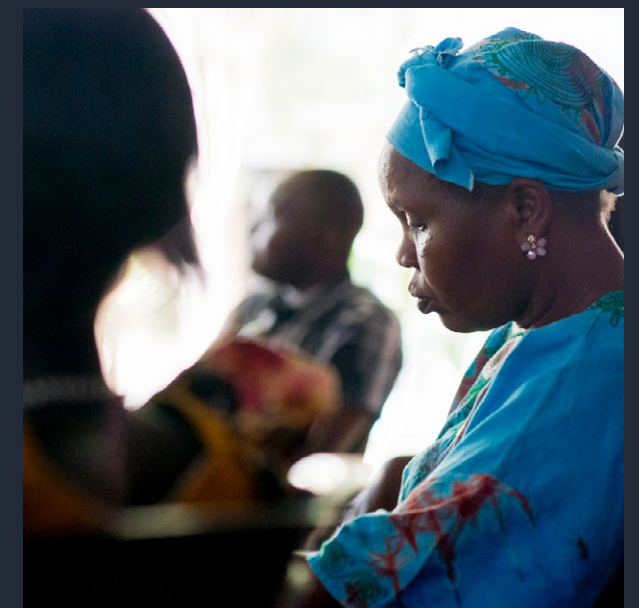
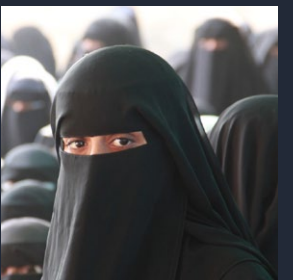
We are completely overhauling our financial systems to maximize the impact of each dollar on the communities where we work. This includes rolling out a global IT roadmap toward innovative, modern global information systems, in order to allow our offices across 35 countries to be in real-time coordination with headquarters

on financial matters, security issues, business development opportunities, and more.

We have invested in our global communications, public affairs, and private fundraising teams to ensure our partners — policymakers and citizens alike — get first-hand insight into the reach and value of the work they enable us to do around the world.

We have redoubled our commitment to publicly evaluating our programs and measuring our impact, to keep setting the bar in our field for transparency, efficiency, and accountability.

We are emerging from this process a new organization, uniquely poised to change the world like never before.





TOOLS



COMMON GROUND PRODUCTIONS

Established in 1985, our media division *Common Ground Productions* has shifted entire societies away from violence using the most basic but powerful human tool: stories.

Take *The Team*, a TV drama about a soccer team composed of players from enemy groups, adapted in 18 countries around the world; *Studio Ijambo*, a radio production house that transformed Burundi's media landscape, introducing trainings for journalists on fair and

effective reporting while presenting informative programs that dissipate dangerous rumors; or *The President*, a reality TV show giving young Palestinians a voice in politics and the chance to run for office for the first time. Our programs touch millions of people each year, breaking through decades of mistrust and inspiring generations of change makers.

Watch these shows on our YouTube channel: [youtube.com/user/sfcg](https://www.youtube.com/user/sfcg)



B4H

Battle for Humanity is a game, a journey, a movement to end violence.

Players download the app, take a pledge, and embark on a gamified path toward becoming activists, leaders, and peacebuilders. They take on missions that have a tangible impact on their community, like standing up to bullying or declaring safe zones from violence. The tougher the mission, the more points they earn, rising through the ranks to become heroes in real life.

Battle for Humanity leverages our decades working with youth and the potential of technology to connect us. To join our beta testers and supporters, visit battle4humanity.com



ADVOCACY

To build safer societies, all stakeholders need to row in the same direction. That's why we marry our boots-on-the-ground work with advocacy at the highest level.

Since the Cold War, our advocacy has impacted millions. Through our government partnerships, back-channel diplomacy, and the work of our *Global Affairs* team, our *Children & Youth* division, and our local staff, we guide the drafting and implementation of policy for countries and international organizations. Recently, in Sri Lanka, our joint advocacy efforts with the Parliamentary Women's

Caucus and several women's groups introduced a quota for women in local government and provincial councils. On the international stage, we led a consortium of organizations whose collective advocacy culminated in the unanimous adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security.

This is one way we institutionalize the *Common Ground Approach* for lasting change.



INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING TEAM

The *Institutional Learning Team (ILT)* monitors and evaluates the results of our work and our progress toward sustainable change. This team is critical to ensuring that we learn what works and what doesn't in our projects, informing the design of future initiatives.

ILT was born in 2002 and quickly emerged as a leader in the peacebuilding field, creating a vast body of research that guides the design, monitoring, and evaluation (DME) of programs implemented by us and others all around the world.

ILT has also launched *DME for Peace*, an online community of peacebuilders, evaluators, and academics who share best and emerging practices in design, monitoring, and evaluation. With over 5,500 subscribers, 1,000 resources, blog posts and webinars on the DME of peacebuilding and development programs, a global mentorship program, and a platform designed to accommodate users in locations with low bandwidth, *DME for Peace* has made monitoring, evaluation, and learning accessible to users in over 190 countries.

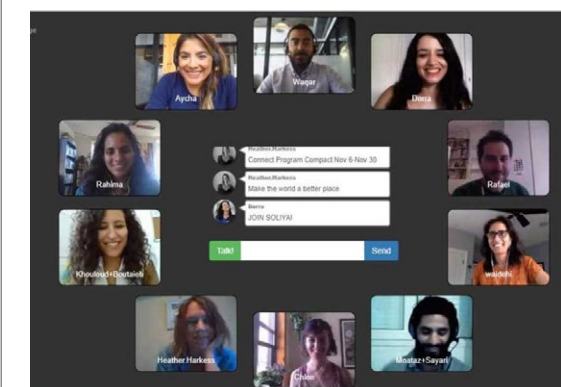


SOLIYA

Founded in 2003, *Soliya* combines the power of dialogue with the reach of new media — connecting, inspiring, and empowering young activists and change makers to shift the way societies relate to each other.

Soliya is a pioneer in the field of virtual exchange, which holds the promise of enabling every young person to have a meaningful cross-cultural experience as part of their education. *Soliya's* flagship virtual exchange program — the Connect Program — and UN-certified Facilitation Training are rooted in neuroscience research led in partnership with MIT and UPenn. Through these initiatives, *Soliya* has engaged thousands of students in 27 countries, supporting and training young leaders who are bridging divides across nations and within their local communities.

Soliya joined us in 2014, becoming a Search affiliate.



3. ReIGNITE

Throughout this phase, we haven't stopped doing what we do best — transforming conflict from a destabilizing force into an engine for progress. In countless communities across the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the U.S., our programs continued to help stop immediate threats of violence while igniting constructive change.

A person's life is not solitary. Each one of our participants is empowered with the tools and process to transform her own life, as well as the lives she touches.

736,731



DIRECT PARTICIPANTS IN 2016

48k **6k** **3k**

MILITARY & POLICE

POLITICAL LEADERS

ARTISTS

MORE THAN
50
MILLION
PEOPLE REACHED
THROUGH MEDIA

1,215
LOCAL PARTNERS

TRANSFORMING LIVES



FROM SYRIA TO THE HEART OF EUROPE:

JOURNEY OF A REFUGEE ACTOR

When the Syrian conflict broke out, Mahmoud's world was turned upside down.

He left Syria in haste, crossing the border to Lebanon with nothing but the clothes he was wearing. This was the second time he had become a refugee. His family fled Palestine when he was only a child and had integrated well into Syrian society. Now, once again, they had lost a home and a future.

Mahmoud found respite from war in a refugee camp, but he didn't feel safe. At 16, he was thrown into a new world, "damp and chaotic, with lots of staring eyes, sharp claws, big fangs." He realized that respect was the most valuable currency, the only asset that could keep him safe. To earn it, he had to be feared — and was determined to become fearsome.

Then, a fortuitous meeting with our local team set him on a different course.

In 2014, a friend invited Mahmoud to the first *Better Together* summer camp, our initiative in partnership with the European Union to reduce tensions between Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities, targeting more than 300 youth on both sides and bringing them together to learn drawing, theater, music, and film.

Like many other participants, Mahmoud was initially diffident — but soon, he started opening up. He found a mentor in Elias, one of our facilitators, and discovered his true calling in the theater class. Encouraged by Elias, he trained as an actor and learned how to use his craft to defuse tensions, break stereotypes, and build relationships across differences. After six months of training, Mahmoud and his troupe went on a national tour, performing for Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian crowds — including the inhabitants of his own camp.

A year later, Mahmoud became a volunteer trainer at the summer camp. Every day, he had to pass through six army checkpoints to get to work. For him, it was a huge risk; at any time, he could be stopped, searched, deemed illegal, and sent back to Syria. He decided to come regardless.

The camp was still in session when Mahmoud's family fled Lebanon to seek shelter and stability in Germany, where he followed them in 2016. The impact of life in Germany was even harder than Lebanon had been: language barriers and stereotypes toward refugees erected a wall between him and the rest of the world. But this time, he knew how to cope with these obstacles.

In Germany, Mahmoud launched his own project in the mold of *Better Together*, to help refugees integrate. So far, he has organized six theater workshops and three training sessions on nonviolent communication, conflict resolution, and the management of emotions.

Be it in Lebanon or in the heart of Europe, he is as devoted as ever to his mission of supporting refugees as they try to build a new life in an unknown place. Mahmoud credits *Better Together* for helping him cope with the tragic reality of displacement and giving him the tools to help others.

“This project literally saved me. It was like a ship that took me in while drowning. Now I can stretch my hand to others and lift them onboard the ship”

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Even the most dangerous and violent conflicts produce opportunities for constructive change. The Common Ground Approach activates key players in a healthy and inclusive process. During turbulent times, we provide safe spaces where opposing sides can explore their common humanity and goals.



SOUTH SUDAN

RADIO DRAMAS AND THEATER BREAK THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE



203

EPISODES
OF *HIWAR AL SHABAB*

33

THEATER
PERFORMANCES

200%

INCREASE IN
INTERACTIONS
BETWEEN TRIBES

South Sudan is the world's youngest country — and also one of the most violent. The nation is currently in the grip of a politically motivated Civil War that has killed 300,000 and displaced 12 times more. Widespread violence across tribal lines is fueling fears of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Extreme poverty, water scarcity, and the marginalization of women and youth are contributing factors to a seemingly endless cycle of destruction.

We stepped into South Sudan in 2014, with the aim of helping reverse this trend. With funding from UNICEF, we launched the project *Communicating for Peace in South Sudan*, in an effort to manage dangerous rumors, amplify the voices of marginalized groups, and facilitate reconciliation.

To reach these goals, we used the full gamut of media tools that we pioneered in over 35 years of work.

We designed and implemented conflict-sensitive media trainings for journalists all over the country,

helping them develop strategies to craft unbiased reporting and prevent the spreading of false news. We rolled out communication workshops for Muslim and Christian leaders, bringing them together in a safe space where they could discuss the challenges affecting their communities of faith and explore collaborative solutions.

In partnership with local radio stations, we produced two brand-new *Common Ground Productions* programs: *Sergeant Esther*, a drama broadcast nationwide whose protagonist is a police woman speaking up against abuses of power, and *Hiwar al Shabab*, a youth talk show featuring guests of different ethnicities and religions.

Our intertribal participatory theater troupes, which include former refugees and victims of violence, brought interactive performances to isolated, rural communities, enabling audiences to experience tolerance and empathy across ethnic divides for the first time.

Three years later, we are witnessing

powerful, long-lasting changes in the communities we targeted.

We measured a staggering 200% growth in interactions between tribes, 90% of which were positive. Intertribal trust has increased by 63%, reducing the risk of ethnic violence. Journalists are more independent and equipped to deal with rumors. Young men and women have new avenues to voice their grievances and be heard.

Of course, there is still much work to do in South Sudan, but these results are encouraging. Despite the risks, our team continues operating on the ground, building on these successes and reinforcing hope in the hearts of hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese.

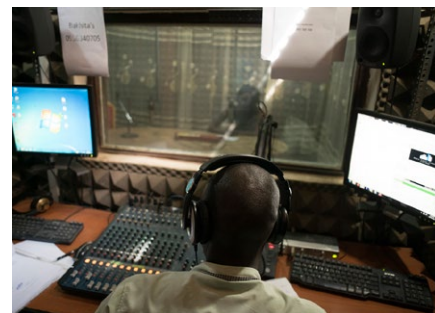
“We see change happening. After the performances, people come and discuss their issues with us, honestly, in earnest”

— David, participatory theater actor



“What I am going to do immediately is to preach peace, whenever I get an opportunity”

— Rev. Alamin Yahuza Samuel, Juba



YEMEN

AN END TO THE WAR STARTS IN THE CLASSROOM



Two and a half years since it started, the war in Yemen has claimed the lives of more than 10,000 people, displaced 3 million, and unleashed a humanitarian crisis that puts the survival of 17 million Yemenis under immediate threat.

Despite the ongoing fighting, we decided to stay. At the time of writing, we are one of the few international organizations still active in the country, working in territories under the control of both factions in the conflict.

In addition to supporting the grassroots work of local peacebuilders, we are tackling the systemic factors of instability in Yemen. Beyond the immediate havoc caused by the war, the country suffers from an entrenched culture of violence, which often impacts children. Violent means to discipline children at home and in schools are widely accepted. Through this exposure, they come to believe that violence is an appropriate and healthy way to deal with conflict, settle disputes, and engage with others — undermining the stability of peace in Yemen even before that peace turns into reality.

Our project in schools across the country is changing this dynamic. We worked with leaders in the education system to create a new environment for children, in which they can learn positive values of tolerance and nonviolence.

At the national level, we cooperated with the staff of the Ministry of Education to develop conflict-

sensitive school curricula. Locally, we involved educators, community leaders, and parents in dialogue sessions, with the aim of encouraging a cultural shift. Then, in consultation with educators, we created a conflict sensitivity manual and training toolkits. These resources are helping teachers create a safe and accepting school environment, in addition to reducing the use of physical punishment in class.

On top of these initiatives, we launched a national campaign to raise awareness of the problem of violence against children, distributing information kits on violence reduction in schools and producing TV and radio flashes on the issue. We also organized outreach activities in three governorates. These activities included puppet shows and games that focus on respect and dialogue.

Just months after the roll-out of these activities, teachers fared overwhelmingly better on tests of knowledge about conflict resolution techniques, which they continue to apply in the classroom. As a result, children in the target communities now receive an education in a safer environment and educators are better equipped to deal with episodes of violence.

In turn, this cultural shift at the local level can contribute to stopping the violence that is engulfing the country as a whole — and build a generation of future leaders who refuse to choose violence as an option.



1

CERTIFIED TRAINING
MANUAL ON CONFLICT
SENSITIVITY

400

TRAININGS IN SCHOOLS



615

TEACHERS INVOLVED



6,455

STUDENTS REACHED BY
IN-PERSON TRAINING

“The school environment and the community are overwhelmed with violence. We were in desperate need for this training”

— Khaled Abdu Naji, English teacher

TRANSFORMING CULTURE

To establish meaningful and lasting change within the norms of a society in a cycle of violence, a culture shift is often necessary. But how do we make peace habitual in people's daily lives?

We challenge the status quo of using violent and destructive means to accomplish one-sided pursuits. We use media, dialogue, and community-based approaches to build peace into a society's foundations and set up institutions that protect the most vulnerable populations.



NEPAL

SINGHA DURBAR: THE MAKING OF A POP CULTURE ICON

Nepal's first female Prime Minister ushered in a new phase of better governance, inclusive democratic participation, and women's leadership in politics.

Even though she is fictional.

With funding from USAID, we designed and produced the first season of *Singha Durbar* (*The Lion's Palace*), a 13-episode TV drama on the first year of governing of Aasha Singh, a Minister of Interior who steps into her new role as head of government when the ruling PM is hospitalized. In her tenure, and as she prepares for new elections, she has to face crisis after crisis, in addition to prejudices against powerful women. The show took the local movie industry by storm and transformed PM Singh, played by Nepali star Gauri Malla, into a pop culture icon.

We envisioned the TV series as a way to inspire positive role models and create a culture of collaboration between the government and the public. *Singha Durbar* addressed important problems of Nepal's political system — namely, the politicians' lack of accountability, the widespread fears of corruption, the marginalization of women from decision-making, and even the violent

clashes that still persist after the declaration of the new Constitution in 2015. At a time of deeply rooted mistrust between citizens and the ruling class, *Singha Durbar* provided a new avenue for citizens to learn about the inner workings of the government, and for politicians to build relationships with the communities they serve.

As part of this project, we set up facilitated screenings followed by dialogue sessions, an outreach campaign on traditional and digital media, and an official smartphone application, reinforcing the messages of the show and providing important information on government services and practices.

Our recent viewership survey found that 6.67 million people in Nepal — 1 in 4 Nepalese citizens — watched *Singha Durbar*. Other indicators pointed to a 60% increase in the surveyed population of the belief that people of all ethnic groups and genders should play an active role in decision-making.

Season 1 of *Singha Durbar* is fully available on YouTube. Season 2 is currently in development. Watch the show at youtube.com/user/sfcgnepal

“I have watched Singha Durbar and I feel inspired. I am confident that the ‘reel-life’ Prime Minister of the TV series will inspire millions of women to take leadership roles” – Jasu Devi Bhatta, audience member



“Singha Durbar is a roadmap. It inspires politicians and imprints upon them the value of collaboration and the need for positive role models in politics” – Onsari Gharti Magar, former war combatant and first female Speaker of the House



195
FACILITATED
SCREENINGS



13
EPISODES OF
SINGHA DURBAR



6.67
MILLION VIEWERS



I thank you because the performance has shown me that, as a chief, you should use dialogue to resolve conflict amongst individuals and families”

– A SOUTH SUDANESE TRIBAL CHIEF



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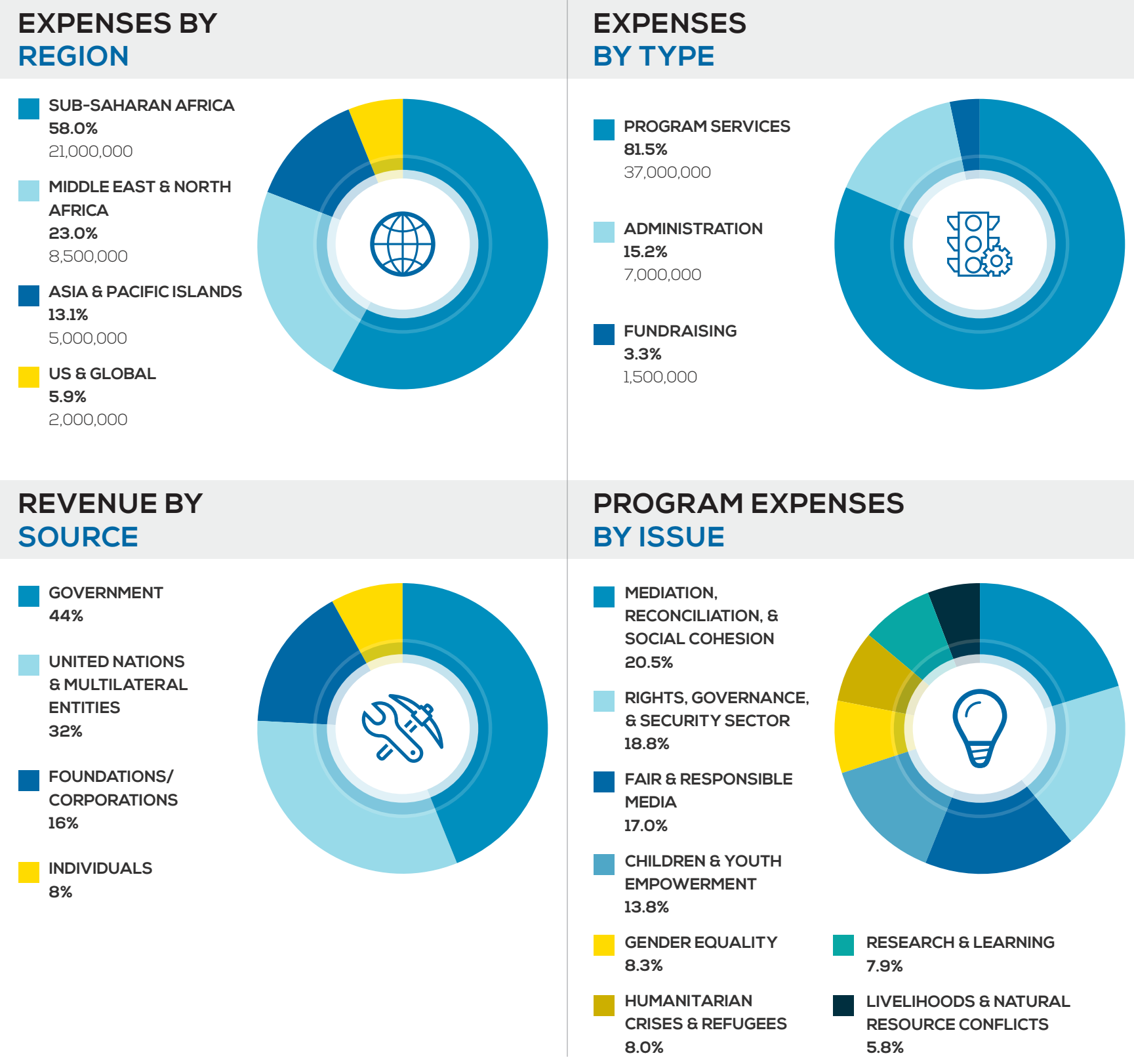
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FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN



■ Data refers to period between 1/1/2016 and 12/31/2016.



Thank you

Your support enables us to continue building sustainable peace across the world. The work we do is changing the lives of millions — and it's because of you.



Re

THINK
BUILD
IGNITE

CONFLICT
ReIMAGINED



Search for
Common Ground

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