Search for Common Ground

Organization Overview

Key Info

Social Entrepreneur
Susan Collin Marks, John Marks

Year Awarded
2006

Issue Area Addressed
Peace and Human Rights

Sub Issue Area Addressed
Human Rights, Peace

Countries Served
USA, Angola, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Republic), Cote d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Indonesia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Madagascar, Morocco, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestinian Territory, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Zimbabwe

Website
http://www.sfcg.org

Twitter handle
SFCG_

Facebook
http://www.facebook.com/pages/Search-for-Common-Ground/72700460615
About the Organization

Founded in 1982, Search for Common Ground works to transform the way the world deals with conflict – away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative problem solving. They work with local partners to find culturally appropriate means to strengthen societies’ capacity to deal with conflicts constructively: to understand the differences and act on the commonalities.

They have developed a broad array of operational methods. These include well-known conflict resolution techniques, such as mediation and facilitation, and less traditional ones, like TV productions, radio soap operas, and community organizing.

Search for Common Ground works at all levels of society to build sustainable peace through three main avenues: dialogue, media, and community. They bring people together across dividing lines to discover and achieve shared goals; use media to stir up discussion about the root causes of violence and how to overcome differences; and provide a safe space for people to work out their conflicts at the local level.

Impact

- Currently working in 30 countries, with four out of five staff recruited locally from the countries they serve.
- *The Team*, a TV/radio soap opera that promotes win-win ways of solving problems, became the third-most-watched television program in Kenya. Adapted to address local conflicts and then broadcast in other countries, it won several major film awards.
- *Génération Grands Lacs*, a multilingual radio show broadcast in Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, reaches tens of thousands of listeners in the region.
- A leadership program co-presented with Outward Bound for Israeli and Palestinian social entrepreneurs intended to develop the core of a Palestinian-Israeli network for positive social change has been expanded to include young political and religious leaders.

Path to Scale

Build Media Audiences

In parallel with broader and deeper involvement in more countries, SFCG seeks to achieve learning and attitude change at a global scale through its media programs.

Social Entrepreneur
John Marks founded Search for Common Ground (SFCG) at the height of the Cold War to build bridges between East and West. Operating from the basic belief that the world is running out of space, resources, and recuperative capacity to deal with wasteful conflict, John and his wife, Susan Collin Marks, built SFCG into the largest nonprofit organization in the world working to defuse, prevent, and transform conflict. Before her 20-year tenure as Senior Vice President of SFCG, Susan served as a peacemaker during South Africa’s transition from apartheid to democracy, mediating bloody clashes, and helping formulate national policy on community policing. SFCG works across whole societies with conflict resolution techniques such as mediation, facilitation and back-channel dialogue; and through less traditional methods including community organizing, TV and radio soap opera, music-video, and sports. At the time of the Award, SFCG had established multi-pronged conflict resolution programs in Angola, Burundi, Congo, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, and was poised to bring its media program to global scale. In 2014, John and Susan transitioned into new roles in the organization. Shamil Idriss, who formerly served as chief operating officer of SFCG, became its CEO.

**Ambition for Change**

Countries around the world recognize that while conflict is inevitable, violence is not, and take constructive steps to achieve inter-ethnic harmony.