

The Role of Sustainable Peace in Conflict-Ridden Micro-Level Markets

José Antonio Rosa – Iowa State University

Armed conflict, be it between or within nations, causes hardship to microentrepreneurs and their customers. It is known that even as war and insurrection inflict damage and death in places like Ethiopia, Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine, commercial exchange between small businesses and consumers continues, and that microenterprises can become the only bridge between producers and consumers in some situations. Moreover, when extended conflict and uncertainties hobble economies, microenterprises often become a lifeline for consumers and subsistence consumer merchants. Ecotourism initiatives, for example, in settings like Afghanistan's Barmiyān Province, Sierra Leone's Freetown, and Colombia's Medellín thrive despite the armed conflict. They do so by forming strategic industry clusters (Porter 1998)^[1] between scores of microenterprises. Such clusters are informal and unregulated, and through their competitive practices give rise to tensions between residents, governments, and foreign entities that add to the violence-caused uncertainty. Left unattended, such conflicts can result in cluster failure and damage to the local economy and the natural environment at the heart of the ecotourism initiatives. Conflict between cluster partners seems structurally inevitable, but we argue that ecological, social, and economic losses are avoidable even in high uncertainty environments through the application of sustainable peace protocols (Coleman et al 2019).^[2] We build on strategic clusters and sustainable peace theories, and show how problem-solving protocols can lead to solutions that preserve essential values, help microentrepreneurs and consumers attain shared goals, and in the case of ecotourism help preserve fragile natural environments.

^[1] Porter, M. E. (1998), *On Competition*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

^[2] Coleman, P. T., Liebovitch, L.B. and Fisher, J. (2019), "Taking complex systems seriously: Visualizing and modeling the dynamics of sustainable peace," *Global Policy*, 10 (2), 84-92.