

spark

Strategy 2030

Stepping up and moving forward



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spark

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20,000

impactful jobs



Youth

including women
and refugees



**3 growth
sectors**

agri-business, digital
technology and green
business



5

social impact lenses



25

fragile and conflict-
affected regions



SDG 8



**Facilitate
localisation**



**Expert
knowledge**



**Operational
excellence**

Introduction

Founded in 1994, this Strategy 2030 is SPARK's fourth strategic plan and most ambitious yet. It outlines SPARK's new targets and ambitions for the coming eight years. The following Strategy 2030 provides the framework that informs SPARK's future annual action plans to operationalise the goals within this new strategy.

SPARK's ambition with this strategy is to become a market leader in creating impactful jobs for youth in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS), creating 20,000 impactful jobs annually by focusing on growth industries and increasing our total yearly turn-over up to 70 million Euros.

SPARK's Strategy 2030 is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are to be achieved by 2030. Primarily, SPARK focuses on SDG 8 - 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' - and secondarily contributes to SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Context in which SPARK operates

Since 2020, young people globally - but especially those living in FCAS - have faced major, intersecting 'permacrises'. Initiated in part by the COVID-19 pandemic, global economic recessions and escalating conflict have increased instability in many places. In less than a year, Afghanistan fell to the Taliban (2021) and a devastating war in Ukraine erupted (2022). Protracted conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Libya continue to linger on, violent extremism is on the rise in parts of the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa, and the climate crisis is now evident worldwide. FCAS are often disproportionately impacted by the effects of the climate crisis and are the least resilient to climate shocks. Unsurprisingly, it is projected that FCAS will not meet their requirements of the SDGs by 2030. The number of refugees fleeing conflict or persecution is now at its highest since World War II and refugee hosting almost always disproportionately impacts neighbouring countries. Ukraine's unique position as a food production and energy transportation hub means global food and energy security is being impacted. These interlinked crises place enormous strain on FCAS. While some countries do transition to stability, others are now at even more risk of collapse or relapse.

Despite this gloomy outlook, hopes for a brighter future for today's youth remain alive. Compared to just a few years ago, it is now widely accepted that urgent responses to the climate crisis are needed in order to protect our world and many innovative, green initiatives are already taking place. This is opening up new sectors with enormous potential for new job creation and investment in FCAS. The COVID-19 pandemic, while devastating, also showcased how flexible and solution-oriented we can be. For example, opportunities for remote working opened new pathways for refugees and women to access education and employment. Similarly, advancements in digital access and skills are leading to greater inclusion of young job seekers and entrepreneurs within online markets.

Our mission

SPARK's mission is to create impactful jobs for youth in growth sectors, support ambitious and innovative entrepreneurs and grow businesses in FCAS.

The jobs created through SPARK's support have long-term effects on individual lives, create hope and realise impact for communities in regions where this is needed the most. By doing so, SPARK – together with local and international partners – contributes to the foundations of sustainable post-conflict economic recovery and stability. SPARK's support is market-driven and focuses on young people, as we envision a world in which young men and women play an active role in the socio-economic development of their societies.

History

For over 28 years, SPARK has been working in and adapting to challenging contexts to create employment opportunities for youth. SPARK has become an expert in creating pathways to employment in FCAS in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. SPARK has partnered with hundreds of mostly local educational institutions, private sector, governmental and civil society organisations to provide tens of thousands of jobs, through facilitating higher education scholarships, internships, supporting startups and helping entrepreneurs to grow their micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).



Tunisian and Libyan entrepreneurs during business skills training
Tunis, Tunisia

Strategy 2030: SPARK's ambitions

As instability around the world increases, SPARK aims to put our expertise to good use. We are determined to build on our heritage to step up and move forward. Over the next eight years, SPARK aims to scale up its job creation efforts significantly and achieve the impact that young people and their communities in FCAS need.

SPARK's main ambition is to become a market leader in creating impactful jobs for youth in FCAS, which responds to the UN SDG 8 'Decent Work and Economic Growth'. Concretely, this means that by 2030 we will create 20,000 jobs annually in key industries with growth potential by increasing our total yearly turn-over up to 70 million Euros.

1. Moving forward: Increased impact and systemic change

Essential to this new strategy is SPARK's presence in-country as a 'facilitator'. SPARK acts as a leading organisation that initiates, brokers and enables partnerships with local and international partners to create impactful jobs and support educational and entrepreneurial opportunities.

SPARK's focus on job creation in relevant sectors and industries distinguishes 'basic', 'good' and 'gold' standard jobs. The goal is to achieve 'gold' jobs, which means employment in the formal sector for a duration of at least one year with a competitive wage. This will be achieved in countries with growing stability. In the most fragile and volatile regions, SPARK takes a realistic approach and focuses on 'basic' jobs to stimulate the local economy.

A photograph of a man with a beard and short hair, wearing a grey cardigan over a blue and white checkered shirt. He is leaning on a wooden table in what appears to be a workshop or office setting. In the background, there are shelves with various items and a desk with a chair.

Egide Mugabo, founder of furniture design company
Kigali, Rwanda

SPARK's interventions focus on four pillars:



Skill up

Higher education curricula and career centres become stronger and give youth access to market-relevant skills and entrepreneurship training.



Match up

Enabling youth to access jobs through market-relevant (higher) vocational education and internships/ traineeships and actual job matching.



Start up

Jobs are created by supporting promising, high-potential entrepreneurs (startups) with coaching, access to finance and markets.



Scale up

Jobs are created by scaling growth oriented SMEs through coaching and facilitating better access to finance and markets.

These pillars enable SPARK to focus on business growth and employment creation, which lead to impactful jobs. Thus, we will prioritise growth-oriented MSMEs by 90% of our programmes and develop our core expertise on the inclusion of women, refugees and youth as well as on the country specific opportunities in the 3 key sectors by 80% of our programmes. Note: higher education will become a means to job creation (see Skill Up pillar) and no longer a primary objective of SPARK's.

SPARK focuses on growing MSMEs in three growth sectors (but not limited to):



1. **Agri-business:** In 2030, agri-business will provide up to 75% of all jobs in FCAS, especially for vulnerable communities. It directly contributes to food security, the primary need of populations in post-conflict societies. Our focus in this sector will shift more towards supporting growing agri-business MSMEs, including those involved in post-harvest processing, distribution, trade and services.



2. **Digital technology:** By 2030 digital technology is projected to remain the fastest growing sector in most fragile states. It caters for the youth, women and refugees we focus on and we help to bridge the digital divide for them. It also has an excellent potential to scale, attract private sector investment and operate cross border. In this sector we focus on the digitisation of business processes, business support to growing MSMEs with a growth oriented digital/tech product, as well as digital jobs.



3. **Green business:** Greening the global economy will create 24 million additional jobs by 2030. In FCAS, green business, especially in the food sector, water and renewable energy has enormous potential to leapfrog. It is also one of the areas with the most projected external public and private investment. Focus in this sector will be on greening of business processes, business support to growing (M)SME with a growth oriented green product, as well as green jobs.

SPARK works within the following Social Impact Lenses when supporting these MSMEs:

1. Bridge the digital divide, ensuring vulnerable communities are brought on board;
2. Support businesses in their green transformation and green growth;
3. Support gender inclusivity and women business leaders;
4. Support refugee entrepreneurs and;
5. Mainstream conflict-sensitivity and 'do no harm' in conflict settings.

As SPARK's primary objective is job creation, all business support services provided must make financial (business) sense. These lenses shall not weigh down unrealistically on that primary objective. We prioritise social entrepreneurship and ensure the businesses we support do not harm our social impact goals.

SPARK's impact must be long-lasting and anchored to the business enabling environment. Therefore, job creation needs to be combined with systemic change: strengthen local organisations and institutions to become more effective in the various ways they support business development and job creation – and can continue to sustain this beyond the implementation of our programmes. Lasting impact also means that we influence local stakeholders and contribute to systemic change in a positive way to realise a more conducive environment for entrepreneurship and (M)SME growth, as well as ensure better integration of vulnerable youth, including women and refugees.

2. Stepping up: Targeted growth

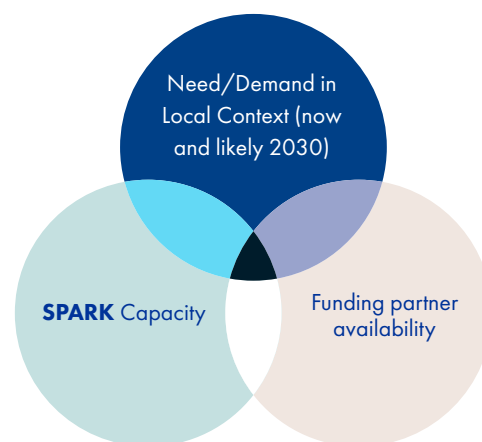
By 2030, SPARK aims to achieve 20,000 impactful jobs, created by increasing our total yearly turn-over to up to 70 million Euros.

SPARK will reach this growth target through more strategic account management, targeted acquisition and optimisation of our programme development capacity, as well as ensuring that we deliver our existing programmes targets on time and within budget. To ensure organisational stability, we will have a balanced income stream from Western governments, EU, GCC states, international organisations, corporate foundations and philanthropy.

3. Moving forward: New geographies

As part of our geographical expansion plan, SPARK has mapped refugee streams, conflict maps, human development index data and climate maps to foresee where development support will be needed. Furthermore, we have incorporated donor presence and trends. Overlaying these maps, 4 priority regions and 30 potential programme countries have been identified.

By 2030, SPARK will operate in four main regions: the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Sub-Saharan Africa (Sahel and East Africa), Asia (Afghanistan and Myanmar) and the Eastern flank of the EU (Ukraine). By 2030, SPARK aims to have programmes in the 25 most feasible of these regions.



Middle East and North Africa Region:

Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, Palestine, Tunisia, Libya.

Sub-Saharan Africa Region:

Sahel: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria.

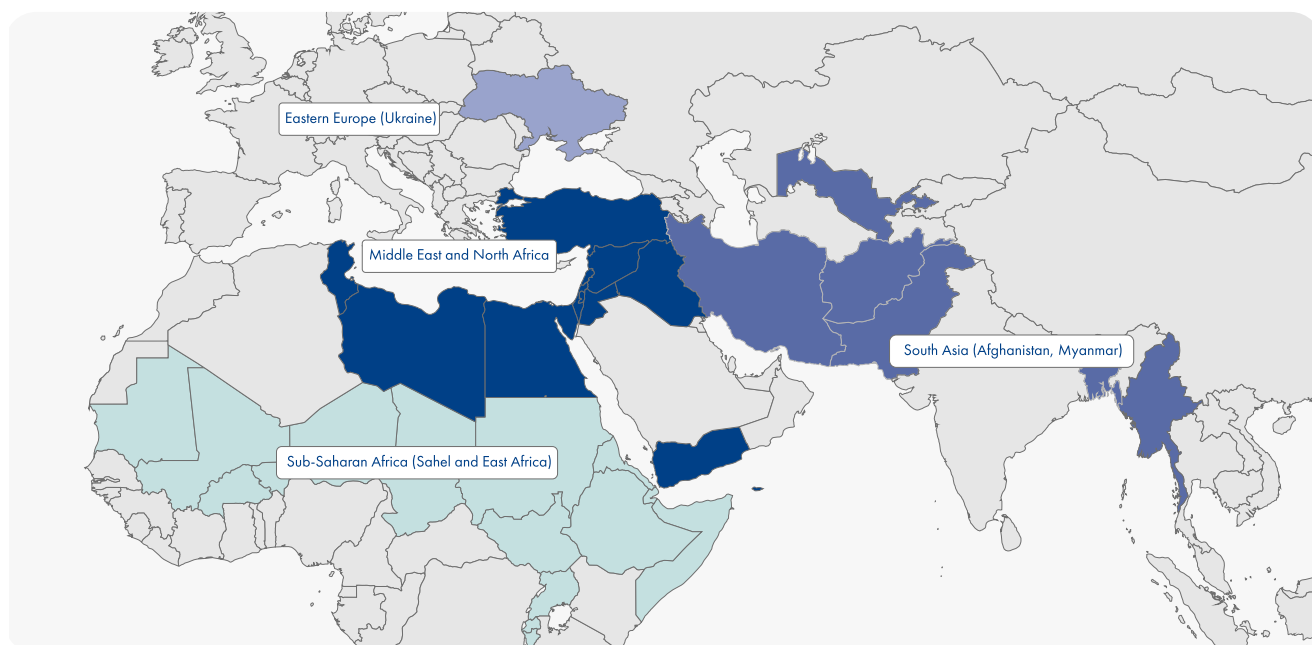
Horn: Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan (Uganda)

Asia Region:

Afghanistan (Pakistan/Iran/Uzbekistan/Tajikistan), Myanmar (Bangladesh)

Europe Region:

Ukraine and neighbouring countries



SPARK plans to expand in more conflict-affected and neighbouring countries which absorb large numbers of refugees. In new programme countries we aim to be the first INGO active in developing job creation programming after humanitarian/emergency INGOs.

4. Moving forward: Shift in SPARK's role

By 2030, SPARK will be a leading organisation that initiates and facilitates multi-stakeholder programmes for impactful job creation in FCAS and spill-over regions. Thus, SPARK moves from a programme design and implementing organisation to one that co-creates tailored, larger programmes together with local organisations, while drawing in international expertise partners and donors.

Becoming a 'facilitator' in fragile contexts requires a trusted intermediary with political, social and cultural sensitivity, which is an unique element of SPARK's heritage. In order to connect stakeholders and broker new collaborations and partnerships for jobs, SPARK will have the necessary local presence and strong, diverse networks, including global expertise partners with proven models that can be introduced at all levels. SPARK will strategically expand its networks to become the single largest network of stakeholders on job creation in FCAS and will utilise this network to rapidly co-create better-quality programmes in these regions.

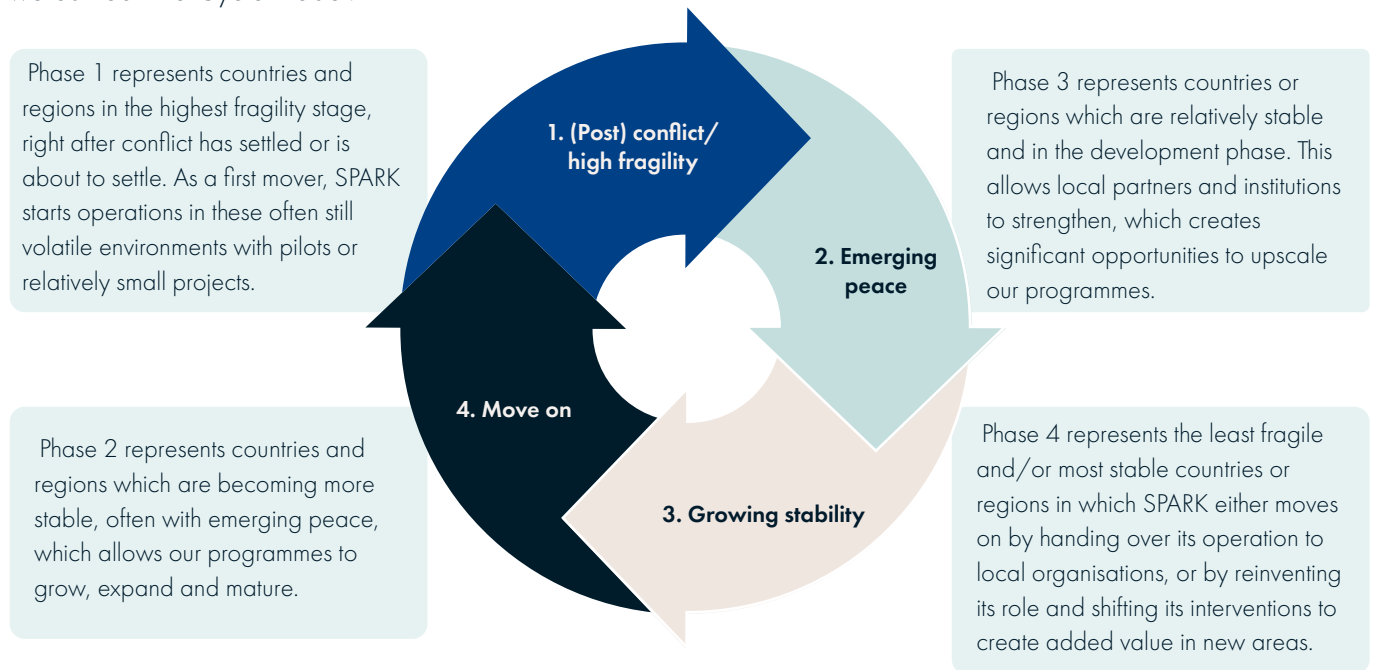
Becoming a 'facilitator' also fits our intention to localise, engage and increase local capacity within FCAS. This is critical if our interventions are to deliver sustainable and systemic impact. By 2030, co-creation with and capacity building of local partners will be central to each programme's design.

SPARK will support partners from the outset in their development, actively stimulate them to take over leadership of programmes and make use of their individual added values in generating business development and job creation. Our focus is to enhance our partners' capabilities to design programmes and attract funding, to further develop their networks, to prepare longer term strategies, to develop learning and to adapt as context changes and develops. We will make use of our own expertise and that of our international expertise partners – including donors – in the introduction, enhancement and delivery of services and activities of local partners.

Localisation approaches need deep involvement of not just local co-creation partners, but also the local authorities. The focus on localisation requires longer term strategic engagement with local authorities, including influencing policy rules and regulations, mobilising the right local capacities to create scalable programmes, based on local insights and ideas.

SPARK's Life Cycle

SPARK best practice in engaging with FCAS and regions can best be described in a four-step diagram – which we call our Life Cycle model.



Each phase (from first entry to exit) requires a different approach in terms of facilitation, brokering and localisation.



Claudine Nibigira and Boniface Nampaye, founders of CEMAC Bujumbura, Burundi

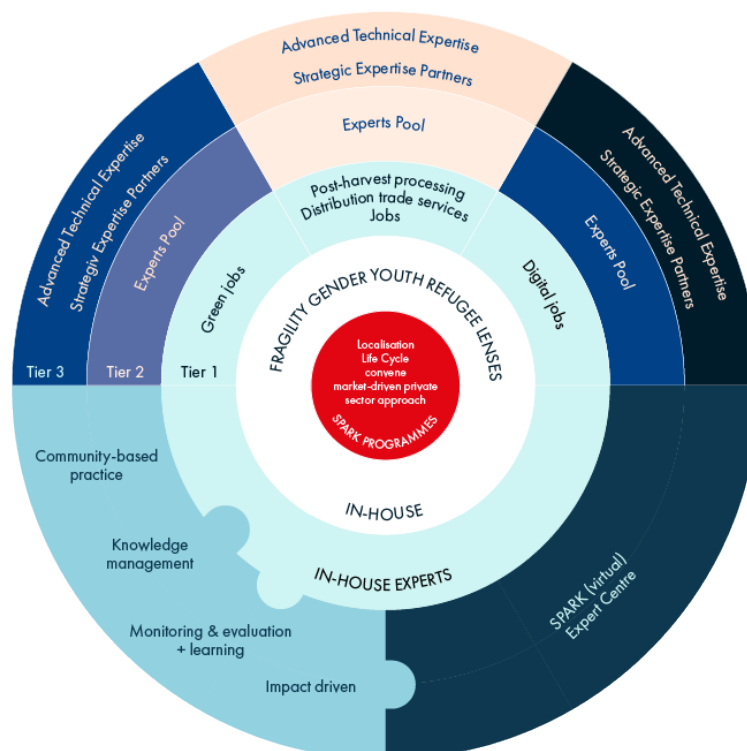
5. Stepping up: Knowledge and expertise management

SPARK will operate an expert-centred knowledge management and learning capability by 2030. This will drive programme design, speed up implementation, increase the quality of results, have a positive effect on our responsiveness, create a competitive edge with donors and partners, and foster innovation. Building and deploying expertise is essential for our role as a 'facilitator' and adds to our distinguished profile.

Knowledge management and learning is embedded in the structure of SPARK and its networks, including partners and donors. We opt for an expert- and Community of Practice-based knowledge management approach. This fits our fragile and volatile markets, which call for a relatively high level of customisation and responsiveness. Essential expertise is available in a three-tier system of in-house experts, a dynamic expert pool and international expert partner's organisations in our key sectors.

Adding to our profile and in ensuring expert knowledge goes beyond programmes, also by deploying experts across programmes, we will establish a (virtual) Expertise Centre, which will function as a base for:

- SPARK's 'way of working' (facilitation/brokering, localisation, Life Cycle, and social impact lenses);
- Technical expertise development in the 3 key sectors as mentioned above (agribusiness, green business, digital technology);
- Drive Learning (inside and across programmes);
- Coordination between teams on knowledge management;
- Deployment of experts and support to programme design, implementation and strengthening partners.



6. Stepping up: operational excellence

By 2030, there will be an articulated and therefore largely standardised SPARK 'way of working'. Our operational systems need to ensure quality, consistency and coherency for adjusting to the new requirements of our new facilitation, localisation and the Life Cycle approach. Additionally, SPARK will address the changing needs and growing capabilities of our local partners, who may be happy to rely on standardised formats in early phases of recovery but must have more room to experiment and customise later. Thus, we aim for standardisation or customisation in the following areas:

- Partner/stakeholder management
- Programme management
- Programme design management
- Knowledge and expertise management
- Talent management

While aiming for operational excellence, our values are the heart of everything we do.

Trust

in SPARK to be reliable,
fair and have integrity.

Ignite

innovative responses to the
ever changing needs of the
countries we work in.

Care

for what we do and who
we work with.

Can-do

attitude is how SPARK
achieves its best results.

Courageous

in who we are, what we
do and who we support.

About SPARK

SPARK is an independent, non-profit international development organisation, with over 100 staff members working in fourteen offices in thirteen countries. Established in 1994, SPARK has almost 30 years of experience in working in post-conflict regions of Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

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