



# Assessing peace and social impacts through local human security business partnerships

Mark van Dorp<sup>\*</sup>, Mary Martin, Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic

*LSE IDEAS, London School of Economics & Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2 2AE, UK*

## KEYWORDS

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**Abstract** As competing guidelines and standards to encourage responsible business behavior and social impact management proliferate (e.g., the Do No Significant Harm principle and ESG standards), companies and investors are struggling to define basic concepts and devise usable methodologies for operating in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Objectives are framed using large, general terms like peace and sustainable development. Even organizations that aspire to positive social and environmental impacts toward peacebuilding find their ambitions thwarted when global frameworks must be translated into the messy and chaotic conditions on the ground. In this article, we outline an approach using forward-looking human security partnerships between business and local stakeholders to identify and assess the potential peace value and risks of business interventions as they materialize over time. Next, we outline lessons from Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo and suggest how businesses can use novel governance arrangements to design and measure social impacts that build peace via improvements to human security.

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## 1. The proliferation of ESG standards and the challenge of fragile, conflict-affected settings

Businesses face heightened expectations to contribute positively to societal challenges like climate change, sustainable development, inclusion, and the protection of human rights. This has required increased importance toward

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [m.van-dorp@lse.ac.uk](mailto:m.van-dorp@lse.ac.uk) (M. van Dorp), [m.c.martin@lse.ac.uk](mailto:m.c.martin@lse.ac.uk) (M. Martin), [v.bojicic-dzelilovic@lse.ac.uk](mailto:v.bojicic-dzelilovic@lse.ac.uk) (V. Bojicic-Dzelilovic)

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) objectives and commitments to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With pressure coming from not only regulators and media but also investors, employees, and other public stakeholders, more companies are mainstreaming ESG performance in their annual reports, using internationally accepted standards (e.g., those promoted by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) or the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board; SASB). The percentage of publicly traded companies in the S&P 500 index that publish some kind of ESG-related report has increased from 35% in 2010 to 86% in 2021 (Rouen et al., 2022). However, there are significant knowledge gaps around addressing corporate social impacts, including how to adequately measure and evaluate ESG strategies (Edmans, 2023; Sheehan et al., 2023). Many investors and companies acknowledge that current standards are incomplete, costly, and time-consuming to implement due to their complexity and difficulty in measuring progress. This applies to social issues within the ESG standards regarding their elusiveness, propensity toward selective assessment of certain social issues, and challenges capturing ESG's interrelatedness. At the same time, it is increasingly recognized that social issues have high relevance regarding risks and potential benefits from improved business performance to better relationships with local communities (Sheehan et al., 2023; UNPRI, 2017). As such, the same gap applies to defining and measuring companies' SDG contributions. There is a disconnect between the ambitions of the SDG agenda regarding contributions from the private sector and so-called *financial materiality* (i.e., what is relevant and applicable to a company's financial and business goals). This gap impedes effective impact measurement and the implementation of durable business contributions to sustainable development, peacebuilding, and other social goals.

There is no single, globally accepted ESG standard. Rather, there are prolific, paradoxical guidelines and standards to encourage responsible business behavior and social impact management from Do No Significant Harm human rights due diligence to ESG and SDG impact standards. As such, companies and investors are struggling to heed regulatory and normative developments, define basic concepts, and devise usable methodologies. However, the promulgation of the SDG agenda has illuminated the misalignment between certain segments of the ESG and SDG guidelines. For example, *SDG 16* (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) calls on governments to deliver

inclusion and participation via inclusive governance, yet the private sector's contributions to empowerment—via meaningful participation from individuals, communities, and civil society to advance peace, security, and development—are not clearly defined. Businesses need more clarity in this area, and throughout this article, we argue the benefits of human security.

In fragile and conflict-affected settings where impacts are framed using general terms like peace and sustainable development, the operational challenges are daunting. The global frameworks that exist must be translated into the messy and chaotic conditions present in such contexts. Definitions of financial materiality must be adjusted to include risks and opportunities for the company, as well as the multiplicity of interrelated threats facing local stakeholders affected by different forms of violence impacting the business and social ecosystem. In this article, we outline how businesses can adopt a more context-focused, people-centered approach that uses human security partnerships between business and local stakeholders to identify and assess materiality, impacts, and the potential peace value and risks to business interventions as they materialize over time.

*Human security partnerships* are a long-term dialogue between business, conflict, and crisis-affected communities in which all sides articulate the experiences and perspectives of existing threats in a particular context to foster an agenda for collective action. Creating effective mechanisms to underpin business-community interactions starts with understanding particular forms of vulnerability in each location and identifying how these can align with the business agenda of risk minimization, mitigation, and the search for commercial advantage.

This contextualized, people-centered dialogue represents more than the usual forms of stakeholder engagement (Maher & Buhmann, 2019) or consultation exercises (e.g., free, prior, and informed consent). It requires companies to enter ongoing, participatory, and equitable conversations alongside community groups. These dialogues aim to identify common ground and the potential for collective action between the company and community and involve the mutual recognition of threats, opportunities, and the capacity to address them. As we will show in the case of Colombia in Section 4, this kind of dialogue culminating in decisions to work together is part of an extended process in which awareness, understanding, and trust must be built—usually with the help of third-party facilitators. Unlike a classic mediation exercise, the aim is not merely to reach a

compromise between conflicting interests but to arrive at and consolidate reciprocity and shared outcomes via partnerships.

We argue that such adaptive partnerships are a means to bridge high-level policy and management goals (e.g., those that are embodied in SDG and ESG objectives) and facilitate long-term, meaningful transformation at the community level. This can be achieved by integrating a bottom-up perspective that respects and leverages the everyday realities of those affected by present or potential business operations.

In this attempt to improve business-community interaction, we demonstrate why human security is also a more effective way to conceptualize and eventually measure corporate impacts on the S in ESG, as well as how it can provide a more comprehensive and locally oriented indicator of sustainable peace and development that more accurately captures company impact.

## 2. Assessing peace and social impacts in fragile settings

### 2.1. Conceptual challenges

How to demonstrate the positive impacts of peacebuilding activities remains at the forefront of the broader academic discourse on conflict and peace. Despite valid theoretical claims and empirical evidence that discrete interventions and activities, including by corporate actors, can generate outcomes consistent with promoting peace in conflict-affected settings, these outcomes are confounded by frequent reversals to violence as a conflict resolution mechanism. This has informed the widespread view among conflict and peace scholars—especially regarding peacebuilding—that it is uncertain whether a suite of interventions and activities pursued as part of peace-affirming projects and agendas would coalesce into sustained, durable peace (Molly, 2021; Randazzo & Torrent, 2021).

Peacebuilding scholarship has been grappling with several key dilemmas that, individually and in combination, inhibit impact assessment both conceptually and in practice. The first concerns a perennial lack of clarity about what peace is—articulated in the debates that have couched peacebuilding aims toward conflict reduction rather than positive peace (Barnett, 2008; Haegerudbraiden, 1998). Deciphering the impact on conflict reduction appears more straightforward when peacebuilding intervention specifically targets a cause or driver of conflict. However,

positive peace first requires going beyond addressing the root causes to ensure social and societal aspects (e.g., reconciliation and social justice), which contribute to conceptual complexity. Second, conflict and peace dynamics operate across multiple levels, with possible (and likely) disconnect between local (i.e., individual and community; peace-writ-small) and national (i.e., governmental; peace-writ-large) peacebuilding outcomes. This interaction poses a challenge regarding how to conceptualize local actors and their relationships with national (and international) actors (Ernstorfer et al., 2015; Ernstorfer & Miller, 2020). Third, peacebuilding is an inherently cooperative endeavor. Delineating an individual actor's contribution or tracing any discrete intervention/process-outcome trajectory confounds direct attribution to a peace-supporting outcome. Fourth, the time dimension is consequential when demonstrating impact, as peacebuilding interventions consist of short- to medium-term activities whose outcomes act as a throughput toward durable peace and are underpinned by social cohesion and resilience that form two pillars of social stability (Barron et al., 2023). It is not well-defined how such outcomes translate into long-term dynamics that prevent reversion to violence where change can be frequent and abrupt. Lastly, and permeating all four aspects, peacebuilding scholarship has questioned whether peace is best conceived as a process as opposed to an aspirational outcome, requiring different methodologies and metrics of impact assessment.

In earlier literature on business and peace, there were assumptions about the potential positive role that business actors could play in peacebuilding (Fort, 2007; Fort & Schipani, 2004; Getz & Oetzel, 2009). Some contributions could include fostering economic development, adopting principles of external valuation, and obeying the rule of law, which would contribute to a sense of community by engaging in track-two diplomacy, conflict-sensitive practices, and risk assessment (Oetzel et al., 2009). However, little evidence exists regarding whether these contributions actually take place and what the mechanisms are through which they can occur. Whether and how the functions of business via improvements in economic growth, job creation, increased investment, greater inclusiveness in employment policies, better access to education and healthcare, poverty reduction, and the like in conflict-affected settings are peace promoting remains an open question (Mayer et al., 2020). Such outcomes may address some of the dimensions of conflict, but the causal links to the broader societal and political

dynamics that support durable peace remain vague. The same uncertainty extends to other potential roles ascribed to business activity in conflict-affected settings (e.g., a mediator/lobbyist and a provider of governance and economic resources; Blowfield & Dolan, 2014; International Alert, 2021; Miklian & Schouten, 2014; Oetzel et al., 2009). Despite the lack of evidence about these interlinkages, it can be argued that they are relevant to ESG objectives and outcomes, especially regarding double materiality, as explained in Section 2.2.

## 2.2. The measurement challenge

In the policy, practice, and corporate governance arenas, ESG objectives and the SDGs are generally seen as proxy indicators for social impact norms and practices. ESG-related concepts and their definitions derive from discourse in organizational and management studies on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and are designed to suit its broad agenda on responsible business. When attempting to measure social impact—setting aside broader conceptual issues—companies and investors face practical challenges, including the absence of clear methodologies for establishing positive and transformative social impacts. A lack of progress in measuring social impacts and developing standards is in stark contrast with the relatively widespread and harmonized way in which environmental and governance impacts are measured. That said, the G in ESG is generally about corporate governance, which has its own internal logics, while conversations about governance in the context of peace usually refer to *country governance*, limiting the potential for business actors to get involved in peacebuilding—sometimes even scaring them off. As such, this ultimately adds to the measurement challenge.

In general, risk assessment and impact measurement are still mainly driven by *inside-out approaches* (Day & Moorman, 2010), focusing on the risks and potential negative impacts on the business' operational capacity and profitability. The lack of an outside-in approach means that there is overall poor traction with impacted populations. This also challenges company managers who are making the business case for social impact internally because the materiality of the risks and impacts experienced by outside stakeholders is unclear.

A major development in addressing this shortcoming has been the introduction of *double materiality*, which allows nonfinancial impacts to be

considered as material to the company alongside financial outcomes (Täger, 2021). However, its application has been hampered by a lack of the granular, high-quality data necessary to analyze double materiality—especially on social impacts. Many accepted ESG performance and SDG impact frameworks and their guidance materials acknowledge and have incorporated elements like local inclusion, community engagement, and participation as ways to account for the social impact aspects of business activity. However, these entail a context-specific high qualitative dimension, meaning the quality of local engagement is a crucial variable and an essential part of the sustainability of positive impacts in fragile settings. The difficulty, though, lies in translating normative frameworks and performance standards to outcomes consistent with strong local engagement. In many cases, the concepts have not been clearly defined, and guidance is limited on how to realize conditions for strong local engagement and inclusion rather than the process as such. This weakens both corporate due diligence (i.e., the risk approach), as well as the intended environmental and social impact (i.e., the transformative approach) that investors are looking for. Strong local engagement in a company's operational sites is an often neglected but potentially valuable element in the adoption of ESG issues and impact objectives among investors, portfolio companies, and other stakeholders.

Stronger and better engagement relies on access to quality data. To gauge social impact outcomes, more on-the-ground data is needed regarding the socioeconomic dynamics in relation to conflict and security in FCS, as well as that for any vulnerable groups to identify material impacts and define thresholds for intervention. Human rights risks are often the starting point for reporting the social element in ESG, although the criteria themselves take a much broader view of social impact. Issues like human rights, labor standards, access to land or water, and gender equality—and the risks and opportunities they present to investors—are gaining prominence. The practical guidance released by the UN Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI, 2017) shows this phenomenon, highlighting the business case for integrating social issues into investment decisions. Yet, existing social impact assessment tools that focus on key performance indicators (KPIs) fall short of accounting for the types of risks companies and local populations face in fragile settings (van Dorp & Smits, 2020).

### 3. Human security partnerships as a complementary approach to measuring social impacts

#### 3.1. The concept of human security and human security business partnerships

Existing ESG metrics are designed to capture the do no significant harm impact of business activity (i.e., preventing and reducing harmful impact on society and the environment, as opposed to emphasizing maximization of the social and environmental impact of value creation; [Becchetti et al., 2022](#); [Edmans, 2023](#)). According to [Becchetti et al. \(2022\)](#), the latter would require shifting to a relational approach to the assessment of the ESG factors, with a particular emphasis on S, underscoring the importance of community engagement to identify the relevant social impact of business activity. Engagement with local communities is key to understanding the complex security needs and threats facing communities and individuals in their everyday lives. *Human security* describes what individuals and communities need to lead a tolerable life and provides a more comprehensive and locally oriented indicator of sustainable peace and development. The concept, first proposed by the UN Development Programme ([UNDP, 1994](#)), is summarized as freedom from fear, want, and the right to dignity, which equates social impacts to their consequences for people, as well as threats to their daily existence. The components of human security (e.g., food security, economic security, a clean environment, decent livelihoods, access to health-care, and safe neighborhoods) are context-specific and interconnected. As such, addressing conflict, fragility, vulnerability, and resilience is a holistic enterprise that is driven by local circumstances. The critical and ethical edge of human security—captured by including dignity as essential to a decent life—is that individuals and communities should be able to make their own choices about how to survive, build resilience, and plan their futures ([Gasper, 2014](#)). Active participation by locals is considered fundamental to establishing durable peace and stability and achieving sustainable development ([Donais, 2012](#); [Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015](#)). Examples of human security, or *security from below initiatives*, include increasing the capacity of people, not just policymakers, to define development and peacebuilding in their own terms. As [Pearce and Abello Colak \(2009, 2021\)](#) demonstrated in their construction of human security agendas in Mexico, human security could be used to frame contributions to policymaking from

community voices, adding an alternative perspective to proposals for development and peacebuilding.

Human security provides an alternative to a rights-based approach, offering a holistic and forward-facing vision by emphasizing integrated responses that combine different elements of protection, as well as driving changes to the underlying ecosystem of human vulnerability and opportunity. It goes beyond compliance to emphasize positive transformation. Human security can also bridge different actors, helping them go beyond conventional silos or spheres of action. By cutting through traditional boundaries, foregrounding the need to address human vulnerability as a common motivating driver of action, and taking a comprehensive view of practical challenges, human security goals can be the basis for convening diverse interests and ways of working. [Gasper \(2007, 2014\)](#) refers to this concept as “joined-up feeling,” bridging different organizational worlds. This includes mobilizing action by businesses (e.g., companies and investors) in situations where fragility, crisis, and insecurity threaten communities and business interests alike. Intrinsic to human security is the idea of *disruption* (i.e., human security is most often jeopardized by sudden reversals of fortune due to natural, man-made disasters, as well as conflict and crisis; [UNDP, 1994](#)). This is familiar ground for private sector actors who value business continuity as a prerequisite to operational and financial performance and see disruption as a material risk. In a similar vein, fragility, volatility, and their converse (resilience) are critical issues for businesses as well as individual or community actors. Hence, markers of human insecurity can be read across a social divide as existential risks for the private sector and communities alike, causing damaging consequences or, in business language, negative externalities.

As a way to help solve the challenges regarding social impact measurement in FCS, we outline an approach using forward-looking human security business partnerships between businesses and local stakeholders to identify and assess the potential peace value, social impacts, and risks of business interventions as they materialize over time. In this approach, efforts to limit the risks, fragility, and vulnerability faced by people are emphasized and translated into economic, environmental, and social effects. Equally, this approach deals with the upside potential of FCS settings, where business is often poised to positively transform the local context and improve people’s dignity and survival chances. This jives with the aims of the 2030 SDG Agenda, which



envisages actions on multiple fronts to build resilience against crisis, underdevelopment, conflict, lack of governance, and climate change. Articulated from the corporate perspective, in what could be termed the inside-out approach, risk mitigation and positive transformation often appear as binary, disconnected objectives. In practice on the ground, particularly in FCS, there are pragmatic imperatives that are rooted in problem-solving and blur this distinction, viewing risk management and transformation as points on a spectrum of local issues.

The entry point for companies to use this approach is to take human security risk-informed and risk-responsive actions and to organize strategies for peacebuilding and SDG contributions according to the risk dimensions that are components of human security. Human security emphasizes local risks as a starting point, so corporate actions should be directly connected to the potential and then actual improvement in people's well-being and security due to the intervention. From a measurement angle, human security connects interrelated material ESG issues that allow composite indicators to be created to cover sustainable development, security, and human rights dimensions. Table 1 shows how risks to individual and community security and their impacts can be mapped onto both dimensions of human security: ESG indicators and SDG targets.

A major advantage of this approach is that it could potentially help with preparatory risk

assessments for operating or investing in FCS and identify what issues to tackle regarding their materiality to the business. This would not only limit the risks to people affected by the business but also increase the attractiveness of investing in FCS because of its lower risk profile. A key condition for this approach to succeed is that impacts on the local communities should also be considered as part of the business' material impacts. This means that a multistakeholder approach with local community engagement is required, in which a bottom-up materiality analysis would reveal the extent of corporate influence over local factors. If the upstream part of the supply chain is disrupted, companies will have less influence over these impacts but will still need to engage with their suppliers as part of their supply chain responsibility and decide at which point in the supply chain they can best manage adverse and positive outcomes. This provides greater clarity into the often-nebulous idea of corporate responsibility, helping both to define it and meet the expectations of responsible investors—especially in FCS where government institutions are weak or completely absent.

### 3.2. Addressing exigencies and opportunities of local peacebuilding

Human security business partnerships are local-level mechanisms for sustained interactions

**Table 1.** Human security risks mapped to ESG factors and SDGs

Dimension of human security	Examples of risks to security	ESG classification	SDG classification
Economic	Poverty; unemployment; corruption; lack of access to land, water, electricity, credit, or education	Governance and Social	SDG 1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 16, 17
Food	Natural hazards including droughts or floods; breakdown of supply chains; conflict leading to hunger and famine	Social	SDG 2
Health	Infectious diseases; malnutrition; lack of access to healthcare	Social	SDG 3, 6
Environmental	Environmental degradation; resource depletion; contamination of water supplies; groundwater depletion; natural hazards including droughts or floods	Environmental	SDG 6, 12, 13, 14, 15
Personal	Physical (domestic/gender-based) violence; crime; terrorism; child/forced labor; injustices	Social	SDG 5, 8, 16
Community/Group	Interethnic, identity-based group grievances based on socioeconomic and cultural inequalities; lack of social cohesion	Social	SDG 5, 10, 11, 16
Political	Political polarization; repression; human rights abuses; corruption	Governance and Social	SDG 10, 16
Technology	Applying technology that is negatively impacting people	Social	SDG 8, 9, 10, 16

Source: Adapted from LSE (2022)

Note: The original figure was slightly adapted for the purpose of this paper. Technology was added by the UN General Assembly in September 2023 as a new dimension to human security.

between companies, investors, and local stakeholders. As such, these entail a relational perspective on ESG definition and measurement. Partnerships help reach a reciprocal understanding between businesses and the community about insecurities and threats that jeopardize peace and development, as well as identify opportunities and capacities for positive change. Through an iterative process of understanding and responding, partners design and implement collective actions. Ultimately, partnerships are a way to jointly assess outcomes and measure business impacts. This is a relational approach that seeks to bind actors across the public, private, and civil divide in a common enterprise. In addition, it aims to avoid bargaining over rights, negotiating zero-sum outcomes, or consolidating traditional power structures. Beyond simple compliance measures or transactional encounters between multiple, differentiated, and often physically and culturally distant groups, these arrangements for sustained dialogue and cooperation invite participants to pool and share their quotidian experiences of the local peacebuilding and development environment.

Partnerships combine the premise of human security (i.e., peace and development must be contextually driven and people-centered with local participation and agency) with a modality of collaborative actions and commitments to deliver meaningful business engagement to achieve peacebuilding, inclusion, cohesion, and other SDG targets (Maher & Buhmann, 2019). They are based on a three-pillar framework of principles, processes, and tools that govern the ethos and methodology of working together (see Figure 1). Partnerships identify material threats, establish priorities for action, and are participatory mechanisms that provide access and inclusion for a broad range of interested parties. Undertaken jointly, stakeholder mapping is an essential early step in the process of partnership formation. It ensures inclusiveness and that the partnerships reflect local interests and capacities that are particularly appropriate to achieving collective goals.

Partnerships can exist within established frameworks like the SDGs, ESG goals, National Action Plans on business and human rights, or development policies. They can be triggered for various reasons ranging from the impetus of a government, business, or investment initiative to addressing a particular challenge or seizing an opportunity. Taking a fine-grained approach, and situating business-community relations within a long-term dialogue about risk and reward, partnerships seek to address an important missing

ingredient of due process in business for peace strategies. The aim is to manage the often complex interactions between business and local actors by agreeing on appropriate and realistic objectives, identifying and enlarging areas of overlapping interests, and finding collective solutions to achieve positive development and peacebuilding outcomes. They also set rules of the game to improve confidence and provide a normative structure to engagements that might otherwise tilt either toward short-term transactional arrangements or, worse, deepen power imbalances and the potential for abuse.

In Section 4, we show two examples of the interplay between businesses and communities, illustrating how meaningful engagement can make a difference in achieving and assessing social impact. The cases provided illustrate how local exigencies must be addressed by businesses and investors to mitigate risk and limit conflict drivers—especially before any potential upside from market expansion, value creation, or new investment can be seized. Exigencies—like being unfamiliar with each other’s perspectives, mistrust and suspicion of business, inappropriate interventions, a chronic imbalance of power and capacity between actors, short-lived outcomes, and the rapidly changing dynamics of crisis and postconflict management—require interventions that combine the perspectives of multiple actors through forms of association that are adaptive, accountable, transparent, and promise mutual benefit.

## 4. Case studies from Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo

### 4.1. Territorial peace through business interventions in Colombia

In five municipalities most affected by the armed conflict, the UNDP, UNHCR, local NGOs, and Colombian government agencies dealing with victims and rural development aimed to generate sustainable solutions involving the private sector in the context of the post-2016 peace process (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2019). The program implemented between 2019 and 2022 used the novel Human Security Business Partnership Framework (HSBPF) approach to set up local multiactor human security partnerships. The aim was to provide guidance and a structure for a new kind of interaction and long-term dialogue between local communities, the government, companies, and investors (LSE, 2022).

Figure 1. Human security business partnerships framework



Source: LSE (2021)

The program focused on three overarching communities in Antioquia: (1) Bello, a semiurban location near Medellin, which had received waves of internal and external immigration (e.g., people displaced by conflict and natural disasters, as well as refugees from Venezuela), which heaped additional pressure on the lack of formal infrastructure and governance; (2) Dabeiba and Ituango, two rural communities of which the latter had a troubled history of relations between the operator of a hydroelectric dam and the community; and (3) Tumaco and El Charco—two remote communities in the coastal province of Nariño. Each municipality had varying levels of historic engagement with private sector actors. Crosscutting problems included a lack of licit and stable livelihoods, a lack of inclusion and social cohesion aggravated by population displacement, the need for integration and reconciliation, and a vacuum of governance and leadership via absent or undersupported public institutions. In Dabeiba, Tumaco, and El Charco in particular, there was an ongoing threat to safety from armed groups and illegal economic actors, as well as a legacy of violent social fracture.

Political challenges included a change of government and policy priorities during the program and changing public and government attitudes toward the 2016 peace agreement and its associated prescriptions and institutions for rural development (Barreto-Galeano, 2021; Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2020). The security situation in all the municipalities deteriorated significantly during the period of the program including killings of social leaders in the territories covered.

#### 4.1.1. Implementing human security partnerships

The program focused on establishing relationships and stimulating a mutually beneficial dialogue between the target communities and different forms of private sector actors (e.g., large national corporations to financial investors and lenders to local businesses and entrepreneurs). These relationships were commercially grounded but also took a holistic view, recognizing the threats and opportunities that partners faced in the local and national context and seeking ways to resolve these



collectively. The activities that were part of the partnering process were mediated and facilitated by local and national public sector organizations. They aimed to coconstruct key drivers of development and peacebuilding between businesses and local actors.

The short-term goal was to build value chains for goods like coffee, bananas, and beans, targeting economic security and legitimate livelihoods. The program also provided an opportunity to explore the potential of new value chains as the country sought to open previously inaccessible rural areas following the cessation of hostilities between the government and the FARC guerrilla movement in 2016. Criteria like environmental impacts, inclusion, reconciliation, and social innovation were applied to select business participants, so that the project was (and was seen as) more than just a conventional private sector intervention to expand trade and investment.

For many communities, the program represented an initial socialization helping to break down barriers between different actors—particularly those from the private sector—and establish the value of multistakeholder cooperation to address a wide range of local challenges. Nineteen alliances, as incipient partnerships, were achieved because of more than 160 connections made between local producers and outside companies and investors via program activities. The alliances were the first step in establishing associative governance mechanisms. These allowed diverse actors to address not only commercial interests but also wider social, development, and peacebuilding goals using a framework of principles and processes that applied a distinct ethos and methodology to what were, for many, novel interactions that brought different ways of working and highlighted the challenges of understanding the local context.

Larger enterprises were prepared to engage in this process because they had an interest in development and peacebuilding, underpinning their commercial interests. For example, the restaurant chain Crepes and Waffles, which sources much of its seafood from the Pacific Coast, wanted to expand its supply chain into some of the coastal communities in the project yet was motivated by social goals like better inclusion of women and minorities. Coffee producers in Urbania also saw value in working with local communities in a structured way. For larger businesses, the human security partnership approach provided a framework to realize their social impact objectives alongside market growth and business development.

Partnerships (*alianzas*) were established through an initial process of identifying the key human security characteristics of each municipality. Implemented by a local NGO with the UN via discussions with all sections of the local population, a baseline of needs and expectations from the ground up was provided. In parallel, a process of selecting potential corporate partners took place via roundtable forums—often outside the localities—to understand the motivations and barriers to business and investor engagement in each municipality.

An important characteristic of the project was to establish compatibility between the requirements of buyers and the capacities and perspectives of community actors not only among suppliers but also among local business associations and local government operatives who were part of the engagement process. This was a precursor to generating dialogues aimed at finding and expanding common ground between partners. The preselection of candidates by *dynamizer committees* set up by the UN was an important step in ensuring that eventual face-to-face interactions were productive. The role of neutral, independent facilitators (e.g., academics) in mediating early encounters between outside businesses and local suppliers was also critical. In this sense, the program borrowed from the role of *pracademics* used in the construction of local human security agendas in Latin America (Pearce & Abello Colak, 2021).

The program used physical gatherings and cultural events such as business fairs or local music performances as platforms to trigger dialogues and alliances. The wheels of business (*ruedas de negocio*) process was a distinctive mechanism that identified participants, offered initial training workshops, and targeted capacity building, accompanying each encounter before, during, and after the event. These platforms were also a way of extending the alliances to include public sector participants like mayors' offices and local development agencies who were involved in organizing the events. The program succeeded in piloting a novel form and process of interaction between the highly differentiated needs and capacities of businesses and local producers. The process also revealed a set of criteria for the long-term sustainability of social interactions between local producers and suppliers from the private sector, which can guide future early-stage interventions and the use of the human security partnership framework in similar postconflict/postcrisis contexts.

In the absence of key elements like social cohesion, technical expertise, and start-up

financing—which are required for businesses and local communities to thrive—the structured governance basis of the framework filled important voids in the local development and security ecosystem and helped address specific local challenges. For the partnerships to be initiated—and sustained—certain key components were essential: (1) funding to enable local participation where travel was problematic, (2) infrastructure improvements to accompany efforts to grow new markets that benefited both companies and communities, and (3) the active and constant facilitator role played by the NGO and the UN to godfather the new relationships being built.

#### 4.2. Responsible mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The following case focuses on the mining sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Compared to the case of Colombia, we take a different entry point for the new approach to social impact measurement. In this example, a community affected by the activities of a Chinese mining company successfully changed its terms of engagement with the company.

In the Katanga region, the copper and cobalt belt of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), most mining companies are of Chinese origin (Searcey et al., 2021). Since their arrival in the early 2000s, they have been criticized by civil society for not adhering to environmental and social standards. According to Congolese workers, working conditions in Chinese mining companies are considerably worse than those of European and US mining companies in the DRC. This includes a lack of safety provisions, the use of child labor, forced evictions of local communities, and a lack of adequate legal safeguards for them (RAID, 2009). The terms of engagement of those companies in the Congolese economy demonstrate a critical disconnect between global and local normative standards and actual practices by some of the most important operators and investors in the DRC economy.

Since 2014, when the Chinese company described in our case began mining copper and cobalt in the area, local communities have suffered a loss of land due to deforestation, a lack of compensation for the loss, water pollution, and restrictions on their freedom of circulation. There were no consultations between the company and communities affected by its operations regarding the impact of business activity on the local communities and their residents. With the help of a local NGO, several attempts to raise the issues and

risks faced by communities with the company's management in DRC failed to get the company to engage with the affected communities.

The first opening to change the lack of engagement by the company with local communities came in 2014 when the China Chamber of Commerce of Metals, Minerals, and Chemicals (CCCCMC, 2016) announced a set of guidelines for responsible mining by Chinese companies. Initially, the company ignored the responsible mining guidelines but, following a 2018 visit by a high-level delegation of CCCMC and facing further efforts by a local NGO and complaints by community leaders, a formal dialogue process began in 2020. This created an opportunity for the company to get a first-hand account of how its operations were affecting local communities. After a series of dialogues, the company took steps to address some of the key concerns voiced by the local community, including the installation of water boreholes as well as decantation basins for the disposal of chemical waste, which had previously been dumped. It also built a new road, which significantly eased movement for locals. Between 2020 and 2022, when the dialogue started, the dynamics shifted from a nonresponsive, disinterested attitude on the part of the company to a more open spirit of dialogue and cooperation due to the combined pressures of the Chinese regulator and the local community. In 2022, it was reported that there was a clear positive development in relation to earlier recommendations made by civil society organizations. This includes the construction of a bypass road that opened the surrounding villages to the outside world, the construction of settling ponds, the restoration of a forested area previously destroyed by the company, and the company's commitment to create a department responsible for local community relations (Kashala & Bwenda, 2022).

Based on conversations with the author of the study, it can be concluded that this case provides a useful example of how a mining company can potentially move beyond sole compliance (or noncompliance, as often occurs in the mining industry) with human rights due diligence requirements toward embracing a human security perspective. This requires addressing diverse local concerns ranging from environmental protection to land issues, searching for mutual ground for collaboration, and taking a collective problem-solving approach to contribute to sustained peace and development. Despite the challenging and fragile context of the DRC, characterized by weak governance—sometimes in acute forms at the subnational level—the quasi absence of the rule of

law, a lack of national grievance mechanisms, and a weak judicial system that constrains community ability to hold companies accountable for rights abuses, a partnership approach was instrumental in resolving the conflict between the company and the community by locating key grievances and instigating durable social outcomes from the corporate presence. Where international standards (e.g., home state government regulation) had failed to mitigate tensions between businesses and the community, the dialogue and sustained interaction of the new approach produced tangible benefits for the business and community alike.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose and contribution of this article is to present a framework of human security business partnerships. This framework addresses an important gap in the scholarship on business contributions to peace and development, which concerns how corporate activity can create positive impacts within local communities and actively engage local populations affected by business activity to underpin sustainable peace and socioeconomic development. It furthermore aspires to inform existing practices for measuring corporate social impacts based on ESG metrics.

Peacebuilding efforts or impact strategies that have no grounding in how efforts and impacts are experienced by the communities they affect risk rebounding as examples of sustainability washing or cynical exercises in corporate power. We argue that a human security business partnership approach can improve business-community interactions to conceptualize, implement, and eventually measure positive business contributions. By focusing on the process that supports company engagement with communities and other stakeholders to identify and assess the potential peace value, social impacts, and risks of business operations as they materialize in specific local settings, partnerships address an important missing element in business for peace strategies. They have mainly concerned the understanding and influencing the conditions for business community engagement at the expense of the actual process (Ernstorfer & Miller, 2020).

The human security partnership approach is designed to address the complexity of social impact processes by identifying specific issues and contextualizing certain locations to better manage negative and positive peace impacts. Companies must develop collaborative solutions to measure their peace and social impacts, as

they lack the knowledge or capacity to achieve effective implementation or measurement on their own. Unilateral strategies are more likely to produce badly designed interventions that range from poor traction with actual conditions on the ground to accusations of social washing to negative consequences. In this article, we have suggested that human security business partnerships can serve as a model for multiactor dialogues in which public, private, and civil society/community actors focus on common challenges and seek shared value and benefits like reduced risks and improved ESG and SDG contributions. We contend that human security is a more effective way to conceptualize and eventually measure corporate impacts on the S in ESG. It provides for a more comprehensive, local indicator of sustainable peace and development, which can have a twofold benefit. First, it can contribute to the scholarship concerned with demonstrating the impact of business and peace. Second, it can be a useful addition to the manager's toolbox in measuring social impacts.

### 5.1. Limitations and future research

Our article answers the calls for better conceptualization of the peace and social impact of business activity and the development of appropriate metrics. The human security business partnership model that we propose requires further testing for its propositions to be validated, particularly regarding whether following new rules of the game engagement processes for a structured and durable relationship between businesses and communities in fragile settings will sufficiently change actors' behaviors and have a demonstrable effect on the conditions and outcomes of peacebuilding. Aside from the lack of empirical evidence—which is the main drawback of the present study—the framework itself may contain limitations to some of the arguments we make. Specifically, the two key actors in our approach (i.e., the private sector and the community) are not homogenous, and their members may harbor different attitudes and predispositions toward the propositions entailed in the framework. We know that not every community nor all its members will welcome the presence of the private sector, notably in situations of extractive sector business in conflict-affected places, even though this is often seen as integral to the conflict dynamic. We also know that many private sector actors are reluctant to engage with peace, social impact, and the broader development agenda, which is reflected in questionable ESG practices. This may affect receptiveness to

the ideas and propositions advanced by the framework.

Therefore, we suggest that a human security business partnership approach should not be seen as adding more layers to existing ESG and SDG standards and frameworks. Rather, it is proposed to strengthen actions and strategies already in place by bringing together significant elements of the challenge businesses face in meeting expectations of social impacts and responsible behavior (e.g., how businesses articulate and implement impact strategies for internal and external stakeholders).

Another limitation concerns the concept of partnering. We note that for companies as well as other stakeholders, partnering as a mode of working is not a given; it requires learning and additional metrics by which to assess whether and how successfully it is taking place. This may affect the overall outcomes that can be expected from applying the human security business partnership framework. In complex and fragile environments in particular, relationships and partnering will require navigating significant barriers to confidence and trust. Managing and assessing impacts, including peace outcomes, based on this kind of structured relational and associative governance approach will be particularly challenging.

Future research is needed to better understand how to build and maintain constructive relationships between companies and local communities in their local sites of operation and in different economic, social, and political contexts. The discourse on multistakeholder partnerships has privileged global development partnerships, especially since the launch of Agenda 2030 and national-level private-public partnerships. As a result, there is a lack of knowledge regarding interactions between companies and other stakeholders in areas where they have their operations or intend to invest, as well as the contextual and personal factors that influence the possibility of engaging in constructive and sustained dialogue via learning, trust building, and empowered action. The emerging literature that takes a relational and systemic approach (Dreier et al., 2019; Eweje et al., 2020) is a promising resource for tackling many of the intricate issues associated with new forms of business engagement with communities regarding the impact and opportunities for collective action. The human security business partnership approach provides a useful addition to this branch.

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