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Economic development and peace

Practice note 3: Linking programming to analysis: How do we develop theories of change linking economic development and peace?

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Introduction

Economic development covers a wide range of processes and interventions that aim to improve the functioning of an economy at a global, regional, national or local level. These interventions have multiple, often interconnecting, goals ranging from increasing economic growth or promoting equity to boosting entrepreneurship or employment, or tackling barriers to doing business.

In fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS), economic development has become part of the 'toolbox' for actors working in development and peacebuilding. Adapting economic development approaches and methodologies to the specificities of FCAS has generated considerable research and raised questions ranging from the role of the private sector in rebuilding the infrastructure of the state to how to increase human capital in post-conflict situations. These questions highlight some of the challenges of promoting economic development where the state is absent or has limited legitimacy, capacity or reach.

Initiating economic interventions and investments into a conflict-affected context can contribute to the processes of building peace as well as risk exacerbating conflict dynamics. Conflict and economic factors interact and impact each other in both positive and negative ways. It is therefore critical for project designers, implementers and donors to understand how this happens in order to design, implement, monitor and evaluate economic development interventions that are relevant, effective and sustainable in their economic outcomes and in their contribution to peace.

What is the purpose of this practice note series?

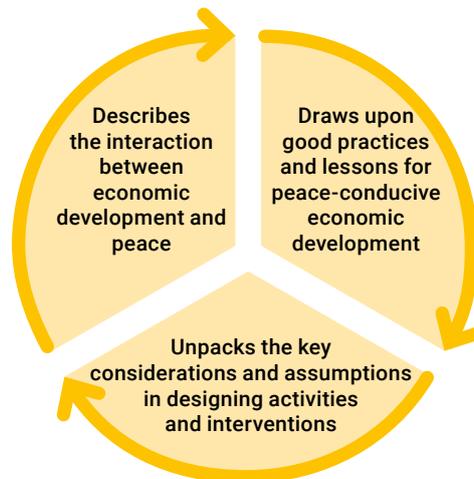
This practice note is part of a resource series to address the design, monitoring, evaluation and learning (DMEL) challenges for peace-conducive economic development interventions in FCAS. These are interventions that are conflict-sensitive and explicitly integrate a peace objective. **These practice notes are intended for project designers and implementers as well as policy-makers working in/on FCAS who wish to see peace impacts from economic development interventions or who want to integrate economic elements into peacebuilding projects.** They are not intended as a step-by-step 'how-to-guide' but rather as a tool to spark greater analysis and critical engagement with the potential for more peace-conducive economic development in FCAS. They consolidate key good practices – 'what works well' – based on emerging evidence and analysis of key gaps and challenges, from a peacebuilding perspective, observed among diverse economic development programmes in FCAS. The practice notes ground the considerations and good practices in case studies and examples from the Horn of Africa region, including Kenya, Somalia, as well as the Great Lakes region.

This practice note explores how to create robust theories of change and the considerations for designing effective peace-conducive economic development programming. This builds on the conceptual challenges of understanding how economic development can be peace-conducive (**practice note 1**) and the guidance on identifying robust methodologies for analysis (**practice note 2**). It underpins the guidance on embedding good practices on monitoring, evaluation and learning in FCAS to promote, measure and assess the impact of programming on both peace and economic factors (**practice note 4**).



What will this note help you with?

This third practice note will help you to design a theory of change that:



What are the challenges facing practitioners?

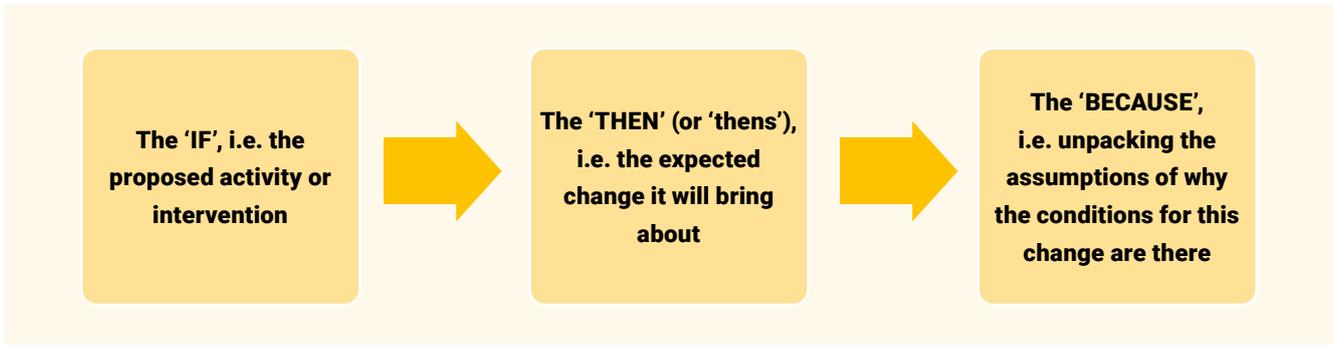
Effective programming in both economic development and peacebuilding are built on clear theories of change that can articulate how an intervention or specific set of activities will bring about a desired change. However, while many programmes and donor strategies make the link between economic development and peacebuilding, there is a lack of empirical evidence on how this link works in practice.

International Alert's study on 'jobs for peace' in the Horn of Africa examined 14 employment promotion and livelihoods programmes with explicit and implicit theories of change that linked the creation of greater levels of employment with a reduction in conflict.¹ In several cases, the theories of change were grounded in superficial assumptions about the impact on peace – for example, drawing their assumptions on the link between jobs and peace from global-level studies, such as the 2013 World Development Report on jobs, and importing these to the Horn of Africa context. This creates a challenge in designing interventions that lead to change, in terms of both economic development *and* peacebuilding. For example, making the assumption that providing inputs to micro-enterprises will reduce conflicts but using poverty indicators to select who will receive the inputs risks having limited impact on conflict, and could even prove to exacerbate conflict dynamics in some circumstances.



Designing robust theories of change – Why is this important?

For an economic development programme to have a positive impact on the peace and conflict context, it must be grounded in a theory of change that explains how changing economic factors or dynamics will positively affect peace and conflict. It should include objectives for the expected changes in both economy and the conflict context. A theory of change represents a testable hypothesis for how the intervention will achieve its intended results.² It needs to clearly articulate:



Each conflict context is unique, and theories of change cannot simply be transposed from one to another. A theory of change needs to be both logically sound and practical to achieve. It is important to understand the expected level of change, for example, is the programme anticipating change across a large part of the economy, such as a large-scale infrastructure or employment programme, or at a meso- or micro-level in specific market systems, value chains or geographic areas. However, it is also critical to understand how change at the different levels interacts. For example, increasing skills of youth to enable them to work in a specific sector may produce limited results (and may even create frustrations) if there is no space in the labour market in that sector.

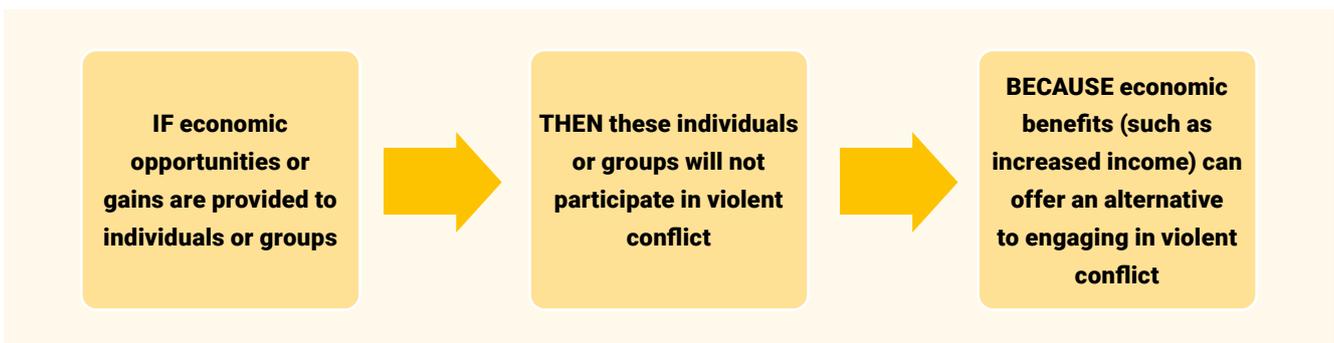
Theories of change also serve a practical purpose for implementers to be able to monitor the impacts of their projects, to test whether interventions are leading towards the anticipated changes and to adapt plans if necessary.

What are common theories of change for peace-conducive economic development?

Within the existing literature on ‘economic development for peace’, several common theories of change are used to explain the interaction between an economic development intervention and a positive impact on peacebuilding (or stability), despite limited empirical evidence to demonstrate that these theories work consistently. For example, the report ‘Jobs Aid Peace’³ studied the documentation of 432 employment programmes in FCAS, and found that, while theories of change were clearly articulated, there was frequently limited empirical evidence to support them (for more on analysis challenges, see **practice note 2**).

This section details several of these theories of change and notes some of the key considerations for practitioners.

The opportunity cost of conflict



This is a common theory of change that presupposes that a key driver of conflict is the low opportunity cost of participating in conflict and a lack of alternatives, for example providing a financial alternative to joining an armed group, which may offer an individual economic security or empowerment. International Alert’s study on ‘Jobs for Peace’ in the Horn of Africa found that most of the theories of change reviewed articulated this theory of change in some way, particularly in relation to youth-focused programming and programming focused on the prevention of violent extremism.⁴ These tend to assume that, if

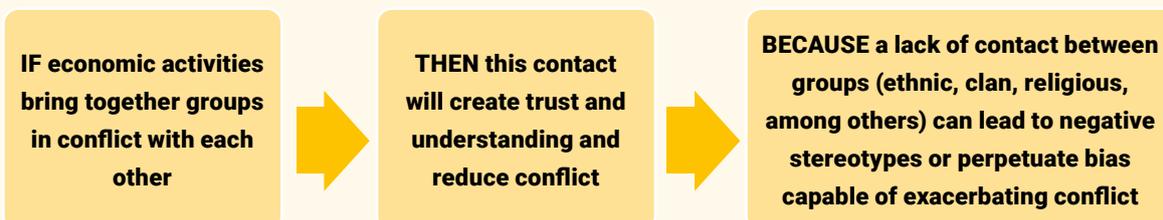
youth are employed, they will have less incentive to join violent groups that offer them income-generation opportunities. This theory of change can also apply to addressing other specific economic drivers of conflict, as well as decreasing economic dependence on the conflict economy (the economic, logistic and market activities that perpetuate conflict).⁵

What should practitioners consider? It is critical that the economic gains are appropriate to the context, market dynamics and interests of participants, and are sustainable beyond the lifetime of the intervention. Programming needs to be based in a thorough understanding of why individuals and groups engage in violent conflict – for example, while economic incentives may be a factor in why some join armed groups, providing an alternative may not address other motivations, such as grievances or ideology that may motivate them as well (see the following case study).

Case study: Unpacking the link between employment and peace

Research by Mercy Corps for a youth empowerment and employment programme in Somalia and Somaliland⁶ tested the hypotheses underpinning their theories of change, one of which was whether having “meaningful employment” meant youth were “less likely to participate in or support political violence”. They compared this to three other hypotheses on factors influencing youth participation in political violence and found that “Employment status was not found to be related to youth engagement in or attitudes about political violence”. The research also enabled them to unpack some of the assumptions around employment – for example, around heightening expectations from skills training leading to grievances. This research was to be used for adjusting the programme design – for example, to ensure that training was matched to job market demand.

Economic activity leads to social cohesion



This theory of change is based on the assumption that opportunities, spaces and processes, such as a workplace or market or working on a joint project, that bring groups or individuals together can increase understanding of others and build trust through mutual endeavour. This is a common theory of change articulated by International Alert’s own programmes, i.e. that bringing groups together for an economic activity can support their survival as well as provide space for dialogue.⁷ For example, International Alert’s work in the Great Lakes region supporting cross-border trade between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda seeks to strengthen the business environment for women working as small traders in order to improve their chances of economic survival, and use this as a basis for promoting contact and dialogue between traders on the different sides of the borders, as well as with the border officials who perpetuate insecurity for traders. However, it is critical to emphasise that simply bringing people together is unlikely to effect a considerable change in itself.

What should practitioners consider? Practitioners need to look at how people could build an understanding that they can gain more by cooperating together (win win) and building a longer-term vision – which will inevitably require collaboration with others. The level of interaction is important. A Mercy Corps study of economic development for peacebuilding in Uganda tested several assumptions about social cohesion and found limited interaction between individual market interactions and peace indicators.⁸ They suggested that deeper economic interactions (e.g. participation in associations, such as chambers of commerce) may build strong relations between groups.⁹ Implementers need to ensure that these interventions “promote mutually beneficial cooperation rather than increasing competition between adversarial groups”.¹⁰

Furthermore, the long-term viability of this theory of change is dependent on the success and therefore continuation of economic activity, i.e. will the social cohesion persist if the economic activity comes to an end?

Existence of grievance



Theories of change related to economic grievance will often overlap and interact with other factors that drive conflict – for example, opportunity costs may perpetuate grievances.¹¹ In practice, this means that programming could be based on a combination of two or more of these theories of change.

What should practitioners consider? This theory of change requires a strong understanding of exactly how grievances are related to economic as well as other factors, such as political or social exclusion.

Business for peace



The question of how to engage business actors as peace actors in FCAS has gained increasing attention in recent years. Acknowledging the role of the private sector in perpetuating or exacerbating conflict has led to increased focus on 'conflict-sensitive business practice',¹² as well as considerable conceptual work on how businesses can be engaged as peace actors.¹³ While there are strong examples of business actors engaging in peacebuilding (see the following case studies), there is limited evidence overall of how 'business for peace' is put into practice.¹⁴

Case study: Private sector and peacebuilding in Somalia

Following the collapse of the state in Somalia in 1991, the private sector has operated for much of the intervening period without government regulation or the provision of security by the state. This has resulted in the private sector adapting to this conflict context, providing key services like water, electricity and telecommunications,¹⁵ and filling the governance vacuum. For example, “Somali entrepreneurs compensated for the lack of effective government regulation by ‘importing governance’ from foreign institutions; using clans and other local networks to assist with contract enforcement, payment and fund transmission; and simplifying transactions.”¹⁶ Businesses have played a more proactive role in peacebuilding. For example, in the mid-2000s, business groups supported logistics to enable elders to meet to de-escalate conflicts.¹⁷

What should practitioners consider? The neutrality of the private sector is contested and business can be compliant in ‘war economies’ or even be conflict actors themselves. The ‘private sector’ as a conceptual framing covers a wide range of business entities from large multinational corporations to small micro-entrepreneurs operating in the informal sector.¹⁸ These types of business will have very different relationships to the conflict context, and therefore defining which type, size and sector of business a programme will engage with is critical.

Protracted conflict has facilitated a transition for some from rural agricultural-based livelihoods to informal urban livelihoods, and this should be taken into account in designing programmes that seek to increase employment or access to finance. In supporting informal economies, it is important to consider that entrepreneurship is often not a choice but a coping mechanism and may increase the uncertainty of some livelihoods.¹⁹ Often, labour market roles in the informal economy are determined by gender (as well as other factors such as ethnicity). These dynamics need to be unpacked to avoid reinforcing these roles.

Case study: Business for peace

Businesses in Kenya, partly through the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA), launched the Mkenya Daima campaign ahead of the 2013 elections with the aim of preventing election-related violence. The campaign used different means available to the private sector, including public communications with peace messages and high-level influencing with political figures, to achieve this end. The case study highlights some of the opportunities and challenges with this theory of change.²⁰ While this intervention was recognised as important to preventing violence, the engagement of the private sector often depended on its strong relationships with political leaders through elite networks. The motivation was based as much on economic value as on moral value – the economic shock of the 2007/08 post-election violence (PEV) created a business case for violence prevention. Austin and Wennmann argue that, while the business community played a role in preventing escalation of violence, it entrenched some of the longer-term drivers of conflict around exclusion and inequality.²¹

Addressing gender inequalities

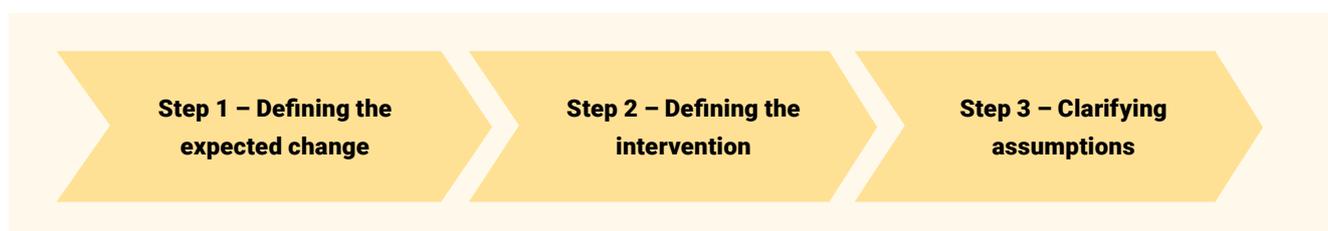


Women's economic empowerment is seen as a key part of peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery.²² More equal gender societies are, in and of themselves, more peaceful, since equality, justice and inclusivity are intrinsic facets of 'positive peace'.

What should practitioners consider? While considerations of gender sensitivity are critical to ensure that programming does not entrench inequalities or discriminatory gender norms (e.g. around labour roles or how women and men engage in informal economies), it is also important to understand how reducing economic inequality can contribute to peace. Therefore, interventions need to be grounded in a thorough gender analysis to understand the potentials and risks. There is also a need to understand how inequalities and power imbalances function down to the household level. For example, how gender norms impact decision-making over jobs and earnings at the household level and how this exacerbates or mitigates violence.

Designing robust theories of change – How to do it

These theories of change should not be seen as 'blueprints' for programming but must be contextualised through research and analysis, and revisited as the context evolves. This section explores the steps to developing a robust theory of change and what this means for 'peace-conducive economic development'.



Step 1: Defining the expected change

The first step is to identify the specific change that is expected. This needs to draw upon the existing analysis of the conflict drivers that can be addressed, as well as the existing capacities or opportunities for peace that an intervention could strengthen (see **practice note 2**). It is also important to ground the expected change in an understanding of the strategy, mandate and capacity of the implementer, as well as what other actors are doing in the context and how this might interact or overlap with the proposed intervention.

The best objectives are those that draw on what works in economic development and are modest in their peacebuilding impact. It is also important to define and be realistic about the level of the change. For example, is the programme aiming to improve the business environment (e.g. through better business regulation) or is the goal to promote changes in the way markets function (e.g. promoting market linkages, value chains, business associations; employment interventions; vocational training; microfinance, etc.)? These different levels of intervention will affect the peacebuilding impacts that can be expected.

Zoom in: Building sustainability into the expected change

For any economic development to have lasting positive impact on peace and stability, it must be inclusive and should indirectly benefit a large section of society. **Interventions therefore must seek to understand challenges around sustainability of outcomes.** The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) pinpoint that development must meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.²³ Successful economic development programming will require intentional integration of sustainability into the expected change and for this to be reflected within the wider Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system. Sustainability of outcomes will depend on diverse factors, such as the evolving context and power dynamics and the capacity of a project to adapt to these changes. In doing so, the programme must be delivered in a transparent, fair and ethical way that includes the participation of different stakeholders.

Step 2: Defining the intervention

The initial conflict and economic analysis can help identify entry points for activities to bring about the desired change. Interventions need to respond to the *interaction* between peace and the economy. For example, if a conflict analysis reveals that grievances over access to jobs in a specific sector are a key conflict driver, will increasing access to jobs reduce conflict? It is difficult to assert this causality without taking into account various other factors about why these grievances have emerged (social, historical, political). Approaches could include targeting groups in conflict with economic support or integrating 'traditional' peacebuilding activities (such as dialogue) into economic development programming (see Zoom in: Targeting participants).

International Alert's work on grievances related to oil operations in northwest Kenya invested resources in building trust with different groups before starting multi-stakeholder dialogue over the economic and conflict impacts of oil.

For more information, see here.

Analysis of good practice identifies some critical considerations for designing interventions:

- **Consider the levels of trust between participants** – It is risky to assume that economic incentives will overcome interpersonal or intergroup hostilities. In the case of protracted conflicts, trust may be very low between different groups and it may be necessary to undertake activities with groups in conflict separately to lay the ground for engagement.
- **Sequencing different types of economic development interventions** – There are differing perspectives on how well economic development can work at different stages of conflict, particularly in terms of the capacity of the state to support and regulate the economy.²⁴ Implementing economic development interventions 'too early' risks negative outcomes, such as increasing vulnerability with credit schemes, when livelihoods or jobs are not present to allow people to repay loans. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to whether the interventions are appropriate to the stage of conflict the context represents – such as the strength of existing institutions (formal and informal) to regulate/sustain markets, the level of influence of the war economy and the levels of human capital. Strategies also need to acknowledge that post-conflict countries exhibit "fluidity between conflict and fragility".²⁵
- **Avoid undermining the quality of economic development initiatives** – While it is important to see a longer-term need for peace to sustain economic development,²⁶ integrating peacebuilding objectives (and the associated adaptations) into economic development models should avoid undermining their effectiveness as flawed programming can become a conflict risk in itself.

Zoom in: Targeting participants

Practitioners should tailor their activities by adapting how they target participants within the conflict context. For example, whereas an employment-promotion programme may target a demographic group or individuals based on criteria of poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability, for programming that seeks to achieve a 'peace objective', the targeting of direct project participants and broader communities needs to be informed by the relations between groups in the conflict context. The practitioner can then understand how working with groups in conflict builds social cohesion or reduces intergroup grievances.

Identify how targeting participants could exacerbate conflict dynamics – Targeting criteria needs to consider how working with different groups or communities could create new grievances over unequal sharing of resources (real or perceived).

Avoid simplistic assumptions – For example, making assumptions about 'youth' as a target group based on generalised beliefs about why they engage in conflict can lead practitioners to identify ineffective or even conflict-insensitive interventions.²⁷ It is critical to disaggregate and understand how the differences between identities, such as age, gender, class and ethnicity (for example, 'youth' are often 'ungendered' or assumed to be male), affect how groups engage in conflict or are resilient to it.

Address gender norms – Targeting needs to consider how gender norms (identified through a gender and conflict analysis) affect employment in a specific sector or how gendered decision-making is over household income or assets. Gender identities attached to the achievement of adulthood – such as having sufficient funds to marry – can lower the opportunity cost of engaging in violence where joining an armed group represents a source of income or status.²⁸ Understanding these dynamics will aid informing targeting – for example, involving men and boys in women's economic empowerment programming.

Step 3: Clarifying assumptions on why and how such interventions would lead to change

The contexts for intervention are highly diverse and therefore the 'because' of the theory of change should outline the context-specific considerations of why the intended interventions will lead to the expected change. Context-specific considerations should draw on the evidence from analysis as well as the implementer's experience and lessons from previous interventions (where these exist). At heart, it is critical to question your assumptions. This section outlines specific assumptions around economic development and peace that should be questioned by practitioners.

- **What are the motivations of business actors to participate in programming?** These need to be unpacked and understood.²⁹ Implementers need to understand (and not underestimate) the role of the private sector in the conflict context. Often, to operate or even survive in FCAS, businesses will be connected in some way to the war economy,³⁰ for example, engaging with armed groups to provide security, paying informal taxes or actively profiting from the conflict.
- **What is the capacity and appetite for the state to support practitioners?** There is a risk that economic development interventions assume a strong state,³¹ yet FCAS are characterised by a weak or even absent structure for governance. This can affect both conflict dynamics (as the mechanisms to resolve disputes or provide security are missing), as well as the economy (e.g. absence of regulation, revenue generation, economic policy, etc.). It is therefore important to consider how the regulatory framework (or lack of it) could affect practitioners' interventions, or how alignment to government priorities (such as development plans) could promote sustainability.
- **How does corruption perpetuate conflict?** In many FCAS, the issue of 'corruption' remains a key barrier to both peacebuilding (as it undermines trust between the citizen and the state and generates grievance) and economic development. It is important to unpack exactly how corruption drives conflict,³² and more research is needed on how to approach corruption from a peacebuilding perspective.³³ Furthermore, the state is not the only actor implicated in rent seeking, which often encompasses the private sector, as well as those in civil society and elsewhere. It is necessary to understand the 'normalisation' of corruption to identify ways to address it.



Checklist for designing peace-conducive economic development programming

What are your objectives? Are they addressing improvements in economic development or greater peace or both?

- How will you achieve both objectives? Do they require separate activities? How will these reinforce each other?
- What is the sequencing of interventions?

What are the links between the specific economic development intervention (e.g. in terms of sector, type of intervention, etc.) and peace and conflict dynamics in your specific context?

- How are economic development trends and processes driving violent conflict?
- How does conflict distort markets, e.g. labour markets?
- How do you envisage the proposed intervention impacting on conflict dynamics?

Who are the direct participants in your intervention?

- How have they been engaged in your programme design and conflict or other analysis?
- What are their needs in the immediate and longer term?
- What is their role in, or relationship to, the conflict?
- Who is included and excluded from participation? Will this impact conflict risks?

What role does the state play in your programme?

- Are there policies to which your interventions can be aligned? Are the regulatory frameworks in place to reinforce your interventions?
- Is the state an actor in the conflict? How will your programme impact on power relations with the state?

How have you engaged the private sector in your programme design?

- How has the conflict context impacted the specific market, value chain or economy that you are targeting?
- How do private sector actors relate to the conflict context? What capacities for peace do private sector actors have?

How sustainable is your impact likely to be?

- Is the project aligned with national/regional/international priorities and investments?
- What is the balance of quality vs quantity in your outputs (such as jobs or enterprises)?
- Are the necessary structures for peacebuilding (e.g. peace committees) and economic development (e.g. business associations) present or do they need to be created/developed during the project period? Is there a vision for how maintenance of these structures continues beyond the project period?
- Is an exit strategy envisioned? Will there be a transfer of the necessary knowledge and skills?
- Are there risks of a return to conflict once programming ends or support is withdrawn?

How might your programme exacerbate identified conflict and gender dynamics?

- How might conflict factors influence how you implement your programme?
- What mitigation measures have you built into your design?
- How will you monitor these during implementation?
- How does your programme take into account how men, women, boys and girls engage with economic activity differently?
- How does your programme understand the different ways in which men, women, boys and girls, and people with other gender identities, participate in and are affected by violent conflict?

To go further

Programme design

- CARE International UK, Peacebuilding with impact, <https://care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/PSJ-2012-CARE-Defining-Theories-of-Change-document.pdf>
- ILO, Handbook: How to design, monitor and evaluate peacebuilding results in jobs for peace and resilience programmes, 2019, https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Instructionmaterials/WCMS_712211/lang--en/index.htm
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- ILO, Illustrated guidelines for gender-responsive employment intensive investment programmes, 2015, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/assist/docs/F1148634023/gender-responsive_EIIP.pdf

Resources on economic development and peacebuilding

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About the Peace Research Partnership

Saferworld, Conciliation Resources and International Alert are collaborating on a research programme that generates evidence and lessons for policy-makers and practitioners on how to support peaceful, inclusive change in conflict-affected areas. Funded by UK aid from the UK government, the research focuses on economic development, peace processes, institutions and gender drivers of conflict. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

Endnotes

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- 12 Conflict-sensitive business refers to business practices in which a company: (1) understands the conflict environment in which it operates; (2) is aware of potential positive and negative impacts the company might have on the conflict environment; and (3) implements policies to avoid causing or further exacerbating conflict and wherever possible takes steps to positively contribute to peace and stability. A. Graf and A. Iff, Conflict-sensitive business: Review of instruments and guidelines, 2013, https://www.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Media/Publications/Deliverable_3_ConflictSensitiveBusiness_InstrumentsandGuidelines.pdf
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