



# Strategy 2030

Stepping up and moving forward

**spark**



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# 1. Introduction

SPARK has spent over 30 years building youth-driven pathways to economic opportunity and peace in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The coming years demand that we adapt further: global development is shifting, donor expectations are evolving, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution is transforming how organizations work and how young people find opportunities. This Multi-Annual Strategic Plan outlines SPARK's goals and priorities for 2025–2030, and sets out how SPARK will scale its impact, strengthen organizational resilience, and rise to meet the moment by integrating and advancing digitalization, B2B linkages, and humanitarian engagement into every dimension of our work.

Developed in close consultation with country teams and the SPARK management team, this strategy provides a framework to guide our annual planning and long-term impact.

At SPARK, we believe that when young people are equipped with the right tools, skills, and opportunities, they can drive economic growth, societal resilience, and stability. In an era marked by declining aid budgets, climate crises, protracted conflicts, and large-scale displacement, SPARK's mission is more vital than ever:

**“To develop higher education and entrepreneurship to empower young, ambitious people to lead their conflict-affected societies into prosperity.”**

From Gaza and Syria to Ukraine and the Sahel, the demand for inclusive, locally led employment solutions continues to grow. Alongside these global trials, an internal reorganization has also challenged us to reflect and reorient ourselves.

Over the next five years, SPARK will sharpen its focus on building dignified livelihoods by equipping youth with essential skills for meaningful employment, supporting entrepreneurship, and strengthening local economies. By driving economic growth in fragile and conflict-affected communities, we not only create jobs but also foster resilience, countering the forces of conflict and extremism, and reducing the pressures that fuel irregular migration.

Women and refugees remain at the heart of our efforts, as we work to break down inequalities and open doors to opportunity. At the same time, we will deepen our role at the critical intersection of conflict, climate, and migration—investing in local partnerships and international linkages, championing green entrepreneurship, and resilient value chains. This approach ensures that communities, particularly those facing acute climate vulnerability and food insecurity, are equipped not just to survive, but to thrive.

## 2. Global Context

The 2025–2030 period will be marked by deeply interconnected global challenges: climate change, migration, economic instability, authoritarianism, and social fragmentation. These dynamics amplify fragility but also create new opportunities for locally driven, innovative, and bold solutions.

The urgency to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and deliver on climate commitments is accelerating. Governments, civil society, and the private sector are increasingly focused on inclusive, climate-resilient development.

Meanwhile, the political economy of aid is shifting. Migration management has become securitised, with frontline states in the MENA region playing a central role. On the other hand, government aid budgets are shrinking and funding priorities are growing ever narrower, with national interests at the core of many major donor policies. This evolving context increases demand for SPARK's work as a facilitator, advocate, and convener; amplifying local voices and partners to ensure essential programs continue to support education, employment, and economic resilience.

# Ambition





## 3. SPARK's Strategic Direction

### 3.1 Desired Impact

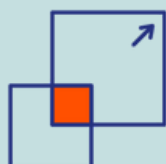
Over the next five years, SPARK will:

- Expand youth employment pathways in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
- Create inclusive green jobs that tackle the climate-employment-migration nexus and address the root causes of displacement.
- Advance localisation by empowering local actors to lead programme delivery and adopting new governance models at the country level.
- Transform SPARK's organizational capacity to support our partners and networks with digital infrastructure and create global links for key stakeholders.
- Reaffirm the role of education and vocational training as key pillars of long-term stability and peacebuilding.
- Scale engagement in humanitarian and early recovery contexts, applying SPARK's expertise to help communities build resilience and reduce aid dependency.

SPARK's recent work demonstrates what this impact looks like in practice. In Iraq, Networks of Change mobilised thousands of youth and teachers to build resilience and prevent extremism. In Jordan and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the Jobs and Perspectives programme supported refugees and host communities — especially women — to enter the labour market, while helping businesses like Chickmania, a gaming startup that grew to millions of downloads and created dozens of jobs. In Palestine, Launchpad is fuelling a digital generation through scholarships, mentoring, and hackathons that connect young talent with global markets.

Through the Unlocking the Potential of Tech for Inclusivity in the Middle East programme (2022, in partnership with Google.org), SPARK also incubated 130 entrepreneurs across Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq. The top 10 pitched at the IGNITE Conference in Amsterdam, with several receiving €10,000 prizes to scale their ventures — proof of SPARK's commitment to nurturing innovation in fragile contexts (see link).

SPARK's strength is thriving in the hardest contexts, working with the right partners, and tailoring solutions to community needs. In concert, we bring additional value by pushing the envelope - helping our partners to stay on the cutting edge of development with locally driven innovation, and pushing ourselves to innovate and advance bold and sustainable solutions.



**Scale Up**



**Skill Up**



**Match Up**



**Start Up**

## 3.2 SPARK's Approach

SPARK continues to work through its four proven pillars in order to activate our strategy:

- Scale Up: Creating new jobs by helping existing companies and entrepreneurs to expand.
- Start Up: Supporting high-potential entrepreneurs to launch and grow, while strengthening ecosystems with coaching, investment, and marketplace opportunities.
- Match Up: Enabling access to meaningful employment opportunities, vocational training, internships, and traineeships.
- Skill Up: Strengthening educational curricula and career centres to better equip youth with the most relevant skills and knowledge for today's market needs.

These foundations have guided SPARK's work for decades and continue to shape how we deliver impact in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

For example, our Remote Internship programme—piloted with Syrian and Iraqi youth—placed over 116 participants with companies in Europe. Impressively, 16% were offered jobs by their internship hosts. As this model scaled to Lebanon, over 50% of interns began full-time roles post-programme, proving digital pathways are effective in fragile, displacement-affected contexts. ([SPARK Annual Report 2023](#))

## 3.3 SPARK's Organizational Preparation and Transition

In order to continue SPARK's successes and to advance towards our goals, the next five years will focus on key future-oriented sectors:

- Agribusiness that is climate resilient and improves food security
- Green economy, energy, and water
- Digital and technology-enabled services

Throughout these sectors, we will strive to be a broker of connections between businesses, educational institutes, and the job market, and local actors and international opportunities.



To catapult our capacity as a broker and facilitator, we aim to:

- Expand SPARK's digital infrastructure into a partner-wide ecosystem for knowledge sharing, administration, and finance.
- Utilize digital space in addition to physical presence to facilitate connections between local SMEs and international markets, policymakers, academia, and civil society, enabling Dutch and global businesses to link with fragile-market entrepreneurs and advocate for policy reform while sourcing talent and services.
- Work closely with our network of local partners and humanitarian actors to embed entrepreneurship and job creation into humanitarian programming, supporting MSMEs to remain operational, restoring education opportunities in emergencies, and ensuring livelihoods are central even in relief contexts



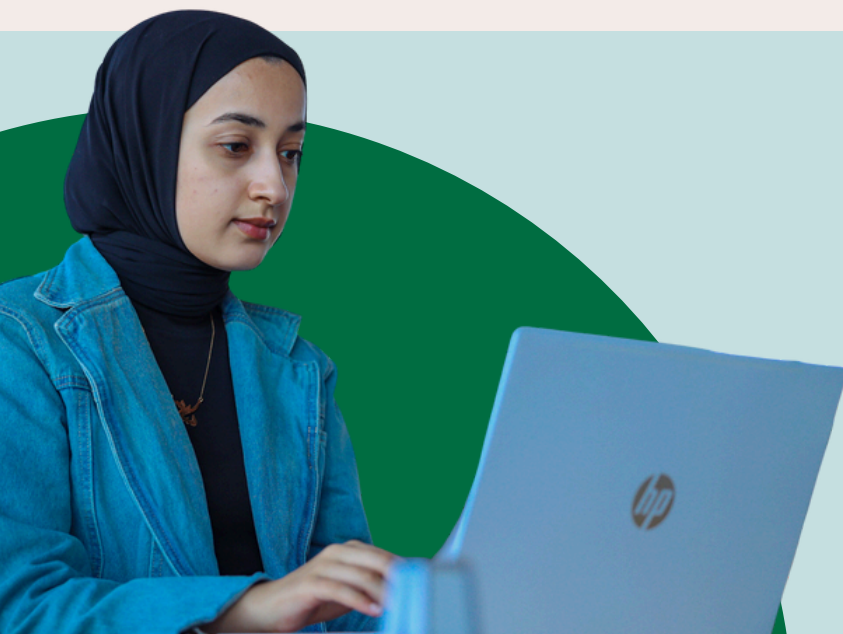
## 4. Humanitarian Nexus

The humanitarian–development nexus is a critical bridge in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. While in many of the communities currently experiencing conflict, emergency assistance is the main focus, and SPARK acknowledges that in many fragile and conflict-affected contexts, immediate survival needs precede any opportunity for recovery. However, SPARK knows from experience that immediate emergency assistance and long-term development must go hand in hand. Humanitarian response saves lives, while development builds the foundations for recovery and resilience. SPARK’s role has traditionally been rooted in development—strengthening education, entrepreneurship, and job creation—but we aim to increasingly position ourselves to help bridge this gap.

In the years ahead, SPARK will support partners and communities across the full spectrum of the nexus. When crises erupt, we will be ready to work alongside humanitarian actors to ensure life-saving aid reaches those most in need. Our local partners are key to enabling this essential work.

In acute crises, SPARK will prioritise life-saving humanitarian aid, delivered in partnership with local organisations. This includes the provision of cash assistance to meet urgent household needs, emergency shelter for displaced families, and basic services that protect lives and dignity. From there, we will facilitate the transition from survival to stability: restoring access to education, supporting entrepreneurs to restart or adapt their businesses, and helping communities prepare for reconstruction and growth. Our goal is to make sure that short-term relief paves the way for long-term opportunity.

Whether responding to armed conflict in Gaza, the long-term devastation in Syria, or climate shocks in Somalia, our approach builds on trusted community networks to ensure that assistance reaches those who need it most, particularly vulnerable youth and women.





Our humanitarian approach prioritises dignity and resilience:

- Access to Finance: Support for MSMEs to remain operational during crises, avoiding collapse and dependence on aid.
- Education in Emergencies (EiE): Integration of higher education pathways in humanitarian responses, linking to local universities and authorities.
- Entrepreneurship and Food Security Linkages: Connecting MSMEs, particularly in seed and agriculture sectors, to humanitarian supply chains.
- Labour Market Integration: Offering tailored vocational training and entrepreneurship support as part of humanitarian economic empowerment programmes.

By strengthening partnerships with UN agencies, humanitarian actors, and local organizations, SPARK ensures coordinated responses that move communities from survival to stability, reducing aid dependency and addressing the drivers of irregular migration. In this way, SPARK will act as a bridge—connecting humanitarian response with sustainable development, and ensuring that communities are not only able to withstand future crises, but emerge stronger from them.



## 5. Localization

SPARK's DNA remains the same: we are a facilitator, bringing the right people together, opening doors, and connecting stakeholders.

Over the next five years, SPARK will deepen support for local communities by building stronger linkages between businesses, educators, governments, and knowledge institutes. Simultaneously, we ourselves are evolving into a powerful network of local organisations and businesses. With headquarters transitioning into a support hub for country teams, this localisation process will expand our reach, strengthen local ownership, and ensure that solutions are sustainable.

This transitional approach and focus on localisation is in alignment with a global shift. Donors are increasingly moving to fund local organizations directly, but there remains a major gap between capacity and expectations. SPARK is reorienting our role to ensure that our local partners have the structural support needed to engage with donors moving in this direction while they build internal capacities to handle donor regulations and expectations independently.

## 6. The Digital Revolution

The Digital Revolution is here, and the world is demanding digital transformation across every level of society. The humanitarian and development sector is no exception, and to put off our own transformation means to fall behind. SPARK has already digitized our internal operations (finance, HR, procurement, partner management), with a new system in place that streamlines our core processes: HR & procurement, finance, and programs. The next step is to extend access to these systems to our partners, building local capacities to scale their work and our joint impact.



With a central hub for knowledge, administration, and finance, SPARK can enhance our role as a facilitator, while addressing a key challenge often expressed by our partners: a lack of capacity and resources to meet the complex requirements for administrative paperwork, financial reporting, and project monitoring required by the vast majority of global donors.

Over the next five years, we can take inclusion to the next level: extending our internal support system to all of our partner organizations - enabling knowledge sharing, capacity building, and access to key institutional donor networks.

With this digital backbone, SPARK can determine the most effective way forward as an internationally renowned facilitator, convener, and accelerator. We aim to scale our impact by advancing our capacity to connect all the stakeholders in our network in digital and physical space: bringing together youth, job opportunities, local and international businesses for B2B linkages, government decision makers, academia, accelerator hubs, investors, civil society, and more.

## 7. Maintaining Excellence

SPARK will continue to measure what matters: jobs created, businesses sustained, and youth securing meaningful livelihoods. Safeguarding, financial transparency, and adaptive management will remain central.

## 8. Scaling & Partnership Development

Through developing our digital ecosystem and marketplace, SPARK will enable replication of successful models and bring new partners into its network. By reducing bureaucratic burdens and offering access to donor pipelines, SPARK ensures that partners can manage growing levels of responsibility, and scale impact sustainably.





## 9. Dialogue & Influence

SPARK will deepen engagement with international and local private sectors, governments, civil society, academia, and investors. This convening power allows SPARK to foster systemic change and enable global-to-local linkages.

Through platforms such as the IGNITE Conference, Startup Roadshows, and regional policy roundtables, SPARK will amplify youth voices, elevate refugee-led innovation, and shape donor and policy agendas in fragile contexts. We will continue to convene and influence policy and programming via high-level panels and expert roundtables, and policy workshops with regional stakeholders and donors.

The Startup Roadshow, co-organised with Jusoor, saw hundreds of Syrian entrepreneurs compete across five countries. Finalists pitched at the IGNITE Conference in Amsterdam—elevating refugee-led innovation and demonstrating SPARK’s role as a regional startup ecosystem convenor. (SPARK Annual Report 2023)





## 10. Geographic Priorities

SPARK will concentrate its efforts and resources on countries where it can deliver the most impact:

### 10.1 Middle East

SPARK continues to operate in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Each faces intersecting crises—protracted conflict, climate stress, and economic stagnation—that limit youth opportunities and drive irregular migration.

**Palestine:** In Palestine, our humanitarian and recovery programs will support startups, entrepreneurs, youth, MSMEs, food systems, and education, prioritising locally led recovery efforts and fostering long-term resilience.

A powerful example comes from Nancy AlZaghal, a SPARK scholarship recipient from Palestine, who launched Go Green, a hydroponic farm that saves 90% of water compared to traditional methods. “I feel I am part of this land... Thanks to SPARK and Al Fakhoora, I have achieved my childhood dream.” Her journey exemplifies SPARK’s impact in green innovation amidst resource-scarce, conflict-affected environments. ([see link](#))

**Syria:** With fragile peace opening space for reconstruction, SPARK will reinvest in vocational training and MSME development to catalyse economic reintegration.

**Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey:** These countries remain central to our efforts in addressing displacement, unemployment, and the growing gap between education and labour markets.

### 10.2 Northern Africa

High youth unemployment, climate vulnerability, and economic fragility converge in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt, making inclusive green job creation essential to long-term stability.

In Tunisia, the conditions are well-suited for implementing programmes that promote green entrepreneurship and skills training. These initiatives aim to address youth frustration, enhance resilience, and mitigate key drivers of migration.

In Libya, SPARK can contribute to green recovery and stabilisation by equipping youth and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) with the skills and capital needed in climate-resilient sectors. This approach helps reduce vulnerability to both conflict and forced migration.

In Egypt, SPARK seeks to expand climate-smart vocational training and promote female-led entrepreneurship, with a particular emphasis on water management and sustainable agriculture. By developing scalable job creation models, SPARK will support both rural and urban youth in adapting to increasing water scarcity and food insecurity, ultimately reducing displacement risks and fostering long-term resilience.

## 10.3 Sub-Saharan Africa

In Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, and potentially Uganda, DRC, and West Africa, SPARK works to counter youth unemployment and displacement risks through green livelihoods.

Great Lakes: Burundi and Rwanda serve as entry points for scalable employment programmes. Focus on water stress, agribusiness, and youth entrepreneurship. Rising insecurity in the DRC and spillover risks highlight the need for job creation and resilience. Both countries face high youth unemployment, climate shocks, and water stress. SPARK's focus on green jobs and entrepreneurship supports local stability while positioning for future regional expansion.

Somalia: Somalia faces extreme political fragility, climate-driven drought, and widespread displacement. Youth unemployment and lack of opportunity fuel migration and instability. SPARK will expand climate-focused skills training and green MSME support to build peace and resilience amid chronic fragility.

## 10.4 Europe

In response to the Ukraine crisis and rising asylum flows, SPARK is strengthening its presence in Europe to support refugee integration, education, and job creation.

Ukraine: SPARK supports youth and women through education and livelihoods disrupted by war. EU Migration Response: SPARK addresses the drivers and consequences of migration through training, entrepreneurship, and dialogue across host and origin countries.

# Impact

## 11. Looking Forward

SPARK's journey ahead rests on three pillars: innovation, resilience, and localization. With a digitized organizational backbone, strengthened local governance, and a global marketplace for jobs and business linkages, SPARK is positioned to lead in fragile contexts. Our focus remains on creating dignified jobs, nurturing entrepreneurship, and bridging humanitarian and development divides. With donor and government partners, SPARK will scale its proven models to ensure that young people, especially women and refugees, have the opportunities and support they need to build stable, prosperous futures.



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[spark.ngo](https://spark.ngo)

**Contact us:**

**Email:** [c.bultman@spark-online.org](mailto:c.bultman@spark-online.org)

**Phone:** +31646431508