

MED in post conflict peace-making

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Post conflict environments with their active and residual tensions between protagonists provide a major challenge to community development. Whereas development moves forward proportionately with cooperation, solidarity and trust between participants post conflict tensions undermine reconciliation, strengthen factionalism and ensure that mistrust continues.

A key factor in any post conflict development strategy is to enable dialogue and social conversation to be resumed. Part of the strategy is to help nurture and encourage these networks. It could be reasonably asserted that the more interdependent networks and linkages between participants that are in place, the healthier the community and the greater the motivation and opportunities for reconciliation. One of the most important of these is the economic network in terms of small scale enterprise and trade. Commerce by its very nature increases interdependence.

For the most part micro-enterprise development strategies have been considered in terms of economic empowerment of poor communities with a special emphasis on credit access for marginalised women. TEAR Fund New Zealand, working closely with field partners, has had reasonable experience in these traditional micro-enterprise models.

In the last few years, we have been asking as an organisation, to what extent micro-enterprise can be a significant agent in rebuilding peace in conflict affected communities. Economic incentives such as access to credit, employment creation and the supply, production and distribution of needed resources through small businesses can be powerful social adhesives.

This workshop will consider and review what TEAR Fund has learned from its micro enterprise partners involved in conflict environments as well as some current research on the contribution of MED to the peace-making process.