

LOBBY & ADVOCACY

Inclusive business environment

SPARK has been working in fragile and conflict affected environments since 1994, to support young ambitious people to lead their post-conflict societies into prosperity. SPARK's underlying vision is that inclusive economic growth and poverty eradication, through the creation of decent work for and increased participation by youth, women and marginalised groups, makes a major contribution to promoting stability and sustainable peace in fragile and conflict affected regions.

SPARK has developed a number of solutions: interventions designed to specifically support proactive entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial minds. One central solution focuses on Lobby & Advocacy for an inclusive, enabling business environment and the improvement of the socioeconomic position of youth, women and other marginalised groups in these regions.

RESULT. Lobby activities in Kosovo included working with STIKK to initiate the process of exemption of ICT equipment from Customs Tax. This included preparing a position paper which showed the current status in the neighbouring countries and the advantages of the abolition of the Customs Tax for IT Equipment for competitiveness in the country. On August 5th 2011 following successful lobby by SPARK, the Minister of Finance introduced a new fiscal package which included the propositions of STIKK regarding the abolition of Customs Tax for IT equipment.



The secretary presenting on the constitutional processes

Beneficiaries and target groups

First, the tools and strategies which SPARK provides within this Solution concern small and medium-sized businesses differentiating between start-ups and existing companies, in fragile and conflict-affected environments which experience specific hurdles and challenges. Also targeted are entrepreneurial youth, women and other marginalised groups to enable them to advocate for and improve their socioeconomic position in their society. Second, relevant stakeholders, such as political parties, civil society, businesses, government and private sector organisations, are the main players able to provide and improve the conditions of the business environment, youth and women employment and public and political participation. Due to the gap between relevant stakeholders, SPARK has stepped up its lobbying and advocacy to play a crucial intermediary role in this field.

SPARK Added value

There is substantial lobbying and advocacy undertaken in fragile and conflict-affected regions by (inter)national civil society organisations, youth movements, business associations and political parties. SPARK's added value can be characterized by the following, crucial strengths:

1. Analysis: ability to analyse underlying drivers of change and to harness (or mitigate) these to achieve effective change without doing harm;
2. Diplomacy: highly skilled at combining cross-level diplomacy encompassing "inside track" lobbying and advice with "outside track" advocacy and activism (via local partners);
3. Training: strong capacity-building methodology in L&A training/coaching for local CSO partners;
4. Local context: Capacity to develop evidence base using in-depth understanding of local context;
5. Protection local CSO's from authorities by directly taking on the most risky interventions;
6. Networks: strong local, national and international L&A networks available in 15 fragile states);
7. Information: function as "eyes and ears" through strong local capability both on obstacles to inclusive MSME development and more widely on socioeconomic and political context.

SPARK's lobby and advocacy activities are orientated towards specific subjects concerning private sector development and the improvement of the socioeconomic position of marginalised groups. SPARK has also guided its local partners into a more political dimension of their work, reaching out to political parties, government organisations and relevant interest groups in order to realise better and more inclusive results.

What we do

In almost all our activities and programmes, a lobby and advocacy component is built in. Below two examples which give a good insight into our approach and illustrate the results that can be achieved:

Business Development in Fragile and Conflict Affected Regions

Capacity building in L&A has been an integral part of our worldwide activities: local partners, institutions, CSO's and other stakeholders are supported to advocate for a better business environment and to promote job creation. Skills in campaigning and advocacy have been strengthened, with a focus on grass-roots approach, campaign strategies and communication tools.

One of the strategic objectives of our L&A programmes has been to remove business barriers through advocacy and policy influencing together with our local partners. SPARK assists in, inter alia: mapping business obstacles; formulating advocacy strategies; and assisting and coaching partners in organising and conducting round-table sessions for multi-stakeholder dialogue and network building.

RESULT. In 2014 SPARK and its local partner in South Sudan, assisted when the local government in Yei announced tax exemption for youth start-up entrepreneurs in agribusiness and agro-processing. This was a topic identified and put on the agenda by the youth agri-entrepreneurs represented at the Value Chain Platforms (VCP). The tax-exemption policy was catalysed by SPARK's commitment to training and financing agribusiness start-ups through the visible promotion of the Business Plan Competitions. It was this combination of advocacy and action that secured the policy change. The above outcome is a partial effect of having local government participate as a stakeholder in the VCP's, bringing it much closer to the challenges of its constituents.

Increasing Youth Participation in Fragile States

These SPARK activities focus on creating an enabling environment for youth to advocate for and improve their socioeconomic position, by strengthening youth and relevant organizations from the government, the private sector as well as civil society organisations targeting youth. Together with its local partners, which advocacy capabilities have been strengthened, SPARK has been implementing several L&A campaigns which aim at increasing youth participation in the public and private sector, influencing government and political party policies and the public and political agenda on socioeconomic issues for youth.

RESULT. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories a campaign called ‘Manarat’, has resulted in higher awareness of youth issues and the growth of youth networks addressing them, mainly at the local and regional levels. Almost 2,000 youths became involved in this campaign which has a strong media component. Our local partner PYALARA has developed into a credible youth advocate, and has been invited to co-write and co-organise a national campaign against corruption by the NGO Development Centre, the largest Palestinian umbrella organisation of its kind working hand-in-hand with Palestinian NGO’s. Due to PYALARA’s efforts, nepotism has become the primary issue the NDC campaigns against.



Former President and Senior Politicians
in YEP training

Training

SPARK provides training which are entirely focused on L&A. Emphasis lies on research and analysis, developing strategies and the involvement of media. This training has been carried out within most SPARK programmes.

SPARK training are tailor-made and meet the demands of the local context.

RESULT. As an example, SPARK works in Burundi with partner organisation “Ligue Burundaise des Droits de l’Homme Iteka” (first Burundian human rights organisation in advocacy and human rights defence) to advocate for women’s property and inheritance rights in Burundi. The project provides women with legal training so they can advocate for their own rights. Besides co-financing this activity, SPARK has assisted in setting the L&A agenda with Ligue Iteka and provided coaching and training for LI staff.



YEP training discussions

Networks

Through its registered field offices in target countries, as well as at a global level, SPARK has access to a variety of networks relevant to L&A in the area of inclusive private sector and business development. Most important networks:

1. Dutch NGO platform PARTOS
2. Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurship
3. Southern African IDEAS network
4. Solutions Alliance. Members of the working group include UNDP, UNCTAD, ILO,
5. DRC, Oxford Refugees Centre, and UNCHR, amongst others
6. Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, together with IFC, World Bank, ILO, UNDP, Shell and Clingendael and others
7. Let's Work Programme initiated by IFC
8. OECD/DAC's International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF)
9. Partnership with the United Nations' Global Partnership for Youth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda (GPY2015).
10. NL MFA Knowledge Platforms (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Security and Rule of Law; and Food and Business)
11. Local networks in over 14 countries (West and East of Africa, Middle East, Balkans)