

EVALUATION SUMMARY

External evaluation of the project 'Promoting national reconciliation using economic and private sector approaches' (Business for Peace)

EVALUATION THEME

1. Economic development for peace (EDP)
2. Conflict sensitive business practice

INTRODUCTION

From August 2011 to February 2015, International Alert was implementing a project funded by the Swedish embassy/Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in Uganda. A final external project evaluation was conducted by an independent consultant in November and December 2014. The evaluation objectives were to:

- Assess the achievement of the project's goal, objectives and expected results and activities, by referring to the project's logframe;
- Assess the quality and effectiveness of project implementation – Alert's approaches and methods – and the links between methodology and results achieved. The project methods include: dialogue, research, advocacy, capacity-building, training and awareness raising through radio and puppet theatre; and
- Give recommendations to inform the next phase of Business for Peace (B4P) interventions in Uganda, and provide specific operational and programmatic recommendations.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

B4P was designed out of the need to tackle economic drivers of conflict in Uganda, which has been increasingly characterised by weaknesses in the economic governance institutions of the country, pervasive corruption, and fragmentation of the national identity into regional, ethnic and religious ones. Moreover, Uganda is characterised by a population ratio that counts over 70% of its population under 30 years old, whilst having high levels of unemployment. Many Ugandans are concerned about political transitions and fear political manipulation of violence. In the midst of this context, the private sector has remained a growing, yet timid force in the country. Alert has found, however, that empowering and working with the private sector is key to tackling potential conflict drivers.

The underlying theory of change (ToC) within B4P is therefore the following: "By leveraging the strengths of the private sector to influence civil society, government and business communities as a whole, Alert expects to be able to influence peace and reconciliation processes in Uganda, which are expected to yield results in terms of inclusive economic empowerment, and which, in turn, benefit the growth of the private sector itself."

In order to do so, Alert has identified four key objectives to deliver results via various activities with the private sector, communities and other stakeholders:

- Provision of analytical leadership on the links between economy and conflict/peace in Uganda;
- Catalysing business for peace networks at the local and national level;
- Facilitation of efforts to build a peace economy in northern Uganda; and
- Harnessing the potential contribution of oil to peaceful development.

Alert therefore conducted operations in northern Uganda, in Kampala (the capital city) and in the Albertine Graben region, delivering activities as wide as: radio talk shows; training for potential investors on conflict-sensitive business practices; organising puppet shows for communities to inform them about oil and gas explorations as well as land and investment issues; and organising dialogue forums for the private sector, decision- and policy-makers, and youth leaders on various topics such as youth unemployment, investment practices, etc. Activities were always informed by a strong component of research, and as much as possible, oriented towards concrete action and advocacy for policy change.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation therefore looked at the relevance, effectiveness and impact, efficiency and sustainability of the project. The consultant applied a methodology, which included participation of some of Alert's partners, a documentation review and desk research, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, B4P staff self-assessment and design workshops.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Relevance: B4P is assessed to be highly pertinent, coherent and rightfully tailored to the Ugandan context. Its relevance is informed by a strong research component, important connections with local partners and key individuals who have leverage over their communities, as well as an extensive network in various sectors of the Ugandan society. The staff's constant communication lines with partners and key informants informs both their adaptability to evolving circumstances and makes up for strong shortcomings in the lack of a proper monitoring system. Moreover, the B4P approach, which is perceived to be pragmatic and non-threatening, has enabled Alert to carve a space from which it can influence various actors.

Effectiveness and impact: Referring to the logframe, Alert has achieved most of its objectives with great results. Alert's activities have yielded tremendous results in terms of processes (relationship, confidence and trust-building with and among various partners and targets). It has had impact at various levels: policy, business sector and grassroots.

Research contributed to raising extensive awareness and momentum around the issue of youth in particular, and managed to create more linkages between private sector actors and decision-makers. National policies were greatly impacted as a result.

Change in the business community's mindset towards peacebuilding is not uniform, but significant examples attest to Alert's impact in creating a culture of conflict-sensitive business practices. Efforts must be maintained, as it is a task that takes time.

Information gaps about oil and gas, and land and investment were closed, and efforts must be kept up to reach out to rural communities. The puppet theatre is an unexpectedly good means to convey information, as people resonate very strongly with its format. The indirect result is that it raises substantial discussions about crosscutting issues, such as gender-based violence, environmental sustainability and civil society empowerment.

B4P has had the added benefit that it has quietly built Alert's signature over time, as well as its legitimacy to respond to conflict tensions with a different angle. There is a strong responsive component in how Alert operates – something that is quite rare in a peacebuilding organisation and is much more common to humanitarian agencies.

The shortage of staff has had an impact, however, on the programme's effectiveness in various ways, among which the consultant found the lack of strong monitoring system to be the greatest shortcoming.

Efficiency: The programme has performed very well in efficiency terms. Lots has been achieved with parsimonious value for money. The reliance on partners has worked well in matters of efficiency, since it allowed for extending Alert's influence, publications and activities at a lower cost than if Alert had to implement everything themselves. One of the most important findings has been the shortage of staff, which has impacted quality control of activities, follow-up and monitoring procedures. The staff shortage has been one motivation for such strong reliance on partners, which in itself has had an opportunity cost between effectiveness and efficiency performance. Indeed, the use of partners proves highly efficient, however, since quality control and follow-up was not always properly performed; this represented a weakness in the programme's implementation.

Sustainability: Alert has started to have impact on the business and institutional mindset regarding conflict-sensitive practices, however the gains are still too fragile to be sustainable. Efforts should be continued in the next phase, and B4P credibility and best practice dissemination should be strengthened and deepened.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To SIDA: B4P should continue to be funded, especially in light of SIDA's new country strategy and its focus on private sector development, agriculture, civil society empowerment and election conflict prevention. The various strands that SIDA itself has prioritised are directly in line with B4P logical continuation for the next years to come. If possible, funding should be extended to a period over three years.

To International Alert HQ: International Alert needs to provide the Ugandan B4P team with more content support, and organise greater lesson sharing with other B4P teams from across the world.

To International Alert Uganda: B4P needs to keep a strong emphasis on building networks, relationships and legitimacy. While Alert needs to maintain its identity and role as a dialogue facilitator and convener, it should turn its attention towards more action-oriented forums, so as to transform research findings, discussions and forums into actionable results and active platforms of advocacy on various issues. Areas of particular focus should include: youth; economic governance and private sector development; and agriculture.

The next phase of B4P should look to consolidate further the achievements of the first two phases, and outreach to more stakeholders within the country.

The research strand should be maintained, as it provides Alert with programmatic legitimacy. Potential areas of research include issues of corruption and a technical investigation of the 'peace economy' concept. The strands on 'Catalyzing business for peace networks at local and national level' and 'Facilitation of efforts to build a peace economy in northern Uganda' should remain the main focus of B4P, whilst the oil strand should be replaced with a focus on electoral violence prevention.

Regarding internal management, the number of staff for B4P should be increased, and include new skills, including expertise in: gender, M&E, advocacy and economics/finance. A strong monitoring reflecting B4P's objectives should be designed and integrated within project management. Efforts should be invested in helping some of Alert's partners to build their institutional capacity, which would enable better sustainability of the project over time.