

BUSINESS AND CONFLICT BAROMETER

The Business and Conflict Barometer (BCB) allows us to listen in on the dynamics of conflict and cooperation—including issues, actors, and causal relationships—within a defined timeframe and localized geographic area.

The BCB's integrated suite of data science tools and analytics thus enables identification of conflict-prone private sector development so that it can be avoided and addressed, as well as of peace-positive pathways so that they can be promoted and implemented—for planning, monitoring, and learning, from the project to the global perspective.

Its flexible and accessible design make it valuable to actors on the ground, policymakers, and researchers. Its academic management allows for trusted stewardship of data, analysis and platforms that allows for partnership with all actors concerned with peace-positive private sector development.

Business case for better data and easier analysis

Simply stated, easier access to better insight and analysis through the BCB can shape projects and initiatives related to the private sector in fragile contexts that are far too often implicated in conflict and violence rather than being dependable drivers of peaceful development.

Furthermore, the BCB can provide the trustworthy, shared data that is a proven enabler of greater horizontal and vertical alignment, consensus-building, and conflict resolution within a specific context.

Illustrative value to a “local” actor (e.g., a company, or a peacebuilding or development actor)

1. Tracking of conflict sentiment. The BCB can assess conflict sentiment. It can be tracked by issue (e.g., gender, human rights, cultural heritage, land, water, security, or livelihoods) and actor (e.g., all of the private sector, a particular sector, or our project). Importantly, conflict sentiment is a leading indicator of increasing conflict, particularly when analysed along with changes in networks of interaction between groups in conflict.
2. Project-specific measurements. The BCB allows composite pictures from different data sources to give a more complete picture of the impact of private sector development (e.g., income growth and its distribution), while data systems can adapt to locally-agreed metrics and measures that build trust (e.g., water quality or crime).
3. Simplified access to a range of useful data sources. Local stakeholders benefit from straight-forward access to the data that is available about a place: human development indicators; conflict event data; geo-location of company and development actor investments; physical infrastructure; and much more.

Illustrative value to a “portfolio” actor (e.g., an investor, insurer, development partner, or company HQ)

4. Business development. The BCB can help actors to better understand the range of risks—environmental, socio-political, project-specific, or actor-specific—through multivariate analyses across comparable projects and contexts. This helps to calibrate risk as well as to inform choices between competing investment contexts.
5. Conflict risk assessments. Network and textual analyses enabled by the BCB help to determine the range of issues that form the boundaries of pre-existing ethnic, gender, political or other conflict fault lines in a given place. Analysis of the issues around which conflict presented in other contexts in which analogous projects unfolded can help to determine the ways in which a particular project may activate conflict fault lines, amplify their conflict impact, and necessitate enhanced cross-group engagement.
6. Portfolio management. Monitoring of conflict sentiment—related to the project locality, intergroup relations in general, or the project, its sponsors, and contractors—can support proactive management inquiry, resource reallocation, or project gateway decisions (i.e., whether or not to move to the next phase).
7. Longer-term monitoring and evaluation. Sentiment data about each project, disaggregated by interest or identity group, can contribute to assessment of contributions to a peace-positive private sector, and, through comparison to other projects or portfolios in similar sectors and contexts, whether a given approach is better than alternatives.

Illustrative value to a “global” actor (e.g., an advocacy group, international agency, or government)

8. The role of the private sector in conflict. The BCB data structure enables multivariate, cross-contextual, larger-N analyses based on comparable data (both textual and quantitative). It thus tests presumed associations between the private sector and conflict (from academia and policy work), and uncovers new ones.
9. Factors for conflict risk escalation and mitigation. The BCB allows assessment of the contributing factors associated with conflict (or its mitigation) related to the private sector, including rule of law, development outcomes, income levels, public confidence in government, and other measures of institutional robustness. Similarly, the BCB can test sensitivity to pre-existing conflict faultline issues, the nature of bonds between identity or interest groups, to inclusive, participatory, or consensus-based approaches, or to other propositions from theory or practice.

Technical case for the BCB

Our proof-of-concept work establishes that it is wholly feasible to deploy known datasets, current information technologies, and empirically well-supported analyses to more positively shape peace-positive private sector development in post-conflict and otherwise complex socio-political contexts.

However, actionable data analytics require a range of human skills and technological capacities, requiring resources to put systems and platforms in place and to maintain them over time. Data sciences tools and approaches must be developed within a medium- to long-term perspective for budgeting and planning; require significant frontloading of data analytics investments before they are expected to be used for due diligence, development planning, or M&E; and benefit from their positioning as a platform function shared across users and the public.

The gap between the possible and the so-far-delivered is thus explained by the *systems challenge*: it is difficult to harvest the value from data science tools and approaches without bringing together data, processing, analysis, and human capacity, maintained over time. This in turn creates a *problem of the commons*: while valuable to many actors, tools may be too complex or expensive to implement for a given project or programme. Private sector actors less motivated by peace and development outcomes lack incentives to build or share them.

The BCB fills this gap by establishing a trusted steward of the BCB and its data (having no direct stake in the analysis that emerges); a robust data processing and data management infrastructure; interfaces, tools and expert support that meet the needs of users at varying degrees of sophistication; and a platform that allows data to be collected according to local needs but integrated with the global system. Its operations are sustained beyond the timeframe of any particular programme or initiative in the belief that data availability is part of the foundational infrastructure of peacebuilding and development, inclusive of private sector development.

Status report (as of early 2022)

Based on proof-of-concept work to date, a new BCB systems architecture has been designed to dependably and efficiently ingest, process, manage, and analyse some hundreds of diverse textual and quantitative data sources to enable the analyses described above. This will be developed and deployed in the first half of 2022.

Foundation and research grants provide funding for ongoing analyses and tool development, with growing capacity to onboard additional clients and partners.

Future work will focus on expansion of access, as well as on localised dimensions of data curation and use.

Primary Business and Conflict Research Initiative partners

- Stellenbosch University (through the Centre on Conflict & Cooperation at the Business School, and the School for Data Sciences and Computational Thinking)
- The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania (through its Political Risk Lab)
- Copenhagen Business School