

Peacebuilding Impact Hub

November 2025

Reducing conflicts over land by strengthening local and national peacebuilding mechanisms

What was the impact of PBF-funded peacebuilding interventions?

Two impact evaluations (one “macro” and one “micro” evaluation) of a PBF-supported project in Guatemala found that:



1. The project contributed to conflict prevention, leading to an **80% reduction in the number of conflicts** in targeted areas (“macro” evaluation)



2. Residents viewed **potentially violent means to resolve disputes to be less effective** after the implementation of the project (“micro” evaluation)



3. Community members believed that **peaceful means of conflict resolution were appropriate, effective, and accessible** (“micro” evaluation)

The context

Disputes over land are a major source of conflict globally, resulting in significant violence, economic costs, and environmental damage. Guatemala’s Polochic Valley is an area that has been particularly affected by land-based conflict, stemming from a history of poverty, marginalization, and insecure land rights, notably for indigenous communities.

To address these issues, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) supported a project involving three UN agencies-- the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)—aimed at strengthening local and national means of resolving disputes over land.

The project entailed a strong partnership with the Government of Guatemala’s Presidential Commission for Peace and Human Rights (COPADEH), resulting in institutions at national, departmental, and local levels better able to effectively manage land-related issues. The project also worked closely with farming and indigenous communities to create more inclusive land governance systems and dialogue spaces at the local level.

What did we learn?

The findings from two impact evaluations of the project found that the project has led to both a **reduction in the number of conflicts**, as well as a **decrease in the perception of violence as an effective means of conflict resolution**.

Piloting a measure of preventive action, the first impact evaluation (a “macro” evaluation) found that the project has contributed to preventing an estimated **80 percent of conflicts** that would have been projected to have occurred in 2023 in the absence of the project. This finding is particularly noteworthy as a **means of measuring the prevention of conflict**, which remains a complex challenge in peacebuilding contexts.



The second impact evaluation (a “micro” evaluation) showed that residents of the Polochic Valley had **lower perceptions of the effectiveness of potentially violent means to address disputes** (ex. physical confrontation, intimidation, protest, and other acts of resistance) and believed that **peaceful approaches of conflict resolution were appropriate, effective, and accessible** at both local and national levels.



These findings have informed the design of new PBF investments in Guatemala, building on lessons learned to scale up the successful approach. More broadly, this work builds on previous efforts to conduct impact evaluations in other PBF contexts, such as Sudan, demonstrating that rigorous approaches to measuring peacebuilding impacts can be implemented, even for relatively shorter-term conflict prevention projects.

While efforts to address the deep-rooted causes of land-based conflict in Guatemala continue, these evaluations show that peacebuilding initiatives can generate real and measurable changes when they are grounded in strong collaboration with government partners and meaningful engagement with communities, local organizations and their priorities.

“The local solution is best. Dialogue is important to avoid bigger problems. We must always communicate—whether it’s about burned crops or territorial boundaries, for example.”

Community Leader (June 2023)

How did we measure impact?

These findings are the result of two in-depth impact evaluations of a PBF-funded project. Impact evaluations are different from typical project evaluations because they use a more rigorous method to show exactly what difference—or lasting change—the project made to a specific set of communities.

To measure prevention of conflict, researchers used a “synthetic control” methodology, which used data on conflicts across Guatemala from 2015 to 2023 to create a statistically rigorous estimate of the number of conflicts that would have occurred in the Polochic Valley if the project had not taken place, based on the evolution of conflict in other regions in Guatemala.



Sotzil, an NGO based in Guatemala, was the local partner for the evaluation. It conducted the household survey to better understand the specific community characteristics and attitudes that help explain these broader conflict trends. The survey was specifically tailored to the local language and context.



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