

BUSINESS SUPPORT CENTRES

SPARK has been working in conflict affected environments since 1994, to support young ambitious people to lead their post-conflict societies into prosperity. SPARK has developed a number of solutions, interventions designed to specifically support and target proactive entrepreneurs that either intend to start a business or grow an existing enterprise.

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in post-conflict societies experience specific hurdles and challenges. These are different for start-ups compared to existing businesses. SPARK assists both of these categories through Business Support Centres (BSCs).

What is a Business Support Centre (BSC)?

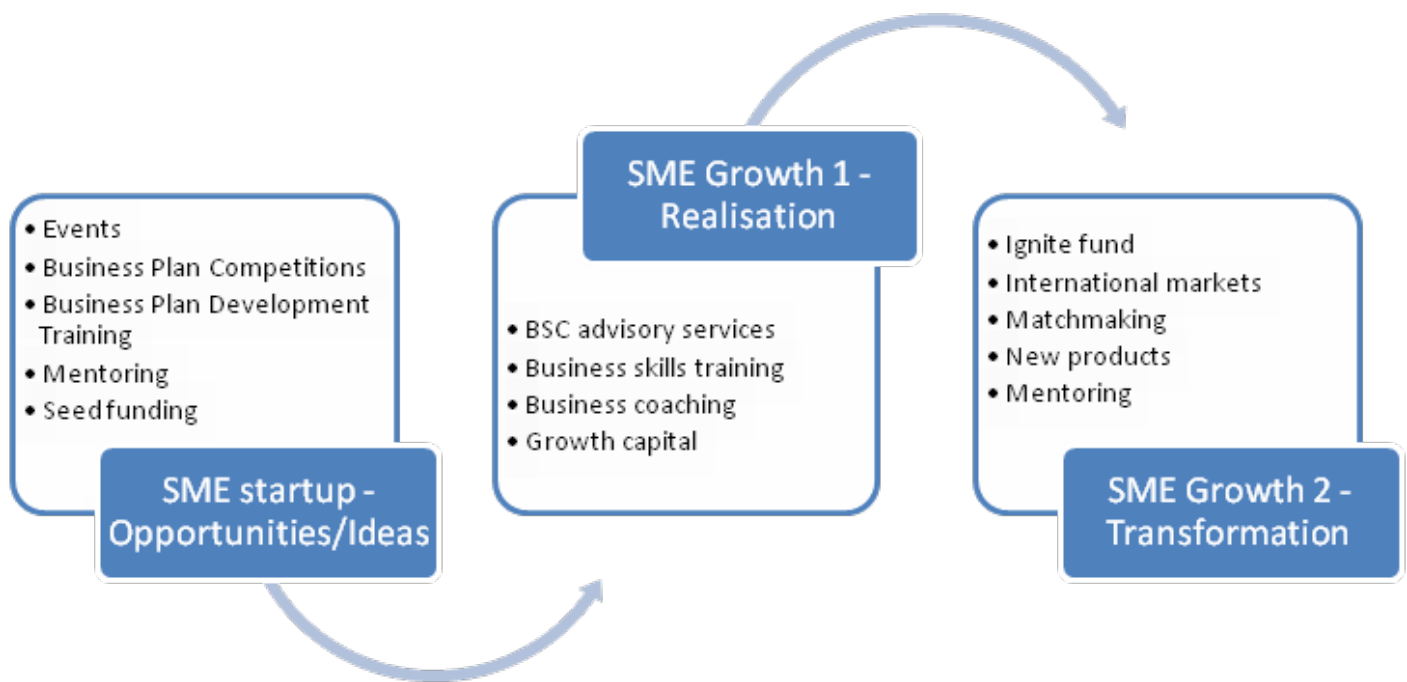
A Business Support Centre is a physical space with well-trained, entrepreneurial and highly motivated staff, who both coordinate the activities of the centre and provide direct support to the entrepreneurs. Very often incubation space is provided to entrepreneurs who receive support from the BSC. The overarching objective of the SPARK Business Support Centres is to assist entrepreneurs to start and grow in conflict affected environments.

Why a BSC?

SPARK sees business and job creation through BSC as a crucial way to contribute to an inclusive and sustainable economy and decent work in conflict affected states. The support services that the centres offer are dynamic and constantly improved by the team operating them as well as SPARK. SMEs lifecycle with the BSC support at every stage:

Theodore Hakizimana
Akezamutima - Burundi





A BSC supports both young ambitious new start entrepreneurs as well as growth oriented entrepreneurs.

A BSC in Conflict Affected Environments?

Since its establishment in 1994, SPARK has focused on conflict affected environments. Conflict affected environments offer less formal employment opportunities to young people. At the same time, stabilisation of the society at large in such environments relies often on creating job opportunities for large numbers of unemployed youth.

Operating in a conflict affected environment also means one needs to be aware of the local political situation, as well as conflict dynamics and community fabric. Special attention needs to be devoted to ensuring opportunities of the centres are equally accessible to all in the society. Groups such as demobilised combatants, refugees, IDPs, women and minority communities are generally adversely affected by conflict. A conflict sensitive approach to include them in the running of the BSC is needed to ensure that the support of the centre is inclusive.

A solution for Start-ups

A Business Support Centre supports young entrepreneurs through the early stages of their company development. Failure rates of start-ups are high, and investment in growing SMEs provides generally a much better value for money. However, in many conflict affected environments the SME sector is very much underdeveloped and new start-up SMEs are required to develop the local economy. Often this includes formalising and up scaling existing informal small scale economic activity. The main challenges these entrepreneurs face are a lack of capacity and knowledge of doing business (management, sales and finance), difficulties with access to (start-up) finance, lack of professional networks, innovation and market knowledge. Additionally, in conflict affected states, there is not much guidance for start-ups. The support that the BSCs offer typically consists of business skills trainings and coaching, business plan competitions, supporting access to finance and mentoring.

Growing existing SMEs

Existing growth oriented SMEs are an excellent investment in creating sustainable employment opportunities in conflict affected states. Although they share many of the challenges of the start-up companies, their needs do differ. Team management skills and access to more sizeable finance and too little absorption capacity of investments are some of these.



Goran Jocić
Godzi Carpentry Workshop - Kosovo

BSC Services

Typical services that Business Support Centres deliver include:

- Training: variety of group training separately for start-up and growth oriented existing entrepreneurs. In these setting, entrepreneurs learn from other's successes and failures;
- Business Plan Competitions: motivate potential entrepreneurs through well advertised competitions that also trigger would-be entrepreneurs;
- Mentoring and coaching entrepreneurs: organise continuous tailor made support for entrepreneurs in developing their business;
- Access to Finance: Especially focussing on SME finance. Finance beyond microcredit, but smaller than large scale commercial loans. At present the mayor gap in developing countries, especially conflict affected states. Through loans guarantee or impact equity funds;
- Matchmaking solutions: assisting local SMEs to become successful suppliers to larger (multinational) companies and investors in country as well as export support services;

For more detailed information on SPARK Business Support Centres contact Verica Koracevic at v.koracevic@spark-online.org and visit some examples at:

- BSC Monrovia, Liberia: <http://www.bscmonrovia.com/>
- BSC Kragujevac, Serbia: <http://bsckragujevac.rs/>
- BSC Bar, Montenegro: <http://www.bsctbar.org/>
- BSC Bitola, Macedonia: <http://www.bsctbitola.org/>
- BAC Zvečan, Business Advisory Centre: <http://poslovnicecentarzvecan.com/pcz/en/>
- COE Birzeit, Centre of Excellence: <http://sites.birzeit.edu/nzitce/>



BSC Kragujevac
representatives at the fair

DONORS:

Throughout the years SPARK has been able to deliver results thanks to a number of donors. The following are just a few of our donors that greatly contributed to SPARK's achievements:

Chevron, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Commission, King Baudouin Foundation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UK Department for International Development (DFID), World Bank Group.

OUR CERTIFICATES:

SPARK is committed to meet the highest standards of organisational practice and ethics. We are proud to hold the following certifications:

- International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001. is an international quality control standard-setting body composed of representatives from various national standards organisations.
- Algemeen Nut Beogende Instellingen (ANBI), are recognised charitable not-for-profit organisations by The Dutch Tax and Customs Administration. Donations to these are tax deductible.
- Centraal Bureau Fondsenwerving (CBF) is an independent foundation that monitors fundraising by charities and certifies them with the goal to promote trustworthy fundraising and expenditure.
- International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) is a multi-stakeholder initiative that seeks to improve the transparency of aid in order to increase its effectiveness in tackling poverty. Certified organisations provide open data and information on how they spend their funds.

