

ARTICLE

Peace Education in the Private Sector of Costa Rica Educación para la paz en el sector privado de Costa Rica

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Abstract

This study explores the potential of peace education as a mechanism for aligning private sector efforts with broader peacebuilding and sustainability goals, focusing on the Costa Rican context. Based on fieldwork conducted through the SDG Observatory at ULACIT—including surveys with 67 companies and interviews with local experts—the research examines how peace education is understood, valued, and potentially integrated into business practices. Special attention is given to the challenges of promoting peace education in a non-conflict country and the tensions that can arise between commercial objectives and social responsibilities. The findings suggest that, while Costa Rica is often regarded as a peaceful nation, targeted educational interventions can still play a crucial role in preventing exclusion, building intercultural competence, and enhancing the private sector's contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 16.

Keywords:

Sustainable Development Goals, peace education, peace, SDG 16.

Resumen

Este estudio explora el potencial de la educación para la paz como mecanismo para alinear

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los esfuerzos del sector privado con objetivos más amplios de consolidación de la paz y sostenibilidad, centrándose en el contexto costarricense. Basándose en el trabajo de campo realizado a través del Observatorio de los ODS en ULACIT -incluyendo encuestas a 67 empresas y entrevistas con expertos locales- la investigación examina cómo se entiende, valora y potencialmente se integra la educación para la paz en las prácticas empresariales. Se presta especial atención a los retos de promover la educación para la paz en un país no conflictivo y a las tensiones que pueden surgir entre los objetivos comerciales y las responsabilidades sociales. Los resultados sugieren que, si bien Costa Rica suele considerarse una nación pacífica, las intervenciones educativas específicas pueden desempeñar un papel crucial en la prevención de la exclusión, el fomento de la competencia intercultural y la mejora de la contribución del sector privado al Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible 16.

Palabras clave:

Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible, educación para la paz, paz, ODS 16.

Introduction

The private sector plays a crucial role in contributing to economic stability by providing jobs and income. This role is particularly imperative in fragile regions and countries that have faced conflicts or violence. Providing sustainable economic stability is also beneficial to help fade out tensions caused by economic exclusion (Spicer & Bousquet, 2019).

The implementation of peace education in the private sector contributes to greater safety and security in the region. However, regional stability is also crucial for the economic growth of organizations. Spicer & Bousquet (2019) point out the fragility and complexity of the private sector's involvement in providing regional stability:

There can be regulatory and market uncertainty, weak sponsor capacity, and limited infrastructure and supplies. These projects thus require a much heavier lift in the areas of integrity due diligence, capacity building, regulatory reform, assistance with project development, and environmental advisory services (Spicer & Bousquet, 2019).

This makes it essential that, before involving the private sector extensively in providing or assisting in regional stability—in all forms that it may take—the employees and staff are educated on how to engage with local communities within the companies. Peace education in this research focuses on dismantling all forms of violence and creating a just and sustainable culture of peace. It covers subjects such as human rights, the environment, and conflict resolution (McKeown Jones, Orchard, & Paulson, 2017). In addition, considering the region, culture, and people is also important. Therefore, as part of peace education, teaching about the community structure and identifying potential fragile areas are included.

The implementation of peace education is aligned with SDG implementation. This alignment is specifically visible in Costa Rica, where the connections between SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions and peace education are extensive. A key element of SDG 16 is good governance. From previously conducted fieldwork, the author identified a high need for governmental assistance and collaboration in implementing SDG- and peace-related initiatives. Moreover, multiple Costa Rican private companies are currently involved in projects that contribute to regional stability with the collaboration of the government (Bruggeman, Valderrama, & Cucchia, 2020; Vernon, 2014).

This previously conducted fieldwork aligns with similar case studies on peace education implementation and helped to identify the government of Costa Rica as the key actor in assisting private companies in this implementation process. In this research, I further analyze what role the government can play to assist this process.

Literature Review

After extensive research on various scholars in different fields, I have gained knowledge for my research paper on various topics. This section lists the relevant topics to this research paper and the key findings. Research has shown a deep-seated connection between the private sector and peace in both positive and negative ways. Private organizations are not expected to be neutral; they can aggravate tensions and conflicts.

Research states that when private companies adopt a conflict-sensitive approach, this will lead to: “better risk management, lower operational costs, enhanced reputation, credibility, social goodwill and positive and constructive stakeholder engagement (Haider, 2014, p.4).”

Previously conducted research showed the importance of good governance in promoting peace and the correct implementation of SDG 16. From a survey conducted for the ULACIT SDG Observatory, I identified a strong correlation between the number of resources a company had and whether they received funds from the government, and the extent to which they implemented SDGs. This shows that support from the government increases the number of sustainable initiatives that a company implements (Bruggeman, Valderrama, & Cucchia, 2020).

The connection between education and conflict has been thoroughly analyzed over the last decade. Academics have concluded that education can have both a positive and negative contribution to building peace. A positive contribution of education is that, through concepts such as justice, peace, and equal opportunities, a culture of peace has been created. This positive contribution has directly contributed to a decrease in conflict scenarios within a society. However, education in developing countries can negatively contribute to building peace and create (bigger) social, psychological, and economic problems. This is because, in developing countries where (higher) education is mainly possible for the rich, bigger differences are created within the dimensions between the people of a society.

Research Statement

Central Research Question: How can peace education be implemented in the private sector in Costa Rica?

Sub-Questions:

- What is the connection between peace and the private sector?
- What is the current peace situation in Costa Rica, and how did this develop over time?
- Why should peace education be implemented in the private sector in Costa Rica?
- What actors are involved in the implementation of peace education in the private sector in Costa Rica?

This research covers various topics, all directly related to the main research topic: peace education implementation in the private sector in Costa Rica. This main research topic consists of four components: the peace process, peace education, the private sector, and other actors. These components are essential to my research, and by addressing and analyzing them, the author seeks to answer the main research question of this research fully.

The main research goals are to find out if implementing peace education in the private sector in Costa Rica is beneficial, how this can be achieved, and what the obstacles and challenges are in implementing this. Another research goal is to analyze how the private sector can contribute to the peace process and collaborate more extensively with the government and public sector.

The operationalization section converts the constructs from this research design into “measurement instruments,” meaning dimensions, sub-dimensions, and indicators (Verhoeven, 2016). In this research, the operationalization is built around the central construct of this paper, which is peace education. There are many definitions, but the most accurate one is that peace education focuses on dismantling all forms of violence and creating a just and sustainable culture of peace. It covers subjects such as human rights, the environment, and conflict resolution (McKeown Jones, Orchard, & Paulson, 2017).

Research Methods

The research method refers to the technique used to gather information and eventually come to a conclusion. For this research paper, the author will use information triangulation.

This means that this paper does not depend on one form of research instrument or one information outlet but has many different sources and instruments to gather information to improve the reliability of this research. Some of the conducted research has already been executed by me for an earlier research paper, which is why some of the information is based on other research papers that have not yet been published.

The tools that are used within the research method to gather the information are called the research instruments. In this research paper, I will apply a variety of different research instruments. I have conducted a survey with the rest of the ULACIT SDG Observatory team earlier this year, which mapped the sustainable profiles of Costa Rican companies in the private sector, where we received 67 respondents.

I also conducted five interviews with private companies regarding peace, justice, partnerships, and peace education. Additionally, I interviewed Ana Araujo, a peace mediator with extensive experience in conflicts between private companies and local communities in Costa Rica.

Desk research in this paper allows me to perform my fieldwork better. This means that before the fieldwork, I first conduct a lot of desk research to increase the depth and effectiveness of the interviews. The desk research is also crucial for identifying the correct theoretical framework to base my research on and to connect specific key topics and findings of my research.

Implications of Research

With this research paper, I seek to discover new findings and results that have never been discovered before. There are research papers on peace education, but not about Costa Rica or its private sector. There is no clear research paper on implementing peace education in private companies and the challenges and obstacles in implementing this. I realize that the research gap is, therefore, relatively sizeable. With this research, I seek as many answers as possible to fill this gap and accommodate my research; however, I do not expect to find all the answers and close this research gap completely. As various research supervisors told me, not every research paper has reached its conclusion and answered all its questions. A conclusion can also be that some things did not turn out as expected, so that other researchers can use my research and try to find the answers that I could not.

The worth of these findings is that this could lay the groundwork for the implementation of peace education in the private sector in Costa Rica. Implementing peace education in the private sector will further stabilize the regions, contributing to the peace process and the further growth of these private companies. Peace education is also aligned with the UN's SDGs and will therefore trigger further SDG implementation in the private sector in Costa Rica. Since there is no detailed research on the challenges and obstacles of implementing peace education in the private sector, this research is also valuable for other countries and companies interested in implementing peace education in the private sector to take it as an example.

Theoretical Framework

For this research, I have selected two different theoretical frameworks. One is research on SDG 16 and how this should be implemented in the private sector. The other is more of an idea, a mindset; it is about the concept of corporate social responsibility. SDG 16 is one of the 17 SDGs from the UN that stands for peace, justice, and strong institutions. The obvious interpretation of SDG 16 is that companies do not harm their employees and treat them fairly and equally. However, this research argues that this is only one part of it, and much more can be done to support this SDG. "SDG 16 asks the private sector to reframe the notion of self-interest in the private sector to magnify the importance of the long-term over the short-term, the societal over the local, the institutional over the personal, and the sustainable over the transiently profitable (SDG-Fund, 2017, p.12)."

This makes SDG 16 not about the companies themselves but about the mindset and involvement of the company regarding peace and justice. A company can, directly and indirectly, contribute to this SDG 16. An example of indirect involvement is supporting governments or NGOs working on peace and justice initiatives. Therefore, the questions in the interviews focused on their cooperation with NGOs on such initiatives and whether these companies were working on any projects that contribute to peace (SDG-Fund, 2017).

SDG 16 is an essential part of this research since the mindset paired with this SDG is aligned with peace education and will be the tool used to stimulate the further and better implementation of peace projects. I will use this research to build on further since it offers the ideal preliminary research to move towards peace education. The research paper does not focus on Costa Rican private companies, so it is important to include relevant parts and questions in my field research.

The study of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) argues the substantial influence that the private sector has on the community, more specifically on topics such as job opportunities, human rights, the environment, education, and training. The solution is to get companies more socially responsible, which can be done through: “integrating social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns into their business strategy and operations (Corporate social responsibility & Responsible business conduct, 2020).”

The study also advocates for strong regulation and assistance by the public sector, which can be done through legislation when necessary. This connects well with the desk research I have conducted so far, which also pleads for more and closer connections between the public and private sector (Corporate social responsibility & Responsible business conduct, 2020).

The CSR theory argues the importance of human rights within CSR, especially for global supply chains. The government should always regulate and uphold human rights and indirectly make sure that the companies grant these human rights. This also overlaps with SDG 16, where human rights is one of the central themes (Corporate social responsibility & Responsible business conduct, 2020).

This study is valuable to my research since the mindset and concept nudge companies into more social involvement, increasing the need for peace education. Additionally, CSR concepts are vital to this research since it is essential to discover in what ways the private sector can be involved in society and peace processes.

The Connection between Peace and the Private Sector

In addition to the 17 SDG goals, the UN has identified international peace and international cooperation as central concepts for achieving a sustainable and inclusive future. The UN works through soft law, meaning it aims to achieve its goals through moral persuasion and public opinion, rather than through binding laws and restrictions. Central concepts of SDG 16 include peace, justice, governance, and security; however, SDG 16 is also highly connected to the other SDGs and is correlated with more than 150 of the UN’s sub-goals. When examining the demarcation of SDG 16, terminology such as “sustainable development” and “peaceful and inclusive societies” will differ significantly by state and society. The path toward achieving these goals will depend on the status and available resources of each region (Vernon, 2014).

In recent years, the private sector has become more involved in the peace processes of on-going conflicts. Private companies possess different resources than governments, allowing them to intervene and assist in unique ways. While traditional assistance in armed conflicts primarily came from the international community or states, current conflicts increasingly involve the private sector, especially where governments are considered fragile. This trend is known as the “privatization of peace” and is an essential part of this research.

The private sector also plays a crucial role in providing economic stability by delivering jobs and income. This role is especially important in fragile regions and countries affected by conflict or violence. Providing sustainable economic stability is also beneficial in reducing tensions caused by economic exclusion (Spicer & Bousquet, 2019).

Multi-track diplomacy recognizes that sustainable peace processes require engagement across multiple levels of society, beyond official state actors. Negotiations can be classified into distinct “tracks”: Track 1 involves formal, high-level dialogue between governments or official actors, while Tracks 2 and 3 encompass informal or community-based initiatives led by NGOs, private organizations, and civil society groups (Upeace, 2021). The United Nations promotes a bottom-up integration of these tracks, emphasizing grassroots participation as essential to long-term peacebuilding (Albani & Ade, 2021).

While Track 1 processes tend to be more visible and leverage formal power, Tracks 2 and 3 operate more discreetly, allowing actors to engage in dialogue with fewer political risks. These forms of “quiet diplomacy” create spaces of trust and are often more accessible for initial engagement. A critical feature of informal diplomacy is the confidentiality it requires; details are typically shared only when substantial progress has been achieved and endorsed by the parties involved (Albani & Ade, 2021).

The private sector participates in all tracks, though most frequently in informal ones. In Track 1, some private actors may directly influence negotiations, while in Tracks 2 and 3, businesses contribute through lobbying, hosting confidential meetings, disseminating information, or facilitating cross-sector dialogue (Tripathi & Gündüz, 2008). Their involvement can lend neutrality, credibility, and resources that are otherwise scarce in conflict-affected contexts. For instance, in South Africa’s transition from apartheid, business actors played a pivotal mediating role by bridging gaps between political factions (Tripathi & Gündüz, 2008).

An inclusive approach that integrates actors across all levels—particularly the private sector—can foster peace processes that are both participatory and resilient. Research suggests that peace shaped collectively by society is more likely to endure (Upeace, 2021). The essence of involving the private sector in the peace process also relates to the differences between the private and other sectors. As mentioned before, private companies can provide certain resources in stages of conflict where other actors cannot, and they can also create progress in stalemate scenarios. When two actors are stuck in mediation, private companies can help find a solution since they do not have a direct stake in the outcome. Moreover, the ability of companies to provide economic support and expertise, as well as non-biased political information, makes them useful—provided their reputation remains that they do not act out of self-interest (Tripathi & Gündüz, 2008).

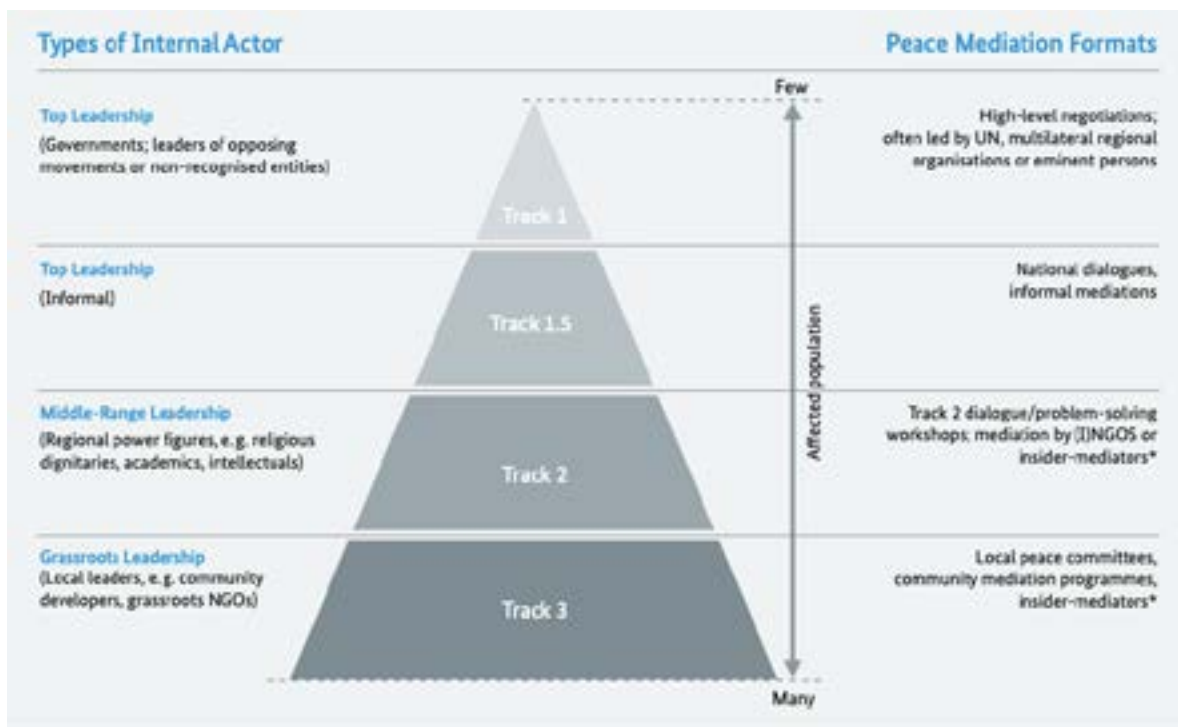
The involvement of the private sector in the peace process has many advantages; however, there are also hazards. Most private companies are focused on economic growth, which is their main incentive when conducting business. Therefore, there is a risk that private companies assist in peace processes driven by economic benefits rather than good intentions. This can occur by influencing a change in the current power structure that would create an economic model favorable to the organization (Tripathi & Gündüz, 2008).

This hazard of self-interest was also identified in Sri Lanka in the 1990s. Sri Lanka had experienced conflict for decades, but the private sector did not show support, as the conflict was regional and did not directly affect their economic situation. When the international airport was bombed in the Colombo region—where 40% of the major businesses in Sri Lanka were located—the private sector suddenly showed extensive support to the community and even created a peace movement. In this case, the incentive for ending the war was the economic costs rather than the violence and loss of life. This also influenced elections to focus on socio-economic benefits and a peace that was not made by the people but rather by the private companies (Tripathi & Gündüz, 2008).

Another point of tension between peacebuilding and the private sector is that peace processes can take years, sometimes even decades, while private companies often have a limited vision and may quickly become impatient. Additionally, most companies deal with various stakeholders who are interested in different agenda points. These stakeholders can come and go, so companies can provide little stability over a longer period. This is because the private sector is a non-monolithic entity that constantly changes (Tripathi & Gündüz, 2008).

An additional point of attention is the fragility and complexity of the private sector's involvement in providing regional stability: "There can be regulatory and market uncertainty, weak sponsor capacity, and limited infrastructure and supplies. These projects thus require a much heavier lift in the areas of integrity due diligence, capacity building, regulatory reform, assistance with project development, and environmental advisory service" (Spicer & Bousquet, 2019). This involvement also requires an extensive understanding of the conflict context and the parties involved, since incorrect approaches can have significant repercussions that affect far more than just the company itself.

Figure 1. Track Diplomacy



Based on Lederach, John Paul (1997). *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington D.C.: USIP, p. 39, adapted by IMSD.

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Variables for Sustainable Peace

Despite the many articles and studies on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, there are only a few studies on sustaining peace within a community. Based on this research gap, Columbia University launched the Sustainable Peace Project (SPP). This project aimed to identify the main variables that contribute to sustaining peace. In their research, they identified the following variables as relevant to sustaining peace:

- A shared identity that unites groups regardless of their issues.
- Interconnections between groups through sport, trade, or other relations.
- Interconnections between groups due to shared responsibility regarding environmental and economic matters, as well as similar security interests.
- A communal understanding of combating non-related conflict violence in homes, schools, and communities.
- Traditions and festivities that celebrate peace.
- The need to keep women safe (Coleman & Donahue, 2018).

The Current Peace Situation in Costa Rica and the Developments over Time

Peace Development in Costa Rica

To better understand the current situation in Costa Rica, it is imperative to get a clear picture of how peace was established and sustained over time. In 1948, José Figueres Ferrer, leader of the armed rebellion group Partido Liberación Nacional, led a coup and became president of Costa Rica. With his leadership and the demilitarization of the country, Costa Rica shifted from the threat of communism to a democratic system. Ferrer transformed Costa Rica into a progressive democracy, granting voting rights to Black people and women just 18 months after taking office (Coleman & Donahue, 2018).

The political changes in Costa Rica ensured fair elections from 1948 onward, with the Supreme Court recognizing peace as an official human right. Additionally, the absence of a standing army freed up resources for societal purposes, such as education and social welfare. Costa Rica became a regional example for demilitarization and the promotion of human rights, with President Óscar Arias even receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987. Arias also helped found the University for Peace (Upeace), the only university established by the UN General Assembly. Since 1997, Costa Rica has included peace education in its school curriculum (Coleman & Donahue, 2018).

Costa Rica has also played a leading role in mediating negotiations on nuclear disarmament. Although this topic is often characterized by stalemates, the negotiations involving Costa Rica have been notably productive (Gomez, 2021). Central themes in Costa Rica include peace, justice, and gender equality, which are reflected both internally and externally through various declarations and conventions. The “Declaration of Perpetual, Active, and Unarmed Neutrality” of 1983 is an example of Costa Rica’s external commitment to international peace, preventing the country from interfering in other states’ conflicts (Coleman & Donahue, 2018).

Mediation and arbitration were officially introduced in Costa Rica in 1997 with the creation of the “Ley sobre Resolución Alternativa de Conflictos y Promoción de la Paz Social.” This law paved the way for further mediation agreements, which were previously not possible due to a lack of legal authority (Sistema Costarricense de Información Jurídica, n.d.).

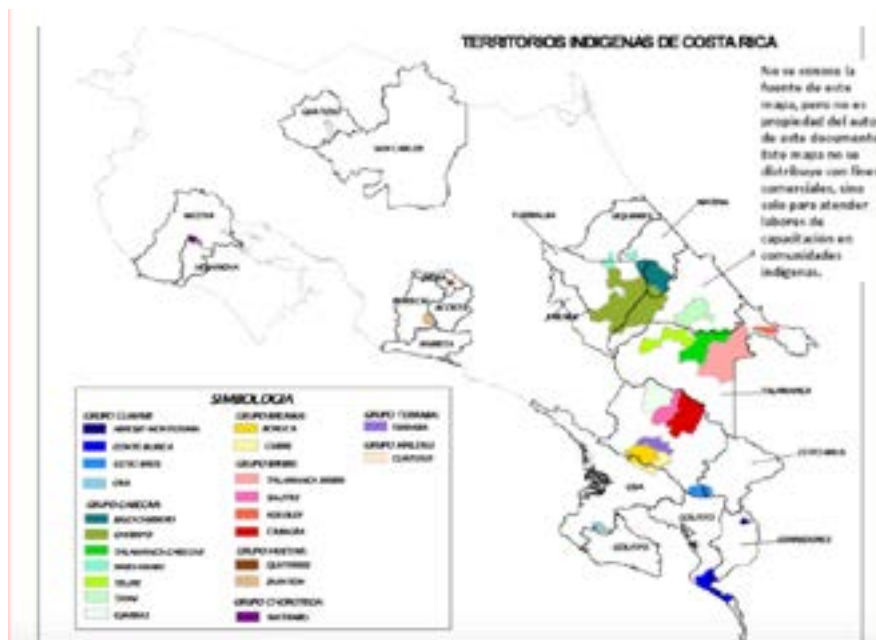
Current Peace Situation

Costa Rica is in an advanced stage of the peace process, actively building and sustaining positive peace. The country consistently ranks highly on both the Positive Peace Index and the Global Peace Index. This strong performance is attributed to Costa Rica's ongoing promotion of peace, equality, and human rights through numerous projects and initiatives. Despite these achievements, some tensions remain that could potentially lead to violent conflicts. These tensions are most visible between indigenous groups and private organizations (Coleman & Donahue, 2018).

Indigenous People and their Relationship with the Private Sector

In Costa Rica, a significant portion of the population is comprised of indigenous peoples, who collectively hold approximately 7% of the country's territory. As illustrated in Figure 2, Costa Rica is home to eight distinct indigenous ethnic groups, distributed across 24 territories. Since 1977, the Indigenous Law has formalized the allocation of these territories among the various peoples of Costa Rica (Bessi, 2017).

Figure 2: Indigenous Territories in Costa Rica (Osario, 2015)



The indigenous communities of Salitre and Diquís are currently struggling to preserve their identity and culture, as they face threats from non-indigenous groups. Salitre, one of the indigenous territories, has experienced ongoing challenges in maintaining its land, despite having both legal and ancestral rights to it. After successfully reclaiming 85% of their territory, the Salitre community endured a wave of violence from non-indigenous individuals, including arson, threats, and persecution (Samuda, 2015).

In response, the Salitre community has fought for recognition of their authority, reaffirmation of their identity, and protection of their culture and language through education. As a result of this resistance, Sergio Rojas Ortiz—a member of the National Coordination of the National Front of Indigenous Peoples (FRENAPI) and President of the Local Government of the Bribri de Salitre territory—was imprisoned for seven months (Samuda, 2015).

The Diquís, the largest of Costa Rica's eight indigenous groups, reside in a remote forested area in Térraba. Their representatives have voiced concerns about a proposed hydroelectric project, fearing it would lead to the destruction of their community (Marsden, 2021; Samuda, 2015).

The primary concern regarding this project is its significant environmental impact, particularly deforestation. The Diquís community's protest is grounded in Convention 169 of the Costa Rican constitution, which affirms the right of indigenous peoples to determine their development priorities, especially when these affect their lives, beliefs, institutions, spiritual well-being, and the lands they occupy or use (Samuda, 2015).

A key issue identified in this analysis is the lack of communication and understanding among the actors involved. Mediation by an external party, as previously discussed, is a critical factor for healthy dialogue; however, the private sector could make greater efforts to prevent future conflicts. Learning about the culture and lifestyle of local communities enables better engagement, and establishing open communication with these communities is essential to avoid misunderstandings.

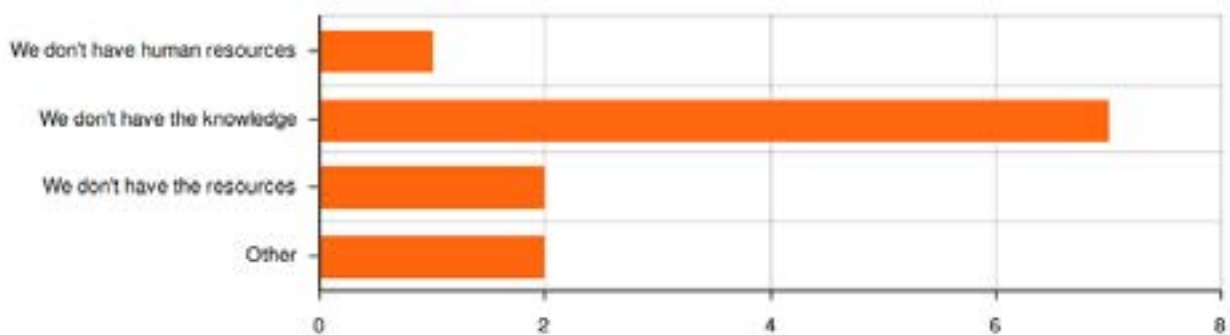
Current Involvement Private Sector in Costa Rica Regarding SDGs

This study examines the role of the private sector in peace-related initiatives in Costa Rica, with a specific focus on Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16). To understand the extent of private sector involvement, it is necessary to assess how companies implement

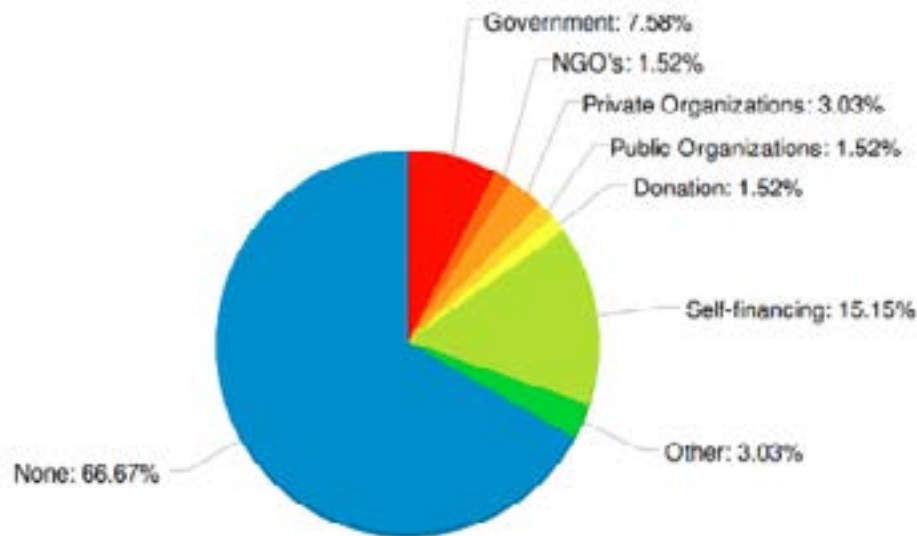
SDG-related projects, the actors involved, and the barriers they face. The research also offers insight into the broader context of Costa Rican corporate engagement in sustainable development and peacebuilding.

In 2020, a survey was conducted among 67 companies selected from the “Esencial Costa Rica” network, a national brand that certifies firms for their commitment to sustainability. The sample was found to fairly represent the private sector landscape. Results revealed that while only two-thirds of respondents were aware of the UN’s SDGs, 97% reported being involved in some form of sustainability initiative. As shown in Figure 3, lack of awareness was the leading reason cited for non-implementation of the SDGs, aligning with broader knowledge gaps (Bruggeman, Valderrama & Cucchia, 2020).

Figure 3: Reasons for not implementing SDGs. Source: Author



Despite Costa Rica’s strong governmental commitment to the SDGs, including pledges of financial and institutional support (UN, 2016), survey data indicated limited external funding for sustainability projects. As illustrated in Figure 4, most initiatives were either self-financed or unfunded (Bruggeman, Valderrama & Cucchia, 2020).

Figure 4: Funding of sustainable projects. Source: Author

Five primary obstacles to SDG implementation were identified:

1. Lack of funding:

This obstacle is especially prevalent among smaller companies that do not have the financial capacity to implement SDGs without external support.

2. Lack of human resources/time:

The current pandemic partially explains this category. Cutbacks have forced companies to operate with fewer staff, increasing workloads. There is a notable difference between companies with a dedicated sustainability division and those without.

3. Lack of training and knowledge:

As concluded earlier, a lack of knowledge is the main problem for companies that have not implemented SDGs. Larger companies that do not face resource or time constraints still struggle with implementation and would like to receive training.

4. Need for UN & Government guidance:

Several companies stated the need for guidance from either the government or the UN. This obstacle is closely related to the training and knowledge gap, as companies seek assurance that they are implementing the SDGs correctly. In some cases, government guidance is considered essential. For example, SDG 16 can only be implemented effectively with good governance (Vernon, 2014).

5. Need for consultancy:

The final obstacle identified was the need for consultancy from external experts to advise companies on which SDGs to implement and how. Most consultancy requests were related to environmental issues and pollution (Bruggeman, Valderrama & Cucchia, 2020).

Current Involvement Private Sector in Costa Rica Regarding SDG 16

To build on the survey findings, five semi-structured interviews were conducted with companies engaged in peace and human rights projects. The interviews focused on three dimensions of private sector contributions to SDG 16: partnerships, employee treatment, and support for peace initiatives. The private organizations I interviewed deemed it very important to verify their partners to ensure alignment with their sustainable values. Some organizations even mentioned a list of preconditions that partners must meet. All organizations reported having experienced at least one instance where they refused to collaborate with a company based on its (lack of) sustainable views. Ms. Araujo, an experienced mediator actively involved in conflicts between the private sector and local communities, added that even though Costa Rica has a sustainable brand, a significant number of organizations remain old-fashioned and focus solely on maximizing profit. However, not all organizations have the resources to verify all their partners, regardless of how important they consider it. These newer and smaller organizations often lack the financial means and human resources to do so (Araujo, 2021).

Good governance is essential for the correct implementation of SDG 16, which can include oversight and assistance from the government in verifying partners. The interviewed organizations had not experienced such support from the government but were all open to the idea. Companies that struggled with this phase even described governmental assistance as a need to help them verify their partners (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021).

Assessing employee treatment posed methodological challenges, as it is a subjective and sensitive topic that can elicit socially desirable responses. To mitigate this, indirect questions regarding the workplace environment and leisure-related activities were used to gather insights. The interviewed companies emphasized employee well-being, highlighting initiatives such as open communication channels, recreational activities, and access to outdoor spaces. These practices were intended to foster a positive work environment that promotes both individual satisfaction and broader social well-being, with the underlying belief that improved

employee morale contributes positively to familial and community dynamics (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021).

Interviewed companies reported limited engagement in supporting external peace initiatives. Instead, they predominantly focused on their own internal peace and sustainability efforts. This pattern is consistent with findings from the broader SDG implementation survey, in which 64.2% of participating companies reported concentrating exclusively on their own projects. Only 22.4% indicated that they actively supported other organizations' SDG or peace-related initiatives (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021). This suggests a tendency within the Costa Rican private sector to approach peacebuilding primarily through self-contained initiatives rather than collaborative or networked efforts.

Current Involvement Private Sector in Costa Rica Regarding the Peace Process

As previously analyzed, private sector involvement in the peace process has been a growing trend over the past decade. Private organizations have become essential actors in peacebuilding efforts. The private sector in Costa Rica participates in the peace process through various means.

By spreading awareness of peace, equality, and human rights, organizations can significantly impact local communities and the broader peace process. One interviewed organization specifically mentioned its contribution by promoting sustainability, preventing discrimination, and prohibiting child labor. They have been working on a project called the "Comisión Nacional de Valores," which aims to implement human rights, sustainability, anti-discrimination measures, and child labor prohibition across the entire private sector in Costa Rica (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021).

Within Costa Rica's private sector, companies occasionally use education to keep their employees aligned with the company's values and goals. Several interviewed companies conduct annual tests on sustainability and human rights for their employees. One company even provides education on human rights to ensure employees are equipped to participate in peace projects (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021).

The private sector is also involved in various peace initiatives aimed at supporting local communities. Interviews provided deeper insight into these initiatives. Many organizations

support local schools through logistical and financial assistance, emphasizing the importance of quality education for all. Some organizations have also established foundations that organize sports events, volunteer activities, and support shelters for children (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021).

Spicer and Bousquet (2015) highlighted the private sector's role in providing regional stability, notably through job creation. When companies provide employment to local community members, they contribute to financial stability and help alleviate regional tensions to some extent. One company, located in the most vulnerable area of the capital, San José, emphasized the importance of this role: 40% of their employees come from that vulnerable area. Employing many people from such a community strengthens the company's connection to the local population and enables more direct and impactful assistance (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021).

Why Peace Education Should be Implemented in the Private Sector in Costa Rica

Earlier was established that even though Costa Rica is an advanced stage in their peace process, communication between the private sector and local communities still must be improved to avoid more tension and conflicts. In this section, the author will analyze two theoretical frameworks that will be used in defining what peace education exactly entails in the case of the private sector in Costa Rica. Additionally, this section will analyze the needs, benefits, and obstacles for private organizations when implementing peace education.

Conflict Sensitivity

The core of conflict sensitivity is the integration of the “what” and the “how,” as illustrated in Table 1. The “what” refers to understanding precisely what conflict sensitivity entails in a given context, while the “how” involves knowing how to address and manage that situation appropriately.

Table 1: The core of conflict sensitivity (International Alert, 2004)

What to do?	How to do it?
Understanding the context in which you operate	Carry out a conflict analysis, and update it regularly
Understand the interaction between your intervention and the context	Link the conflict analysis with the programming cycle of your intervention
Use this understanding to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts	Plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate your intervention in a conflict-sensitive fashion (including redesign when necessary)

The theory teaches companies to understand the context of the region in which they operate and to adjust their projects and approaches accordingly. A clear example of a lack of such understanding occurred in Rwanda in 1994. Companies failed to grasp Rwanda's diverse cultures and societal groups, resulting in a poor allocation of food across refugee camps, which in turn triggered a wave of violence (International Alert, 2004).

Conflict sensitivity further examines the behaviors companies should adopt when entering a new context. Companies impact local communities through resources such as personnel, materials, and intellectual capital. As shown in Table 2, there is a distinction between behaviors that negatively affect the community and those that have a positive impact. Negative behaviors erode trust and can escalate tensions or even provoke conflict and violence between parties. In contrast, positive behaviors foster trust, increase acceptance of the company and its projects, and help create a calmer community environment, which in turn encourages greater engagement and potential partnerships. Within these behavioral patterns, four main types are identified: respect, accountability, fairness, and transparency, as outlined in Table 2 (Burke, 2017).

Table 2: Patterns of Behavior (Burke, 2017)

	Negative Patterns of Behavior	Positive Patterns of Behavior	
Respect	Belligerence/Anger	← → Calm	Transparency
	Competition	← → Collaboration	
	Suspicion	← → Trust	
	Indifference	← → Sensitivity to Local Concerns	
Accountability	Powerlessness	← → Action	
	Impunity	← → Responsibility/Accountability	
	Arms and Power	← → Rule of Law/Nonviolence	
Fairness	Different value for different lives	← → Recognition of value for all lives	

An example of negative patterns of behavior is the aforementioned Sri Lanka conflict in the 1990s. This conflict clearly illustrated that companies only acted when their own interests were directly affected by the conflict and did nothing in earlier stages to support the community. This demonstrated that private companies assigned different value to different lives, showing no sensitivity to local concerns.

Positive behavior patterns can be found in the multi-track diplomacy approach, as demonstrated in the previously discussed apartheid conflict in South Africa. This approach incorporated all the positive behavior patterns of respect in engaging with the local community, transforming them into actions that generated a win-win scenario (Tripathi & Gündüz, 2008).

Corporate Social Responsibility

Not too long ago, the only responsibilities of a company were to pursue maximum profit and abide by the law. However, in recent years, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained significant recognition within the international community. CSR refers to the idea that private companies should be more socially aware, acknowledging the substantial impact the private sector has on communities through job opportunities, human rights, the environment, education, and training (Iturbide, 2018). Companies can become more socially responsible by “integrating social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns into their business strategy and operations” (Corporate social responsibility & Responsible business conduct, 2020).

Alongside sustainable development, CSR establishes new goals for organizations, encouraging the creation of innovative, sustainable business models. These models aim first to identify

all economic, social, and environmental impacts that a company has on its stakeholders and to consider these impacts when making decisions that positively affect society and promote sustainable development (Iturbide, 2018). This approach can be compared to the doughnut theory, where human well-being—rather than maximum profit—becomes the central focus and ultimate goal of any organization (Raworth, 2017).

An increasing number of companies are adopting this ideology as they enhance their sustainable values, fostering what is known as a culture of peace. This culture of peace seeks to make education a standard tool for employees, to develop critical thinking, encourage reflection, and motivate active participation in the progress of society (Iturbide, 2018).

Meaning of Peace Education

Previously, conflict sensitivity was identified as an essential theory for the private sector to follow when engaging in peace projects. It is important to distinguish between the peace education applied in a country like Costa Rica—which is not currently experiencing conflict—and the conflict-focused education recommended by conflict sensitivity frameworks. However, this distinction does not diminish the value or focus of peace education. The ideology of conflict sensitivity—emphasizing understanding and adaptation before action—is closely aligned with the principles of peace education.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is also a well-established concept in Costa Rica, with most private organizations prioritizing more than just maximum profit. The private sector demonstrates social responsibility by developing a wide range of projects that support local communities and contribute to regional stability (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021).

These projects require extensive dialogue and engagement with local communities, making an appropriate approach essential. Furthermore, organizations involved in peace projects can cause significant repercussions if their efforts are mismanaged, with impacts extending far beyond their own operations (Spicer & Bousquet, 2019).

For these reasons, it is highly beneficial for employees of organizations involved in the peace process to possess the necessary knowledge and skills. This is where peace education becomes particularly relevant. Peace education is described as “dismantling all forms of violence and creating a just and sustainable culture of peace” (McKeown Jones, Orchard, &

Paulson, 2017). In anticipation of implementing this approach in the private sector in Costa Rica, peace education in this research is structured in several layers.

The increasing involvement of the private sector in the peace process has created new opportunities, as observed in Costa Rica. However, this involvement requires specialized knowledge on topics not typically included in standard employee training. Several organizations already conduct annual assessments of their employees' understanding of human rights, highlighting the recognized importance of this knowledge.

Further research into SDG 16 has also underscored the significance of peace, governance, justice, and security. These concepts are too important to be confined solely to SDG 16 and have become essential for the private sector's role in the peace process (Vernon, 2014).

Based on the research conducted, peace education in the private sector will cover the following subjects:

- Human Rights
- Peace and Conflict
- Gender Studies
- Intercultural Communication

As identified in conflict sensitivity theory, specific behavior patterns are required when engaging with communities of different cultures. This engagement consists of two key factors: creating healthy dialogue and sustaining it, which are further detailed in Table 3.

Table 3: Factors for private companies to have a healthy dialogue with local communities. Source: Author

Factors for creating healthy dialogue → GOAL = Mutual trust	Factors for sustaining healthy dialogue → GOAL = A win-win solution
- Understanding the needs and goals of the community	- No dishonesty
- Creating a safe environment	- Absolute transparency
- Finding common ground	- Active listening
- Introducing how the community could benefit from the situation	- Working towards a mutually understood goal
	- Willingness to make compromises

Costa Rica is home to a significant indigenous population, distributed across 24 distinct regions protected by the 1977 Indigenous Law. It is crucial that, in addition to learning about conflict sensitivity and effective engagement with local communities, private organizations also familiarize themselves with the diverse cultural groups in Costa Rica and understand their unique values and needs. This cultural awareness is reflected in everyday politics, where individuals take care to avoid causing offense by thoroughly researching the other party, their needs, and the needs of their constituencies (Albani & Ade, 2021).

Research indicates a substantial need for peace education within the private sector, with several companies already expressing interest in such initiatives. When companies were specifically asked about their willingness to implement peace education, their responses were overwhelmingly positive. They believed that peace education would make a significant difference within their organizations and improve their relationships with local communities (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021).

Need for Implementing Peace Education

Peace education will enable the private sector to become more actively engaged in the peace process in Costa Rica. It will enhance engagement with, and understanding of, local communities, while also fostering stronger partnerships with NGOs, the public sector, and the government. Increased engagement will lead to a deeper understanding of the values and interests of other stakeholders, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict.

Survey results identified five primary obstacles hindering private sector engagement in implementing the SDGs and launching peace-related projects. These challenges are mainly linked to gaps in institutional capacity, especially the need for training and technical support. Many companies reported lacking the knowledge required to design and implement sustainable and peace-oriented initiatives effectively. Introducing peace education within the private sector is proposed as a solution to this capacity gap. While not intended to replace governmental guidance, such education could equip organizations with the tools to operate more independently and competently in these areas. Interviews confirmed a broad openness among companies to adopting peace education as a means to overcome these implementation challenges (Bruggeman, Valderrama & Cucchia, 2020).

Furthermore, interviewee Ms. Araujo highlighted that international financial institutions are increasingly requiring the inclusion of conflict resolution mechanisms within national frameworks as a condition for funding. These requirements help ensure that investments in sustainable and peace-focused projects are protected and managed responsibly. As a result, private organizations seeking external funding must demonstrate compliance with conflict-sensitive standards, further underscoring the importance of peace education and conflict resolution capacity within the corporate sector (Araujo, 2021).

Benefits of Implementing Peace Educations

One benefit that is highly valued in Costa Rica is obtaining a sustainability certificate. Organizations such as Esencial Costa Rica and Procomer each have their own brand. Membership in these organizations allows companies to use their brand, which represents sustainability, innovation, and social progress. Companies pay an annual fee to use this brand, but it is considered essential, and they are willing to invest in it (Esencial Costa Rica, 2021; Procomer, 2021).

The concept of recognizing companies for implementing peace education can also be realized through a formal distinction. For example, the “Programa Bandera Azul Ecológica” awards companies with an ecological distinction based on specific efforts and volunteer work related to environmental protection (Bandera Azul Ecológica, 2017).

Building on this idea, the proposal is to grant companies a special brand once they have successfully implemented peace education. This brand would represent cultural sensitivity, awareness of human rights, environmental stewardship, conflict resolution skills, and a thorough understanding of the community structure in the region where the company operates. Such a distinction would assure other private companies, local communities, and the government that the organization’s employees are well-prepared and capable of effectively carrying out peace-related initiatives.

Peace Education as Conflict Prevention

Beyond its normative value, peace education can also serve as a pragmatic investment in conflict prevention. In Costa Rica, disputes between private companies and local communities are not uncommon and can result in significant financial and reputational costs. As noted

by Araujo (2021), international financial institutions increasingly require recipient states and companies to demonstrate conflict resolution mechanisms before disbursing funds for sustainable development projects.

A prominent example is the case of the Costa Rican Electricity Institute (Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad, ICE) and the community of Turrialba. In 2010, ICE initiated a hydroelectric project that required diverting water sources from local springs used by surrounding communities. Residents filed a lawsuit, arguing that the project jeopardized essential water access. The court ultimately ruled in favor of the community, framing the decision in terms of “global responsibility”—a principle that holds developers accountable not only for project planning and execution but also for minimizing harm to affected populations (Tenorio, 2017).

As a result, ICE faced the cancellation of the project, over ten years of delays, and more than \$100 million in losses. Had peacebuilding principles, including community engagement and conflict sensitivity, been embedded earlier in the project cycle—through peace education or external guidance—such outcomes might have been mitigated. This case illustrates that peace education is not merely a normative ideal but also a potential tool for reducing corporate risk and ensuring more sustainable development outcomes.

Obstacles for Implementing Peace Education

The Covid-19 pandemic has struck hard in the private sector in Costa Rica. The government has tried to assist the private sector; however, the bureaucratic nature of the country does not allow the quick assistance that is required. Given the critical financial situation many Costa Rican companies are experiencing currently, investing in something intangible such as peace education might not be desirable for all. Especially since the benefits will mainly become apparent in the long term, with little visible short-term benefits (The World Bank, 2021).

Actors Involved in the Implementation of Peace Education in the Private Sector

From the five main obstacles that private companies in Costa Rica experience when implementing SDGs, three are related to consultancy, assistance, or training. However, these private companies show the willingness to implement SDGs further and participate in peace

projects; however, they lack the knowledge and experience. While some companies specifically wanted help from the government or the UN, most companies just mentioned the need for consultancy or training. This creates a need for peace education in the private sector in Costa Rica. This section analyzes the current involvement between the private sector and relevant actors and the potential of these actors for future participation in the peace education implementation process.

Government

The government of Costa Rica is currently the most involved actor in assisting the private sector with the execution of sustainable and peace projects. While this assistance is mainly financial, private companies are seeking more extensive support from the government in the form of guidance and oversight. This aligns with the theory behind SDG 16, which emphasizes the importance of good governance in implementation (Vernon, 2014).

Interviewed companies highlighted the importance of ensuring that their partners share their values regarding sustainability, with some even maintaining a list of preconditions. However, most companies struggle with this screening process due to their size or limited human resources (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021).

Costa Rica is recognized as a progressive country focused on sustaining peace and sustainable development. Key milestones include the recognition of peace as a human right, former President Arias receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, and the establishment of Upeace, the only university founded by the UN (Coleman & Donahue, 2018).

In 2016, the Minister of National Planning and Economic Policy stated that the government is fundamentally obligated to pursue sustainable development and actively support other sectors. This obligation is enshrined in the constitution under Social Rights and Guarantees, Article 50, which affirms the right to a healthy environment and ecological balance. The government must guarantee, defend, and preserve this right. Additionally, the government signed the 'National Pact for the Sustainable Development Goals' in 2016, ensuring further SDG implementation and greater collaboration between the public and private sectors. Article 64 further states that the government will support companies by creating better conditions for employees' lives (Asamblea Legislativa, 2009; UN, 2016). There has also been a significant shift of power, with the government granting more legislative responsibilities to

the public and private sectors to foster a more inclusive and productive society (Coleman & Donahue, 2018).

Costa Rica's absence of a standing army allows for the allocation of additional public funds to social development and public services. However, the private sector still desires more support from the government for peace-related initiatives and SDG implementation. While peace education in the private sector can reduce the need for governmental assistance to some extent, the government remains a significant partner. The government can collaborate with companies that have implemented peace education and assist those that have not. This is only feasible if relevant government departments also receive peace education, enabling governmental employees to better support the private sector. Companies that have received peace education will be able to engage more effectively with the government on peace projects, fostering smoother and deeper partnerships. Moreover, the government will be better equipped to support other companies seeking to implement SDGs or participate in peace projects.

Additionally, the government serves as a role model; when it successfully assists and advises the private sector after receiving peace education, private companies are more likely to recognize the benefits and implement peace education themselves.

Esencial Costa Rica and Procomer

Interviews with private sector actors involved in SDG 16 implementation and peace-related initiatives revealed that organizations such as Esencial Costa Rica and Procomer play a critical role in promoting sustainability standards within the national context. Beyond their branding function, these institutions actively support companies in adopting sustainable practices and serve as strategic partners in relevant initiatives. Currently, most private companies engage with these organizations primarily for branding purposes. By paying an annual fee, businesses are permitted to display the Esencial Costa Rica or Procomer certification alongside their own branding—signaling a public commitment to sustainability and innovation.

These certifications are used across sectors and organizational sizes to communicate sustainable values to consumers and stakeholders. However, Esencial Costa Rica and Procomer offer far more than symbolic value: they possess substantial technical expertise and institutional

capacity to support deeper private sector engagement with the SDGs. In the context of expanding peace education within the private sector, these organizations could leverage their experience in two key ways:

- Field research revealed that many private companies already maintain partnerships with Esencial Costa Rica and Procomer for the implementation of sustainability-focused projects. These collaborations demonstrate existing trust and operational synergy between public and private actors. However, both organizations hold untapped potential to deepen their engagement, particularly in supporting companies that have adopted peace education frameworks. Strengthening these partnerships could enhance coordination, improve implementation quality, and expand the reach of peace-related initiatives across sectors (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021).
- Given their technical expertise in sustainable development and established roles as intermediaries between the public and private sectors, Esencial Costa Rica and Procomer are well positioned to deliver peace education to private organizations. Their institutional knowledge, practical experience, and community-level engagement provide a solid foundation for training programs that combine theoretical understanding with applied relevance. As recognized national entities, they could serve as credible and effective facilitators of peace education within the corporate landscape.

Public Sector

Collaboration between the public and private sectors in Costa Rica is expanding and can be observed at multiple levels. When these sectors work together, a co-governance structure is often established, regulated by an entity focused on policy implementation. The board of executives typically includes representatives from both the public and private sectors. Since the private sector usually holds more seats on the board, it often wields significant decision-making power (Cornick, Jimenez, & Román, 2014).

Another example of this collaboration is the shared commitment to sustainable development. This partnership is reinforced by the government's dedication to SDG implementation and its constitutional obligation to support other sectors in this progress. The National Pact for the Sustainable Development Goals, signed in 2016, further advanced this collaboration.

A key outcome of this pact is the emphasis on SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals, which promotes more extensive cooperation between the private and public sectors in the ongoing implementation of SDGs (UN, 2016).

Local Community

When private companies interact with local communities, it is essential to initiate healthy dialogue. As previously mentioned, creating and sustaining such dialogue requires careful consideration of various factors. This is particularly important in Costa Rica, where eight different indigenous groups are spread across 24 territories. These communities often maintain traditional lifestyles, making them less connected to the rest of the country. Therefore, establishing healthy dialogue is especially important for private companies before starting any project in these territories. Analysis of indigenous groups and conflicts with private companies highlights the importance of acknowledging their culture, language, way of life, and their right to live undisturbed on their land.

Local communities play a critical role in enabling constructive engagement with the private sector. Grassroots diplomacy is foundational to sustainable peacebuilding and begins with open, inclusive dialogue at the community level. When local actors are willing to engage, the potential for conflict can often be mitigated or avoided entirely. Early, trust-based communication between communities and private organizations serves as a key preventive mechanism in addressing tensions before they escalate.

Once local communities observe that private companies are implementing peace education and investing time and effort to support them, their attitudes toward the private sector are likely to improve. This leads to greater willingness to engage in dialogue and consider the intentions of private companies, often resulting in mutually beneficial solutions.

Universities

Mediators are often regarded as authorized and qualified third parties that arbitrate negotiations. In Costa Rica, since the 1997 mediation law, mediation occurs in many forms, not always conducted by official mediators. Universities in Costa Rica have increasingly focused on peace education through lectures and seminars, and they also promote organizations that launch peace projects or act as mediators in conflicts with local communities.

For example, the mediation between the Diquis and Salitre communities was facilitated by the Universidad de Ciencias Sociales del TEC. The university provided a safe environment for indigenous representatives to share their stories and used its platform to raise awareness of these conflicts, giving a voice to local communities. This demonstrates the potential of universities to bridge gaps between the private sector and local communities. Additionally, universities are gaining expertise in peace education, making them well-suited to advise and teach private companies implementing peace projects (Samuda, 2015).

NGOs

NGOs have been actively promoting human rights, the right to water, and employment diversification for marginalized populations in Costa Rica, mainly through projects. One such project is the 'Red de Mujeres Rurales de Costa Rica,' which focuses on promoting the rights and interests of indigenous and rural women. This project exemplifies how NGOs engage in social initiatives and collaborate with other organizations and universities to raise awareness (Peace Insight, 2013).

Private Sector

To date, the private sector has not made extensive efforts to support sustainable and peace projects. Only 3% of projects from private organizations have been funded by other private organizations, and partnerships between private companies are rare in Costa Rica for these types of projects. This could change significantly with the implementation of peace education, as organizations would be better equipped to support and advise one another to a greater extent (Bruggeman, Valderrama & Cucchia, 2020).

Field research revealed that smaller private companies are more engaged with local communities. In contrast, larger companies, due to the scale of their projects and less frequent community engagement, often attract more attention from environmentalists. This can have significant repercussions, as Costa Rica is a country where many disputes are settled in court. Prolonged legal battles can result in substantial financial losses due to court fees and project delays (Bruggeman & Fallas, 2021).

The UN

The UN is actively involved in Costa Rica, assisting local communities, the private sector, the government, and trade unions in achieving the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Costa Rica's reputation for peace, democracy, human rights, and sustainable development makes it a focal point for UN activities. The UN's objectives in Costa Rica include:

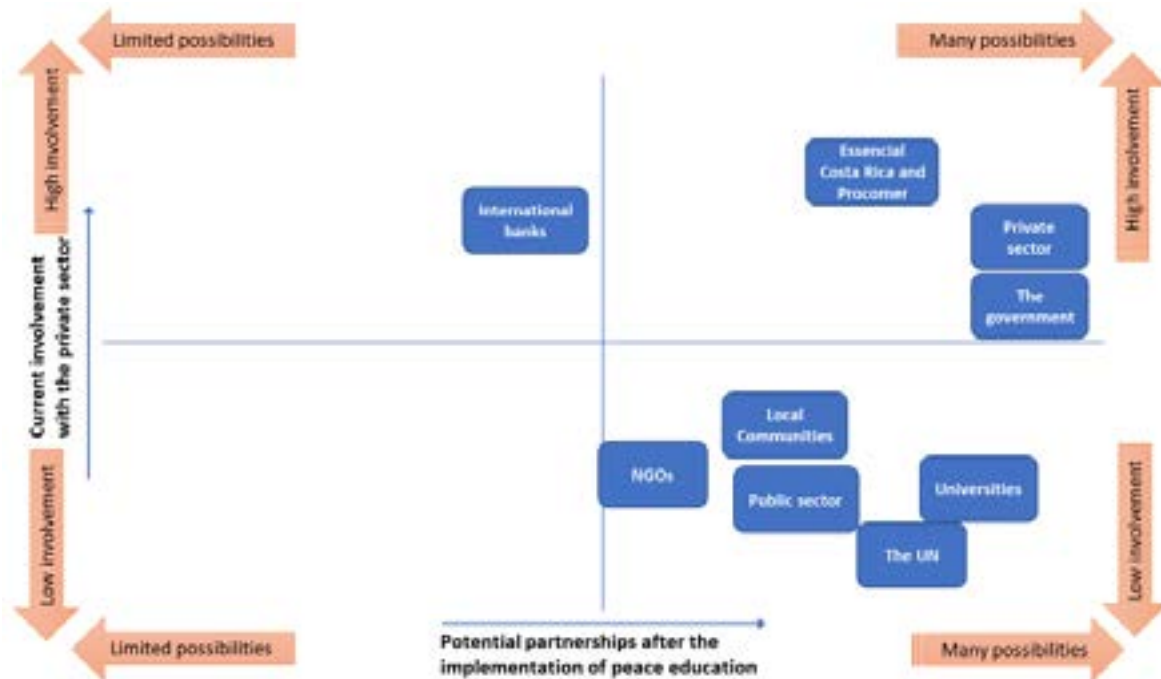
- Implementation of the 2030 Agenda
- Environmental development and a vision for a decarbonized economy
- Promotion of human rights
- Promotion of gender equality
- Support for migratory and humanitarian responses
- Resources for development
- Public infrastructure (UN Sustainable Development Group, 2021)

The UN has also established the SDG fund to support organizations implementing SDGs or engaging in peace projects. However, this fund has not been very successful in Costa Rica, as private organizations report receiving little to no financial support from the UN. Many private companies have also expressed a desire for more advice and support from the UN when implementing sustainable and peace projects (Bruggeman, Valderrama & Cucchia, 2020).

International Banks

International banks are crucial for funding sustainable and peace projects in Costa Rica's private sector. Since Covid-19, the private sector has become even more dependent on international banks, increasing the banks' leverage. This leverage is often exercised through conflict resolution clauses, which serve as insurance that private organizations will use funds for projects that benefit the community and are properly executed (The World Bank, 2021).

The World Bank, in particular, has supported several projects in Costa Rica aimed at increasing productive inclusion and promoting environmental sustainability. Through the Country Partnership Framework (CPF), the World Bank has loaned more than one billion US dollars to the Costa Rican government in recent years, funding projects focused on improving and protecting universal healthcare, developing sustainable and resilient landscapes, generating sustainable energy, and more (The World Bank, 2021).

Figure 5: Actor analysis.²

Source: Author

Conclusion

Key Research Findings

This study examined the feasibility, relevance, and implementation strategies for introducing peace education in the private sector in Costa Rica. The research explored not only the potential benefits but also the practical challenges of implementation. Drawing on fieldwork—including surveys and interviews with private sector representatives—it became evident that there is strong interest among Costa Rican companies in engaging with peace-related initiatives, despite notable gaps in technical knowledge and institutional support.

Over the last 10–15 years, there has been a trend of private organizations involving themselves in the peace process. Since this trend is also visible in Costa Rica, the author sought

² This figure offers a conceptual understanding of actor involvement, based on the conducted field and desk research. It does, however, not present an exact measurement based on precise numbers.

to understand how private companies can participate in the peace process and the potential drawbacks of their involvement. The private sector was identified as playing roles across all diplomacy tracks, meaning it has fulfilled various functions in the peace process. Table 4 illustrates the benefits and hazards of involving the private sector in peacebuilding.

Table 4: Private sector involvement in the peace process.

Benefits to private sector involvement	Hazards of private sector involvement
Provide certain resources	Driven by economic benefits
Easier to approach for local communities	Lose interest due to their short term vision
Helping to create a multi-layer dialogue	Ignoring conflict sensitivity
Often no direct stake in the outcome	

Source: Author

Costa Rica has a long history with peace, beginning in 1948 when the country was demilitarized after a military coup. Other key milestones include the Indigenous Law of 1977, the first mediation law of 1997, and the government's further commitment to SDG implementation in 2016. Costa Rica has actively promoted national and international projects focused on gender equality, peace, and human rights. These efforts have contributed to the country's reputation as the most peaceful nation in Central America. The private sector has received increasing support in SDG implementation and peace projects, but many organizations still seek more assistance, as they lack the resources or knowledge to execute all planned initiatives.

Costa Rica is home to eight different indigenous groups, spread over 24 territories protected by the Indigenous Law of 1977. Despite these protections, organizations have attempted to launch projects in these regions that have led to conflicts and costly lawsuits. Other actors have tried to ease these tensions through peace projects and mediation, but dialogue between the private sector and indigenous groups remains limited.

Field interviews revealed that many private companies are already undertaking initiatives to support local communities, particularly in areas affected by conflict or social vulnerability. These efforts generally fall into four categories: raising awareness, providing education, implementing peace-related projects, and generating employment opportunities. While these

initiatives demonstrate a strong foundation for private sector involvement in peacebuilding, they often lack strategic coordination and conflict-sensitive design—gaps that peace education could effectively address.

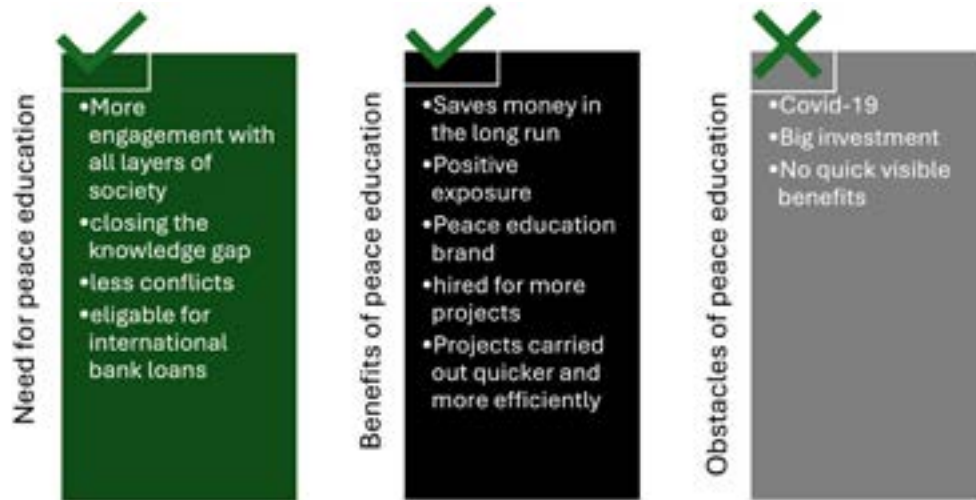
The theory of conflict sensitivity emphasizes the importance of how organizations engage and maintain dialogue when operating in or near conflict-affected settings. While traditionally applied to contexts of armed conflict, its core principles remain relevant in Costa Rica, where tensions persist between private sector actors and local communities, particularly within indigenous territories. These dynamics, though not constituting armed conflict, still involve significant risks of social harm and disruption.

When combined with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) theory—which promotes peace through sustainable development and human rights protection—conflict sensitivity provides a conceptual foundation for peace education. In this research paper, peace education is defined as “dismantling all forms of violence and creating a just and sustainable culture of peace” (McKeown Jones, Orchard, & Paulson, 2017). Peace education in the private sector in Costa Rica is structured around three main constructs:

- Peace concepts
- Conflict sensitivity
- Culture studies

The survey revealed that private organizations require assistance, guidance, and other types of support when implementing sustainable and peace projects. The implementation of peace education aims to fill this gap. Figure 6 compares the needs, benefits, and obstacles for the private sector in Costa Rica when implementing peace education.

Figure 6: Implementation of peace education - Needs vs Benefits vs Obstacles.



Source: Author

In anticipation of implementing peace education, it is imperative to analyze all the involved actors. The three most prominent actors in this process are the public sector, the government, and the private sector. However, these actors have thus far not supported private organizations to their satisfaction in sustainable and peace projects, so there is much progress to be made. To achieve this, the government must implement peace education to better assist the private sector.

Peace Education Implementation Role

Short-Term Involvement 1-5 Years

Qualified peace educators for the Costa Rican private sector must possess extensive knowledge in human rights, peacebuilding, justice, and sustainability, as well as a deep understanding of local cultures to engage communities sensitively and effectively. Organizations such as Esencial Costa Rica and Procomer align closely with the principles of peace education and have proven experience implementing sustainable and peace initiatives. These organizations, alongside experienced NGOs with conflict-sensitive expertise, are well-positioned to deliver peace education programs. Furthermore, Costa Rican universities, increasingly involved in peacebuilding through curriculum integration and mediation efforts, represent another crucial actor capable of facilitating peace education within the private sector.

The UN has numerous significant milestones it aims to achieve in Costa Rica; however, these are all based on the long term. In the short term, the UN would be an essential actor to implement peace education in the private sector. With their expertise, UN employees would make effective peace educators. The UN should focus on educating smaller organizations that are looking to implement peace projects and lack the necessary knowledge. Survey research found that smaller companies, in particular, are missing the financial resources to make significant investments, such as implementing peace education.

Local communities can teach about their culture and needs, which will increase organizations' cultural sensitivity and inclusive approaches and promote the need for peace education. Local communities could collaborate with the UN, which aims to engage more with local communities to promote matters such as gender equality and human rights.

International banks are already demanding peace-related preconditions for providing loans and supporting sustainable development in Costa Rica. Their financial support is essential for the private sector, so they can make peace education a precondition for private companies to receive loans. This benefits international banks by ensuring projects are carried out correctly and help the local community, while also stimulating the overall implementation of peace education.

Long-Term Involvement 5-10 Years

In the longer term, government leadership in adopting and institutionalizing peace education is essential. By embedding peace education within public sector policies and training programs, the government can extend support to private sector actors, particularly smaller organizations lacking financial and technical resources. This institutionalization will facilitate a broader and more sustainable uptake of peace education across sectors.

Once peace education has been implemented by various public and private organizations and the government, it will receive greater acknowledgment. Involvement in peace projects will simultaneously contribute to the promotion of peace education. Collaboration with other companies will also highlight the advantages gained from peace education, encouraging further adoption.

The implementation of peace education equips organizations and the government with the knowledge needed to participate in and create sustainable and peace projects. It also ensures that partners are more likely to share similar views on project execution, fostering further collaboration between the government and the private sector in Costa Rica.

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