

# Business and Peace: A Need for New Questions and Systems Perspectives

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**Abstract:** This paper was written as part of the research initiative entitled Engaging the Business Community as a New Peacebuilding Actor. It is a joint project of the Africa Centre for Dispute Settlement (ACDS), CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA), and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project aims to fill the large gap in evidence regarding the effectiveness of business efforts for peace, providing a framework and practical guidance for more effective planning and evaluation of business-peace initiatives, policies and practices. The paper is in the process of revision for publication. Comments, critiques and corrections are welcome.

The literature on business and peace posits a number of ways in which international business may play a deliberate, positive role in supporting peaceful development in a particular conflict-prone environment, ranging from job creation to the importation of international norms and standards. The conflicting evidence suggests, however, that there is no set of business activities which can be characterized as unambiguously peace-positive. Rather, it appears that it is not only what businesses do, but the manner in which they do so, the alliances of which they are part, and the context in which their actions unfold that may be more determinative of their impact. The fact that these insights are not more central to contemporary debate highlights that most analysis of business and peace, emerging as it does largely in response to the literature on the causes of conflict, seems profoundly disconnected from the contemporary peacebuilding literature. That literature reflects practice that increasingly de-emphasizes specific tools or approaches in favor of conflict systems analyses and questions for strategic engagement. Current modes of analysis may therefore invite policymakers, corporate actors and their partners to fall into conceptual traps that lead to suboptimal outcomes or even unintended negative consequences with relation to business and peace. They may also de-emphasize the capabilities, relationships, resources and enabling factors required for businesses to be constructive peacebuilding actors. This review surveys the state of play in the business and peace literature broadly construed, analyses gaps, and suggests new questions to guide both further research and strategic thinking in the field.

## The roots of the mobilization of business for peace

Numerous international initiatives provide evidence of the persistent attention paid over the past decades to the potential for private sector roles in peacemaking and peacebuilding – that is, ‘the range of activities that are undertaken by non-state groups explicitly to end violent conflict and establish the conditions for lasting peace’ (Anderson & Olson, 2003, p. 8). Already in 2002 an ILO report could note that, ‘The private sector is increasingly being seen as an important partner on conflict prevention, and resolution’ (Muia, 2002, p. 2). The Rev. Leon Sullivan and United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan had in 1999 announced the Global Sullivan Principles to ‘advance the culture of peace,’ (Tully, 2005, p. 174), building on the 1977 Sullivan principles for ethically conducting business and promoting positive change in apartheid South Africa; the UN Global Compact held its first multi-stakeholder dialogue on ‘The Role of the Private Sector in Zones of Conflict’ in 2001 (Shoji, 2012, p. 139). Since then, any number of analyses, guidance notes, and multi-stakeholder platforms supported by the World Bank Group, World Trade Organization, International Labor Organization, OECD, various UN agencies, and private initiatives such as the Business for Peace Foundation have posited that business can, in the words of the UN Global Compact’s 2010 *Guidance on Responsible Business in Conflict-affected and High-risk Areas*, ‘make a positive long-lasting contribution to peace and development’ (United Nations Global Compact, 2010, p. 2).

To some extent, business and peace is simply a special case of long-standing international discourse and policy concerning the role of the private sector within development broadly construed. In the contemporary period, the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank Group was founded in 1956 on the ‘firm conviction that the most promising future for the less developed countries was the establishing of good private industry’ (Tenney & Salda, 2014, p. 119). Over time, this perceived value in the mere presence of a robust private sector shifted towards advocacy for a more intentional role by business in development, shaped by a period of exploration of private sector solutions to problems which had seemed difficult or impossible for public sector actors to solve. By the time we arrive at the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, for example, established by representatives of developing and developed countries at the fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011, international policy articulated ‘the central role of the private sector in advancing innovation, creating wealth, income and jobs, mobilizing domestic resources and in turn contributing to poverty reduction’ (“Busan high level forum on aid effectiveness: Proceedings,” 2011, p. 25). The Partnership therefore commits ‘to enable the participation of the private sector in the design and implementation of development policies and strategies to foster sustainable growth and poverty reduction’ (ibid., p. 26).

More pronounced focus on the private sector and peace emerged in part from a period of reflection on the world’s civil wars, and on the challenges (and sometimes abject failure) of international policy and practice towards post-conflict stabilization and peacebuilding. A relatively large number of studies explored the intersection of the private sector, development and peace (e.g., Collier, 2002; Guimond, 2007; Naudé, 2007; Shankelman, 2007). These often advance prescriptions for the better harnessing of the private sector for post-conflict development (e.g., Aaronson *et al.*, 2008; Bagwitz, Reinhold Elges, Grossmann, & Kruk, 2008; Bagwitz *et al.*, 2008; Banfield, 2007; Collier, 2006; Ersenkall & Wolf Fellow, 2007; Gündüz & Klein, 2008; Hudon & Seibel, 2007; IFC/FIAS-GTZ-BMZ, 2008; SEEP, 2007; Spilsbury & Byrne, 2007; Stabilization Unit, 2008a; USAID, 2006; USAID, 2007). A subsequent wave of scholarship underlined that fragile and conflict affected states were not meeting any of the Millennium Development goals, punctuated by the World Bank’s review of the link between conflict and development in its *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* (World Bank, 2011). In the wake of these and other works, ‘MNCs and state-owned firms alike have increasingly been

drawn into the discussion as the UN, World Bank and other international organizations have reported on success stories of public-private partnerships worldwide that try to stimulate peaceful development through poverty reduction, socio-economic growth, and security provision' (Miklian & Schouten, 2014, citing Brainard, Chollet, & LaFleur, 2007; Brainard et al. 2007; Deitelhoff & Wolf, 2010; UNGC, 2013).

As evidenced by the 2011 World Development Report's unabashedly positive view on private sector contributions to 'security, justice and jobs' (World Bank, 2011, p. xii) in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, arguments for the proposition that the private sector is an under-utilized development and peacebuilding actor are strongly influenced by the liberal economic tradition. As early as 1884, the political economist John Stuart Mill claimed that 'it is commerce which is rapidly rendering war obsolete, by strengthening and multiplying the personal interests which are in natural opposition to it' (Mill, 1848, p. 582). Thomas Friedman captured the contemporary reincarnation of this thinking in his 1990 Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention – 'No two countries that both had McDonald's had fought a war against each other since each got its McDonald's' (Friedman, 1990, p. 248) – updated in 2005 to the Dell Theory of Conflict Prevention – 'No two countries that are both part of a major global supply chain, like Dell's, will ever fight a war against each other as long as they are both part of the same global supply chain' (Friedman, 2005, p. 421). Thus much of the business and peace rhetoric tends to take as axiomatic, as asserts the Freedom of Investment process – an intergovernmental forum on investment policy hosted since 2006 by the OECD Investment Committee – that 'international investment spurs prosperity and economic development' (OECD, 2014), and thereby contributes to peace.

Even the concept of business as an intentional actor for peace is not particularly new. Wharton Business School professor Howard V. Perlmutter, writing during the great post-war expansion of the multinational enterprise in the 1960s, named 'the senior executives engaged in building the geocentric enterprise ... the most important social architects of the last third of the twentieth century.' They offered 'an institutional and supra-national framework which could conceivably make war less likely, on the assumption that bombing customers, suppliers and employees is in nobody's interest' (Perlmutter, 1969, pp. 9-10). The first issue of the *Journal of World Business*, in 1966, similarly argued that business is an unmatched force for peace (Brown, 1966, p. 6). Within this worldview, as asserts the UN Global Compact's Business for Peace platform, there is 'effectively no contradiction between maximized long-term financial performance and positive contributions to peace and development' (UNGC & PRI, 2010, p. 6), positioning business as a natural peacebuilding actor. At least between those inclined to view the private sector favorably, we can therefore trace a fair amount of continuity in perceptions about business and peace across the decades, if not centuries.

What may be distinctive in contemporary discourse, however, may be the focus by traditional peacebuilding actors – including the United Nations agencies, defense actors, and international non-governmental organizations – on mobilizing private sector actors as peacebuilders. As enshrined in the UN Global Compact, businesses should be committed to 'peace' and incorporate conflict sensitivity into their day-to-day business practices (UNGC & PRI, 2010). In the US, 'the Defense Department's 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the State Department's inaugural Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), and the 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) acknowledge the importance of according the business sector a major role in solving strategic challenges and fostering peace; leveraging the core competencies of the private sector in problem solving; tapping the business sector's ingenuity and innovation in both processes and outcomes; using public-private partnerships as vehicles to institutionalize anticorruption measures; and providing tangible peace dividends, such as jobs, income, wealth, and services' (Forrer, Fort, & Gilpin, 2012). Businesses operating

in fragile environments are now expected to become full 'partners in broader peacemaking and peacebuilding assessment, planning and execution'. (Ganson, 2014, p 128).

Any number of initiatives by traditional peacebuilding actors then attempt to put these principles into action. International Alert, for example, works with companies under the belief that 'they can help a country turn its back on conflict, and move towards lasting peace' (International Alert, 2005). An entire literature is emerging around the 'business case' for more constructive engagement of companies in fragile and conflict-prone environments (*e.g.*, Franks et al., 2014; Goulbourne, 2003; Henisz, Dorobantu, & Nartey, 2014) in an attempt to motivate business contributions to peaceful development, and it is probably safe to say that attempts to create public-private partnerships to address pressing issues related to conflict and peace are now the norm rather than the exception within UN agencies. In perhaps the most prominent call to action, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon launched the United Nations Global Compact 'Business for Peace' platform, aiming to 'mobilize high-level corporate leadership to advance peaceful development through actions at the global and local levels' (UNGC, 2013b, p. 41).

## A menu of roles for business in peace

If the assertion is made that international businesses can and should be called upon as peacebuilders, then the question arises as to how they can do so. There are a growing number of meta-studies of the literature of business and peace, resulting in a variety of maps of the arguments made for how business does, could or should advance peace in what is now a substantial body of academic and policy work. For example:

- Most recently, Miklian (2017) documents widespread assertions that (1) economic engagement facilitates a peace dividend; (2) encouraging local development facilitates local capacities for peace; (3) importing international norms improves democratic accountability; (4) firms can constrain the drivers or root causes of conflict; and (5) undertaking direct diplomatic efforts with conflict actors builds and/or makes peace. He explores how 'motivational drivers for deeper and more comprehensive business engagements into peace and justice arenas' (*Ibid.*, p. xx), the ways in which 'businesses integrate peacebuilding within their corporate structures' (*Ibid.*, p. xx), and understanding of 'what constitutes a 'peace contribution' by business' (*Ibid.*, p. xx) impact upon business-peacebuilding trends.
- Oetzel *et al.* focused on specific ways companies can actively engage in conflict reduction including promoting economic development, the rule of law, and principles of external valuation, contributing to a sense of community, and engaging in track-two diplomacy and conflict sensitive practices' (Oetzel, Westermann-Behaylo, Koerber, Fort, & Rivera, 2010, p. 351). Their survey notes that 'the argument arising out of the literature is not that businesses should promote peace, but that ... ethical businesses already are conducting actions that contribute to peace' and that, to be more effective peacebuilders, 'they may not have to radically transform their practices as much as one might think when first hearing about a connection between business and peace' (*Ibid.*, p. 352).
- In between, a number of other works attempt to survey and make sense of business and peace within and across fields (*E.g.*, Andersson, Evers, & Sjostedt, 2011; Forrer et al., 2012; Forrer & Katsos 2015; Fort, 2015; Katsos, 2016).

From these and other treatments of business and peace, we can distill commonly-promoted arguments about business as an intentional peacebuilding actor, relating these to three dynamics of conflict and peace presumed to be crucial to peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts:

- *Socio-economic dynamics*, particularly as these are influenced by the resources available for peaceful development (as well as their distribution across different groups in society), and those available to conflict actors;
- *Socio-political dynamics*, including state-society relations, relationships between different groups in society, and the institutions through which these are mediated;
- *Peacemaking dynamics*, or the processes by which peace is pursued and agreed to.

We explore later in this paper the ways in which these propositions are directly and indirectly contested and qualified in the academic and policy literature – ultimately raising serious doubts as to their general applicability – but state and describe them here in the positive form more typical of the business and peace literature:

Businesses do, can or should impact *socio-economic dynamics* of conflict-prone places in peace-positive ways.

A significant portion of academic literature on business and peace studies the role of business in addressing, influencing and changing the material conditions of peace-making and peacebuilding environments. One common proposition is that, if material conditions on the ground can be changed for the better, the root causes of conflict are addressed and the incentives for conflict are reduced. (See, e.g., the “jobs” thrust of the World Bank’s World Development Report 2011). Under this argument, a company can become an intentional peacebuilding actor simply by deciding to be present in a conflict-prone place, despite risks and potential limitations on short-term returns. In this vein, one executive of a company operating in Afghanistan noted that, ‘No matter what planning is done or precautions taken, working in a war zone is a nightmare. It may be important to be there all the same, because the things you build can help ordinary people. In such cases the company’s work is in fact closer to CSR than to business development, even if there is a hope that the company will work there in the future’ (Ganson, 2013a, p. 83).

Business intentions may, however, go beyond doing business in difficult places. Business and government actors together may arguably make it harder for conflict actors to monetize control over resources, as attempted through, for example, the Kimberley Process for diamonds (Kimberley Process, 2002), the Conflict Free Minerals Initiatives in the Eastern DRC (OECD, 2015), and efforts to prevent the sale of oil from ISIS-held areas (Stupples, 2015). Companies may apply principles of ‘do no harm’ to help ensure that they do not intentionally or unintentionally provide material support to conflict actors, for example, by paying ransoms, extortion monies, or ‘security’ fees to militias or rebel groups, or by engaging contractors or human resources with ties to armed groups – even if this means that they may withdraw from conflict areas because they cannot remain untangled with conflict protagonists, whether state actors (as, for example, Talisman experienced in the Sudan) (Associated Press, 2003) or non-state actors (as AngloGold experienced in the DRC) (Kapelus, Hamann & O’Keefe, 2005).

At the same time, businesses can be conscious of economic grievances that, it is asserted, can be addressed at least in part through business operations. For example, companies may create employment for ex-combatants presumed to be at high risk for resumption of violence, as did Juan Valdez coffee growers in Colombia (Miklian, Schouten & Ganson, 2016). Through management of their presence and operations, therefore, it is argued that businesses help decrease resources that promote conflict and increase resources that promote peace.

Businesses do, can or should impact *socio-political dynamics* of conflict-prone places in peace-positive ways.

State-society relations and relations across ethnic, religious or other divides are often the focus of peacebuilding efforts, and so too the business and peace literature explores the business nexus to such socio-political dynamics. Examples are highlighted of business support for transparency that is intended to enable greater civil society engagement with government, for example, Total's advocacy of EITI in Myanmar (MEITI, 2015); business work with anti-corruption watchdogs, for example, Transparency international's partnership on OECD anti-bribery efforts with private firms (OECD, 2013b); and business support for initiatives that create space for the voices of local government actors and civil society, for example, the Tintaya dialogue table in Peru (Kasturi, Barton, & Reficco, 2012), or the Business Partners for Development experiment (Business Partners for Development, 2002). Businesses may work to support local capacities for peace, for example, by investing in peacebuilding organizations, as did Chevron in Partners for Peace initiatives in the Niger Delta (NDPI, 2014); and may support credible local institutions, as did Barrick Gold's by supporting for municipal planning and service delivery capabilities in the Dominican Republic (Ausland & Tonn, 2010).

In addition, businesses may work to make positive changes through their own operations in conflict-prone places. They may attempt to engage in fairer and more peaceful rules of engagement with communities, for example, through application of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (Voluntary Principles, 2000). They may distribute resources through structures for dialogue and decision making meant to be more inclusive, as does Chevron through its development committees in the Niger Delta (Hoben, Kovick, Plumb, & Wright, 2012). They may commit to international standards of conduct, for example, the IFC performance standards (IFC, 2012), or the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (OHCHR, 2011). They may make it possible for people to come together across conflict lines in the workplace. And they may commit themselves to just processes for conflict resolution even in weak rule of law states, as did mining companies in apartheid South Africa with the formation of the Independent Mediation Service of South Africa (IMSSA) (Hirschsohn, 1996). In doing so, companies are thought to be contributing to 'islands of peace' that have the potential to create new and more positive dynamics in society.

Businesses do, can or should impact *peacemaking dynamics* in peace-positive ways.

While most of the business and peace literature focuses on peacebuilding – often within a framework of post-conflict recovery – the literature also examines business actors working to end active conflicts. This is in part a reflection of business leaders as key people and the business community as key constituencies in conflict and peace, leading, for example, to the role of the Bogota Chamber of Commerce in the Colombia peace process (Rettberg, 2013), the role of the Nicosia Chamber of Commerce in Cyprus (Katsos and Forrer, 2014), and the Consultative Business Movement in South Africa (Charney, 1999). Business leaders may help to engineer and play roles in Track II diplomacy, for example, as described in Aceh (Iff and Alluri, 2016). Business may also catalyze and support mediation of conflict in an area of limited government capacity, as does, for example, Chevron in Nigeria through its Partners for Peace initiative (Ganson & Wennmann, 2016). And its roles may be more mundane, providing material support such as transportation or meeting space in a peacemaking context. The argument is therefore that businesses can be facilitators and enablers for peace in society (UNGC, 2015).

## Assumptions rather than evidence about business and peace

In large measure, the literature posits (sometimes explicitly but more often implicitly) that the activities described above – whether investment itself, conflict sensitivity or CSR – represent contributions to peace. In much of the analysis, causal connections that are asserted about a particular business activity and peace-positive impacts are premised not on specific case evidence of peace outcomes (or lack thereof), but rather on a set of postulates from related but distinct perspectives:

- *Liberal peace*: a business's intentions may be no more than to be present in a conflict-prone place; it is argued that business advances peace by 'doing what business does,' for example, creating jobs or building infrastructure. The IFC's Conflict Affected States in Africa initiative, for example, largely conflates 'growth, job creation, peace, and stability' (IFC, 2013); the Bpeace network simply asserts, 'more jobs means less violence' (Bpeace, n.d.).
- *Conflict sensitive business practice*: a business's intentions may be to avoid entanglement in conflict; it is argued that business advances peace by understanding its own impacts and acting proactively to not exacerbate conflict in already difficult places. The OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas, for example, purports to supply companies 'with a complete package to source minerals responsibly in order for trade in those minerals to support peace and development and not conflict' (OECD, 2013a, p. 3).
- *Business and human rights*: a business's intentions may be to understand and address the human rights impacts of its operation, and to remedy problems to which it has contributed. The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in its publication Business, Human Rights and Peace, for example, argues that businesses have an interest in promoting peace building through, among other measures, 'respecting the rights of each and every member of society' (p. 1).
- *Corporate social responsibility*: a business's intentions may be to apply international norms, standards and best practices even though this is not required in the conflict prone environment; it is argued that business advances peace by acting out of enlightened self-interest. The Hague Institute's policy brief on Corporate Social Responsibility and Human Security in Fragile States: Private Sector Engagement in Peacebuilding, for example, states that, 'A Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) framework is instrumental in guiding efforts of the private sector to contribute to human security' and thus to peace (Appiah & Jackson, 2015, p. 5).
- *Corporate philanthropy*: a business's intentions may be to help out in a place it has a significant presence; it is argued that business advances peace by providing resources that are otherwise difficult to come by in conflict prone environments. It is asserted, for example, that 'Philanthropy heals wounds in times of need', contributing to individual and relational transformation (Ghimire & Upreti 2012, p. 86).

Policy and practice with regard to business and peace should ideally be driven by sound data rather than assertions or assumptions about a particular business activity and its impact on peace. Yet building from these postulates and assumptions, decent livelihoods, the ability to accumulate capital, state revenues for service delivery and environmental sustainability, for example, are all commonly asserted to be part of 'peace-conducive economic development' of which the private sector can be part (International Alert, 2015, p. 5) – without specifying where or how these activities have contributed to peace.

Such assertions without context-specific evidence leaves the evidentiary links between company activity and peace outcomes, in the aggregate, weak. It was noted in the context of business and post-conflict reconstruction that, 'To date, there has been little work done on assessing the impact of programming' (Mac Sweeney, 2008, p. 11). The question of whether business efforts in fact contributed to peace often seems to be treated as an unnecessary distraction in the literature; of 15 company examples in the UN Global Compact's report on Responsible Business Advancing Peace, for example, only two report as outcomes any reduction in conflict or violence or increase in social cohesion to which the company activity has even arguably contributed (UNGC, 2013). It still appears true that 'the current enthusiasm for private sector's contribution to peace is based more on eagerness to do things differently than on a strong evidence base of success stories. The empirical evidence of how businesses have influenced state- and peacebuilding processes remains marginal and at best anecdotal' (Hoffmann, 2014, p. 4). Additionally, 'it is clear that a different picture emerges depending on whether the object of focus is specific corporate citizenship activities or a company's broader impacts' (Gitsham, 2007, p. 40), meaning that the focus of the business and peace literature on discrete initiatives can veil conflict impacts from a company's broader operations or very presence in a conflict-prone environment.

Given that there is certainly no consensus that business activities enumerated in the business and peace literature and illustrated above will make the places in which they are carried out more peaceful, this is problematic. In the realm of socio-economic dynamics, for example, a variety of critiques make clear that the nexus between material conditions and conflict or peace are questionable, unclear, or at the very least far more complex than a simple 'input-output' model can explain (e.g., Woodrow & Chigas, 2009). In the realm of socio-political dynamics, some critics see ever-deeper involvement of businesses into fragile conflict zones as conflict-fomenting neo-colonial exploitation (e.g., Provost, Ford & Tran, 2014); others argue that the privileging of business in the peace and development space is warping international agendas in fragile states further towards corporate interests (Englebert & Portelance, 2015; Barbara, 2006), and can in fact increase grievances by further marginalizing excluded communities (Obenland, 2014). In the realm of peacemaking dynamics, oft-touted efforts, such as logistical support given by 'Tiny' Rowland for the Mozambique peace process, may be taken out of context; he was known both to have supported the liberation movement Renamo through 'protection' payments (Conciliation Resources, 1998), and has been implicated in broader engineering of conflict and commissioning of violence (Drohan, 2004). Indeed, for each of the assertions made about the positive impacts of the activities constituting mainstream business and peace, we can identify significant qualifiers and counter-assertions.

Similarly, discussions of business and peace based on assumptions rather than evidence remain largely disconnected from the literature on 'business and conflict' addressing the private sector as an agent, intentional or not, for conflict and violence. An entire body of literature holds that business is in fact a primary enabler of conflict, either through complicity (e.g., OHCHR, 2008), or through intentional exploitation of conflict for profit (e.g., Drohan, 2004). Case evidence from such disparate settings as Afghanistan (DuPée, 2012) Nigeria (Idemudia, 2010) and Colombia (Dunning & Wirpsa, 2004) indicates that operations of multinational corporations in volatile environments may even prolong or exacerbate conflict, notwithstanding explicit ambitions to bring a 'development dividend' to local populations (Miklian and Schouten, 2013).

Yet this is rarely acknowledged in the mainstream business and peace literature. The World Bank's *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development*, for example, strongly advocates business incentives and 'a new global partnership to galvanize investments in countries and communities where high



unemployment and social disengagement contribute to the risks of conflict' (World Bank, 2011, p. 31). In its treatment of the private sector across 51 pages, however, it makes no mention at all of predatory multinational companies that may exploit fragility, or the possible negative impacts of private foreign investment on conflict or violence (Ganson & Wennmann, 2016, p. 94). Similarly, a report on the 'role of mining in national economies' by the International Council on Mining and Metals – an industry association that espouses among other principles the upholding of fundamental human rights – fails to make a single reference to any negative impact of mining on national economies or local communities, even in fragile states (Ibid.) The inter-relationships of business as an agent for peaceful development when at the same time it acts as an agent of conflict – intentionally or not – remain largely unaddressed.

## A profound disconnect from contemporary peacebuilding theory and practice

Perhaps most importantly, the emphasis on discrete activities presumed to be peace-positive seems profoundly disconnected from contemporary peacebuilding theory and practice. It is perhaps true that, 'Two decades ago international peacebuilding was understood as a centrally coordinated package of interventions aimed at resolving a conflict by addressing its root causes' (de Coning, 2016, p. 1), drawing from a menu of interventions that looked much like those found in the current business and peace literature. But based on hard lessons learned from failed or suboptimal interventions (e.g., Anderson & Olson, 2003) peacebuilding has since then developed in a variety of important directions:

- *Systems thinking.* Increasingly, conflict prone environments are understood as complex systems in which institutions and power relations reinforce conflict dynamics and undermine dynamics that would support peaceful development. Because these systems 'are functioning to achieve some purpose – protecting the power and authority of a particular elite, for example – they are highly resistant to change' (Ganson & Wennmann 2016, p. 192). This means that peacebuilders must work not only on building or reinforcing positive factors (often the focus of business and peace activities), but 'also ask what factors (actors, issues, motives, resources, dynamics, attitudes, behaviors) maintain or reinforce the conflict system, who would resist movement toward peace, and why' (CDA, 2010, p. 5). Because the goal is a system that reinforces peaceful development rather than conflict and violence, they focus on the factors that are driving the evolution of the system, and that, if they were changed, would lead to a significant change in the system (Ibid., p. 8).
- *Focus on resilience of social institutions.* Another important focus is on the capacity of social institutions 'to absorb and adapt in order to sustain an acceptable level of function, structure and identity under stress' (Dahlberg, 2015). For example, the inability or unwillingness of traditional authorities in West Africa to adapt the allocation of communal land to the realities of changing demographics – which would reduce the resources controlled by current landholders – was found to be a significant contributing factor to the large numbers of young men lacking social or professional attachment, and thus their availability for recruitment into the various brutal conflicts of the region (Richards & Chauveau, 2007). Peacebuilders thus often put considerable effort into compensatory mechanisms for building social consensus to address pressing problems, sometimes under the umbrella term of 'infrastructures for peace' (e.g., Odendaal, 2013; Kumar & De la Haye, 2011).
- *Attentiveness to motivations for violence.* Violence is often treated as inevitable, as Albert Einstein wrote to Sigmund Freud, 'Because man has within him a lust for hatred and destruction' (Cramer, 2006, p.

4). Yet more than two decades of conflict research establish that violence is the result of planned, purposeful action. 'Part of the problem with much existing analysis is that conflict continues to be regarded as simply a breakdown in a particular system rather than as the emergence of an alternative system of profit, power and even protection' (Keen, 2002, p. 22). Peacebuilders have therefore come to understand that, 'Only by understanding these functions of conflict and violence can interveners identify the underlying organizational aspects and motives of conflict that need to be understood and dealt with to nurture its prevention, diffusion and resolution' (Ganson & Wennmann, 2016, p. 110).

- *Linkages of peacebuilding activities.* A 'trickle up' theory of impact – that if enough people engage in enough positive activity, peace can emerge – is implicit in the business and peace literature's menu of presumably peace-positive activities; 'contributions to peace', often within a limited sphere, are treated as drops in the bucket that will somehow add up to systemic change. This assumption has been challenged in peacebuilding circles for some time (e.g., Chigas & Ganson, 2003); it turns out that small efforts are more often than not overwhelmed by broader systems dynamics. Peacebuilders therefore increasingly focus on a variety of critical connections among peacebuilding activities, among which the most important are linkages of individual and personal change (targeting skills, attitudes, perceptions, ideas and relationships with other individuals) to socio-political change (including governance reform as well as social norms, group behavior, and inter-group relationships), and linkages of efforts to reach broad segments of the population with efforts to reach key people (CDA, 2010).
- *Local ownership.* There is increasing acknowledgement that societies in conflict are complex, in that (1) the properties of a given conflict system cannot be understood by its component parts alone, but must be seen as a whole; that (2) small changes can have large impacts and large inputs may not affect meaningful change, as outputs of the system are not proportionate to inputs; and that (3) the system responds to a large number of dynamic factors according to the adaptations of its constituent parts, without a controlling agent (de Coning, 2016). Attempts 'to engineer specific outcomes' thus run a high risk of generating 'on-going instability, dependence and fragility' (Ibid., p. 13). There is therefore a growing emphasis among peacebuilders on the need to accompany rather than direct local actors in their own peacebuilding analysis, planning, and intervention (GPP, 2015, p. 8).

In light of these peacebuilding principles, the starting point for contemporary peacebuilding practice is a systems map of key actors and the key driving factors of cohesion and division, ideally developed by diverse local actors in dialogue with each other. This is because, as a result of highly context-specific local dynamics, 'an approach that contributes to peace in one context may be irrelevant to peace in another, and may actually worsen conflict in a third' (CDA, 2014, p. 3). Interventions are designed with reference to the systems map in ways that have some meaningful chance of altering fundamental socio-political realities in positive ways. This allows for actors – intending for their activities to be peace-positive but necessarily only taking steps on a path to peace – to move beyond rhetoric that is still common in business and peace discourse that 'the effectiveness of peace efforts is hard to measure'. Rather, understanding fundamental systems dynamics, peacebuilders can have some certainty that they are making a meaningful contribution to a broader peace if their activity is addressing key dynamics of conflict and peace, AND it also:

- Results in the creation or reform of political institutions to handle grievances in situations where such grievances genuinely drive the conflict;
- Contributes to a momentum for peace by causing participants and communities to develop their own peace initiatives in relation to critical elements of context analysis;

- Increasingly prompts people to resist violence and provocations to violence;
- Results in an increase in people's security and in their sense of security; and/or
- Results in meaningful improvement in inter-group relations (Chigas, Church & Corlazzoli, 2014).

Despite the growing evidence base for effective peace practice, and its incorporation into mainstream policy such as the OECD DAC guidance on *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility* (OECD, 2012, p. 67), the business and peace literature deals with such peacebuilding principles and strategies for effectiveness only superficially, or not at all.

## The high risk of suboptimal outcomes and unintended consequences

As the peacebuilding community itself needed to learn (Anderson, 1999; Anderson & Olson, 2003), there are significant risks of suboptimal outcomes and unintended consequences for peacebuilding work in the absence of the systems analyses, context-specific strategies, and attentiveness to effectiveness measures at the heart of sound peacebuilding practice:

- *'Doing good' but not building peace.* Conflict-prone environments may have many needs, among others for better health, education, employment, infrastructure, security and governance. A corporate intervention to help eradicate malaria or operate in compliance with international labor norms even where this is not required by local law – assuming they are carried out professionally and in a conflict-sensitive manner – are therefore in all likelihood positive from a social perspective. They will have only tangential impact on peace, however, in places where there is no close nexus between these issues and key drivers of conflict. In particular, evidence from development and peacebuilding practice shows that assumptions about the relationship between economic development efforts and peacebuilding are largely untested and often false (Cf. Stewart, 2000; Stewart, 2008; Berman, Callen, Felter & Shapiro, 2011; Blair, Graeme, Fair, Malhotra & Shapiro, 2012).
- *Small 'wins' that don't add up to peace.* A company may in fact undertake initiatives that, for example, increase a local community's sense of security through its efforts to help reform local policing consistent with the Voluntary Principles; its actions might additionally have a close nexus to key drivers of conflict where, for example, state-society relations are particularly tense. Ultimate effectiveness of peacebuilding work, though, is premised on it moving forward fast enough, being sustained over time, and together with other activities, being undertaken at a scale commensurate with the challenges and adequately linked to other levels of peace-positive activity in the conflict system (Anderson & Olson, 2003). Discrete initiatives must therefore be intentionally linked to other efforts if they are to make a meaningful contribution to a conflict-prone environment moving sustainably towards peaceful development.
- *Program failures.* Even if a company is working towards meaningful goals, it must make progress in a fragile environment despite complex conflict dynamics. Otherwise, the very dynamics of political fragmentation, mistrust, exclusion and grievance that make a context fragile in the first place will undermine attempts to address underlying grievances. Schools and clinics will be constructed only to stand empty because the system too dysfunctional to build them in the first place also won't allocate resources to run them; infrastructure projects meant to support inclusive growth will be subject to the same corrupt influences or political rivalries that inhibited inclusive economic growth before (Ganson

& Wennmann, 2016). Corporate initiatives must therefore take account of, and address, potential pushback and spoilers in the system.

- *Perverse impacts.* Companies are prone to concentrate on the good they are bringing to conflict-prone places, whether measured in jobs, local procurement or tax revenues. But the introduction of new resources into resource-constrained societies more often intensifies competition between groups or actors in conflict than eases it (Zandvliet & Anderson, 2009). For every employed person in a platinum mine in South Africa, for example, it is estimated that there are 10 migrant job-seekers who remain unemployed. The dynamics of large numbers of jobless young men support 'a host of criminal and trafficking networks' which, along with contested control over allocation of jobs among the mining company, local government, traditional authorities, and competing labor unions, contributed to the tensions that led up to the Marikana massacre (Breckenridge, 2014).

It is tempting to take a rhetorical stance in favor of business doing something rather than nothing in the face of conflict and violence. But without more substantial points of intersection between business and peace and contemporary peacebuilding theory and practice – in particular the drawing of a thread from the purported peacebuilding activity to key drivers of conflict based on rigorous systems understanding – business and peace advocates will largely be unable to draw meaningful conclusions about the impacts – positive or negative – of a particular business or peace initiative in a particular place. They will rather be limited to vague assertions about business activities 'bringing mutual benefit and the advancement of peace' (UNGC, 2013a, p. 4), or making 'a significant contribution to the common good' (Ibid., p. 11). And they will risk failing to contribute to peace or even doing harm, even if their intentions are to do good.

## Also missing from the equation: the 'who' and the 'how'

As outlined above, the gap is already wide between the menu of activities typically enumerated in the literature as business roles for peace, and the strategies and questions grounded in systems analysis that constitute effective peacebuilding. But peacebuilding is not only a what; it is a who. Effective action is dependent not only on strategic engagement with the key drivers of conflict in a particular context, but on the place of the peacemaking or peacebuilding agent within that system. The business and peace literature also largely sidesteps a critical set of questions about the capacity and motivations for business to engage as a peacebuilding actor, and the relationships to other actors in a conflict system that enable them to accept private sector actors as such.

To the extent that it requires going beyond actions 'ethical businesses already are conducting' (Oetzel *et al.*, 2010, p. 352), one may in the first instance question whether companies have the requisite capabilities to engage in peacebuilding. Mary Anderson, an authority on outside intervention in conflict-prone environments, noted that 'peace is not an area for amateurs' (Anderson, 2008, p. 125). For companies to effectively apply peacebuilding principles, they must 'perform accurate and up-to-date conflict analysis; establish comfortable, trusting, and transparent relationships with diverse people who may not share their values; use specialized mediation skills to identify common concerns that can unite antagonists while also respecting fundamental differences and opposing positions; and have the ability to be calm and comfortable in situations of danger, threat, and emotional and physical stress'. In what is perhaps a pronounced understatement, she concludes that these 'are not common, everyday skills found among corporate managers' (Ibid., pp. 125-6). Anderson's comments echo studies suggesting that global companies require business competencies in areas in which most managers have no background or training, including the competencies needed to deal with foreign

country interests, multiple domestic and foreign pressure groups, or international conflict (Saner, Yiu & Søndergaard, 2000). It is also an incomplete answer to attempt to outsource these functions, as robust governance and management systems are required within the company, in addition to individual skills and courage (Ganson, 2014). How peacebuilding capabilities are integrated into company structures and how these impact peacebuilding effectiveness remains largely unexplored in the business and peace literature.

The question of corporate capabilities for peacebuilding goes hand in hand with the question of motivation. Typical of business and peace policy and practice is the OECD argument that 'MNEs have a strong business incentive to act responsibly' (OECD, 2008, p. 17); as noted above, the UN Global Compact for its part takes the position that there is 'effectively no contradiction between maximized long-term financial performance and positive contributions to peace and development' (UNGC & PRI, 2010, p. 6). Yet companies have long found that they could capitalize on high returns on investment despite instability (Goulbourne, 2003). Countries such as Colombia, Indonesia, Algeria and the Philippines attracted high levels of FDI even during periods of overt armed conflict (Cambell, 2002); flows of FDI to Côte d'Ivoire remained positive during its entire civil war (MIGA, 2010), and the cases of Brazil, South Africa and Mexico highlight that FDI occurs despite high levels of criminal violence (Wennmann, 2011). Studying why direct conflict risks do not deter investment, a 2010 study by MIGA, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency of the World Bank Group, found that companies across sectors, company size and geographical origin believed that business opportunities outweigh risks and that potential losses were limited (MIGA, 2010). Business and peace policy and practice, however, largely discounts the reality that, as concluded *The Economist*, 'For brave businessfolk, there are rich pickings in grim places' (Risky Returns, 2000). With limited exceptions, (e.g., Rettberg, 2016) the literature therefore sheds less insight than it might on the actual motivations of companies taking peace-positive action, and on how the calculus of companies not taking such action might be changed.

Even a company capable and motivated to undertake peacebuilding work must still recognize that the characteristics of the company in its context determine, at least in part, the possible ways in which it can participate in peace efforts. A company operating in a conflict prone environment becomes part and parcel of a complex system, with multiple and intricate inter-relationships among the company, its operations, its neighboring communities and the broader society (Ganson, 2013b). Companies often have close relationships with the elites whose support they cultivate, and have operations that touch on land, distribution of jobs and other benefits, and other issues of profound interest to many people. Their operations will inevitably have direct and indirect impacts on existing social tensions, on the effectiveness and legitimacy of government, and in more extreme cases on the impunity with which governments or others may violate human rights; and companies are often confronted by the unfulfilled expectations and grievances of local populations (Bardouille-Crema, Chigas & Miller, 2013). Additionally, national companies will have, in most cases, very different characteristics, relationships, entry points and histories than multinational companies with global operations (Banfield, Gunduz, & Killick, 2006). It is certainly not impossible for even the same businesses to play both positive and negative roles; mining companies in South Africa, for example, were champions for change at the national level in South Africa (Marais & Davies, 2015), even while their local operations were still focal points for violence driven by apartheid policies and practices in which the mines actively participated (TRC, 1998). Yet in the development sphere, it has been found that approaches by oil companies in the Niger Delta that try to bring benefits to communities without addressing the negative impacts of company operations 'tinker around the problem of poverty and underdevelopment in host communities' and thus have marginal impact (Idemudia, 2009, p. 111). It would not seem unlikely that the same will obtain for peacebuilding

– that the full range of a company’s impacts in a complex environment will shape its relationships and thus its ability to play a peace-positive role – meriting more attention in business and peace research.

Finally, it is unlikely that business actors will achieve substantial results in the domain of conflict and peace without close collaboration with other actors. Yet the interdependent facets of peacebuilding will often require professional and institutionalized support to coordinate and sustain them. Ad hoc processes convened directly by stakeholders can die from the exhaustion of planning and managing complex collaborative initiatives that are outside the core mandate or expertise of any participant (Ganson & Wennmann, 2016). Companies in particular may face resistance from local actors until they ‘relinquish some measure of control over decision-making’ (Laplante & Spears, 2008, p. 115). The United Nations guidance on effective mediation suggests a variety of support functions that may be necessary to support collaboration in situations of conflict: to help build relationships of confidence where they do not sufficiently exist among local actors themselves; to facilitate across a variety of actors the participatory analysis of conflict dynamics as well as local strengths and challenges faced in dealing with them; to ensure the careful evaluation of strategic and tactical options for introducing new thinking and new modes of action for conflict prevention into a fragile environment; to provide expert support for the design, management and evaluation of conflict prevention systems; and to engage in consistent outreach to the full range of stakeholders nationally and internationally for coherent action (UN, 2012; UNDPA & UNEP, 2015). More generally, a ‘backbone support organization’ that provides services such as neutral facilitation or mediation, technology and communication, data collection and reporting, and administrative support is increasingly seen as a critical enabler of complex collaborative efforts (Krania & Kramer, 2011, p. 40). This suggests a need for further exploration of the key relationships and institutional enablers of business and peace.

## A richer set of perspectives and questions

This analysis establishes a pressing need for researchers and practitioners to shift some share of mind from the ‘what’ – the menu of possible business interventions for peace that dominates the business and peace literature – to the ‘who’ and the ‘how’ of business and peace. Advocates will accelerate progress by drawing from contemporary peacebuilding theory and practice to situate private sector actors within a complex conflict system, understand key dynamics reinforcing conflict and undermining attempts towards peace, and seeking entry points for positive influence. What factors matter most in a particular place, what forces are inhibiting sufficient coalitions for positive change from forming, and what particular advantages might businesses have in addressing these?

Peace advocates will also move more dependably towards their goals as they survey the full range of negative as well as positive impacts of private sector actors in conflict environments, acknowledging and addressing tensions between business roles and relationships in different parts and at different levels of the system. What business interventions are perceived as most legitimate and welcome by different actors, and why? How can business best play a peace-positive role, even as its contributions to conflict, intentional or not, are acknowledged?

The analysis also suggests the need to move beyond the stereotyping of private sector actors – largely as a homogenous force for bad or good, depending on the commentator’s perspective – to a more nuanced understanding of the perspectives, interests, motives, capabilities, limitations and possibilities for action of particular business actors. Peacebuilding actors will need to work with private sector actors in the same way they work to understand and engage other actors – even those seen to be hostile or indifferent to peace, in

governments, opposition groups, or civil society – within conflict environments. How do we move beyond the ‘coulds’ and ‘shoulds’ of business and peace to understand how companies in practice find the courage and commitment to work for peace? What is the supporting infrastructure that allows cross-cutting coalitions between business and other actors to emerge and succeed?

Asking and answering these questions will require broader and deeper inquiry than that which currently typifies business and peace research, advocacy and practice. But the broad experience of peacebuilding practice suggests that, as these questions are asked and answered for particular businesses in particular conflict contexts, it will become increasingly possible to understand, conceptualize, plan, implement, and measure the effectiveness of business-inclusive strategies for peace.

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