

Project profile

Working with businesses for peace in Bangladesh

Introduction

Bangladesh has seen rapid growth and development in recent decades, but continues to be marred by political unrest. Saferworld began research on the role of businesses in preventing conflict in 2015, with a strong belief that they would have a key part to play in maintaining peace. The business for peace project works in three districts – Sylhet, Sunamganj and Rajshahi – to bring together businesses and local groups to discuss political violence and to take action against it.

Background

Civil unrest and political violence are all too common in Bangladesh, especially around election time. The last election in 2014 resulted in clashes between supporters of the two main political parties, leading to widespread protests and *hartals* (strikes and blockades). Tensions flared up again on the election anniversary in 2015. Such disturbances not only have human costs – they often result in casualties – but also economic ones. Businesses are cut off from their markets, offices and educational institutions are shut and supply chains disrupted. Some estimates put the economic loss at \$60-\$80 million a day, while others, such as the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce, have put it as high as \$200 million. It is no surprise, then, that a vocal business bloc has emerged as a voice against violence and conflict.

Initial research revealed that five overlapping areas drive conflict and insecurity – including political polarisation and unethical business practices – and that businesses were especially well placed to influence policy decisions and institutions due to their economic links. Respondents suggested that businesses could also play a bigger role in peace by creating jobs and economic opportunities,

Project approach

With its partners, Saferworld will:

- Build relationships with local partners and stakeholders in three districts – Sylhet, Sunamganj and Rajshahi – with a focus on business actors.
- Gain a greater understanding of local perceptions of conflict drivers and the potential role of businesses.



Project

Empowering communities through business for peace (B4P)

Project locations

Sylhet, Sunamganj and Rajshahi

Donor

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Size of grant

BDT 11,440,000 (approximately £106,600 GBP)

Project duration

19 months (October 2016 - April 2018)

Saferworld thematic area

Inclusive political processes

- Bring together local groups, including businesses, to discuss their common challenges and come up with joint solutions.

Throughout the project's lifespan, Saferworld will monitor and evaluate results as well as implement periodic reviews of progress. When the project comes to a close, we will evaluate our success in empowering the business sector as a strong and vocal peace advocate. The final evaluations will be carried out externally and independently.

Anticipated outcomes

- Links are forged between business actors and other local groups, with the committees and centres continuing beyond the life of the project.
- An evidence base is established that examines the role of business actors in conflict and peace, specifically focusing on criminality, officials and economic activity.
- A replicable model is created for coordination of peace advocacy within the business sector.
- During times of political unrest, the business bloc takes a stronger stand against violence.
- The learning, experience and outcomes of the research project attract donors and other actors to invest in Bangladesh, offering an enabling environment for business and trade, positively influencing conflict dynamics.

Key activities

- Research through focus group discussions and key informant interviews with economic actors, local government departments, civil society, academics, media, and political and marginalised groups, to gain a better understanding of conflict dynamics and the potential role for businesses as peace actors.
- Form business for peace committees and centres in each district, bringing together different groups to come up with plans of action and influence policymakers.
- Conduct conflict and gender analyses, looking at how business platforms can minimise risks and maximise the impact for peace.

Partners

Saferworld is implementing the project jointly with partners:

Sylhet - Association of Workers for Alternative Rural Development (AWARD)

Sylhet Business for Peace Committee

Sunamganj- Efforts for Rural Advancement (ERA)

Sunamganj Business for Peace Committee

Rajshahi- Barendra Unnayan Prochesta (BUP) and Rajshahi Business for Peace Committee

CSR Centre (national level interaction and event management)

Funded by



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**Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC**

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives.

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