

# **Synthesis Addressing Root Causes Programme**

Inception Report for IOB, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MMM Consultants - Meerssen, 24 February 2023

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The views expressed herein are those of the consultant and therefore do not reflect the  
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## Acronyms

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
ARC	Addressing Root Causes
BBB	Building Bridges Burundi
BNF	Beneficiaries
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DDE	Directie Duurzame Economische Ontwikkeling (Sustainable Economic Development Department)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSH	Directie Stabiliteit en Humanitaire Hulp (Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOB	Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie
KII	Key Informant Interview
KPSRL	Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of law
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
ME4PS	Market and Employment for Peace & Stability
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
MTR	Mid-term Review
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Bound
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association

# 1 Introduction

The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie – IOB) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the Netherlands had launched a Terms of Reference for a synthesis study based on Addressing Root Causes (ARC) project reports.

An inception report for this ARC synthesis has been submitted on 23 December 2022. As per the Terms of Reference (ToR, Annex 1), the study consists of a synthesis of the findings of end evaluation reports of ARC projects, which have recently come to an end. The reports under study have been published in 2022. Fifteen end evaluations or endline studies have been identified for inclusion into the synthesis.

## 2 Review context

The synthesis is meant to feed the 2023 Policy Review of the "Peace, Security and Sustainable Development" ambitions of the Dutch government between 2015 and 2021.

## 3 Object of the synthesis

### 3.1 Context

Armed conflicts and irregular migration remain important obstacles to sustainable development. Armed and violent conflicts lead to loss of lives, displacement and increased levels of poverty. In these circumstances, the opportunities for affected people to escape poverty are severely impacted. The COVID-19 pandemic has additionally affected vulnerable people. In line with this, for the past decade, addressing root causes of conflict and irregular migration through "bottom up" civil society engagement in fragile states has been a priority for the MFA in the Netherlands.

### 3.2 The ARC Programme

The MFA developed the ARC programme (2016-2021)<sup>1</sup> with the objective to support international and national civil society organisations (CSOs) in fragile and conflict-affected countries in addressing the underlying causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration. This was in line with the Dutch Development Policy "Investing in Global Prospects" (2018), which aimed to intensify efforts to address conflict and insecurity in relation to migration. The ARC programme was a centrally managed tender by the MFA's Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid (DSH) and had a total allocated budget of EURO 126 million.

The ARC programme was implemented by 21 consortia comprised of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and CSOs in 12 fragile and conflict-affected countries.<sup>2</sup> ARC-funded projects started implementation in 2017 and contributed to four thematic areas: (I) Human Security; (II) Rule of Law; (III) Peace processes and Political Governance; and (IV) Social and Economic Reconstruction.

With the revision of DSH's ToC on Security and Rule of Law in 2018, the ARC program's fourth thematic component on socio-economic reconstruction was placed under the Sustainable Economic Development Department (DDE), although the responsibility for managing the related projects, including quality assurance and oversight, remained with DSH.

### 3.3 ARC projects selected for synthesis

Fifteen out of 21 ARC projects had made evaluative documents available,<sup>3</sup> which were deemed suitable for the study. Among these, 13 are evaluations (meaning that the assessments are done against DAC criteria) and 2 are endline studies (they are for a large part quantitative and assess outcomes and sometimes also potential impact). Annex 2 provides an insight into the ARC projects that have been selected, and their potential for contributing to assessing effectiveness, sustainability and impact. The findings from the reports of these 15 projects, which were conducted

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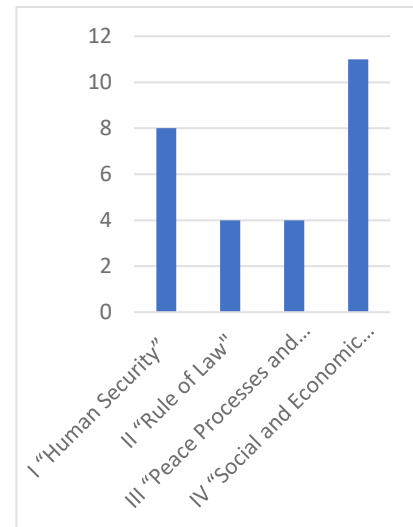
<sup>1</sup> With some projects being extended into 2022

<sup>2</sup> Afghanistan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Syria.

<sup>3</sup> Conducting an evaluation was mandatory for ARC consortia, but only if the budget of their intervention was above Euro 5 million. One evaluation report was disqualified for quality issues, as also acknowledged by the consortium itself (Oxfam Novib Pakistan).

in 10 countries, have been assessed in this report and their results have been synthesised. Annex 3 provides further details on the selected projects such as duration and budget. This annex also shows which thematic areas had been covered by each project; a summary of the areas covered by the projects under study is captured in Chart 1. The annex furthermore gives an insight into the outcome areas covered by each of the project and a summary of the assessment of the quality of the report; it also includes an insight into the numbers of interviews conducted for primary data collection in the reports and the length of the findings section.

**Chart 1: Number of selected ARC projects that include the various thematic areas in its design**



## 4 Methodology and approach

This section outlines the objectives, approach and methodology of the review.

### 4.1 Objective of the review

Now that the ARC projects have come to an end, the ARC partners have submitted their end evaluation reports to the commissioning department. For learning purposes, IOB has commissioned this synthesis of the available end evaluations, implemented by ARC partner organizations, which are available and of adequate quality. The review has a formative as well as a summative objective as follows:

- draw conclusions as to the appropriateness of the ARC instrument in view of its intermediate and ultimate policy objectives; and
- develop generic lessons for future application.

More specifically, the study is supposed to:

1. Assess the quality of the available end-evaluation reports for evaluating effectiveness, sustainability and impact (which has been done in the inception phase)
2. Draw generic conclusions as to the effectiveness, sustainability and impact of the ARC programme
3. Verify to what extent and how the MTR recommendations have been followed-up during the second half of the programme
4. Check the validity of the MTR recommendations in the light of the present synthesis and draw additional lessons regarding the coherence, relevance and efficiency of the programme.
5. Formulate lessons with a view to the development of similar interventions in the future.

### 4.2 Research questions

The overarching question for the present evaluation is "*whether the ARC programme has successfully contributed to addressing the root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration,*" and this will be assessed following the below eight specific research questions.

1. What has been the effectiveness of the individual projects and of the ARC programme as a whole in reducing conflict, instability and irregular migration?
2. To what extent has the ARC programme allowed for context-specific intervention strategies or Theories of Change (ToCs) that support local solutions to conflict, crisis and Instability?
3. To what extent have underlying assumptions been validated at programme and at project level?
4. How and to what extent have the efficiency and effectiveness of the interventions been influenced by the ARC strategies for risk management, adaptive programming and Monitoring/Evaluation and Learning?
5. Have unintended effects been identified and, if undesirable, been mitigated?
6. How do the costs of the interventions and their outcomes compare among the projects?
7. To what extent project exit strategies have been based on (local) evidence.
8. To what extent have the interventions of the individual projects proven sustainable

The methodology of this study has been developed around these questions as they are included in the ToR and the projects will be weighed against the DAC criteria effectiveness, sustainability and ultimate impact. In the research matrix in Annex 4, the questions have been included and further detailed.

### **4.3 Approach**

#### **Assessing endline evaluations and surveys**

The study has started with assessing the quality and usefulness of the available project end evaluation and endline study reports for the synthesis. This has included assessing if and to what extent the selected reports allow assessing effectiveness, sustainability and impact of the ARC programme. The results of this assessment have been included in Annex 3. The annex demonstrates considerable variations in the context and the quality of the reports. As indicated, two of the reports are endline surveys rather than evaluations.<sup>4</sup> Whilst this presents a limitation to their contribution to the DAC criteria effectiveness and sustainability, there is also an advantage, where these assessments have a stronger focus on quantitative assessments. This is an aspect, which only few of the evaluations have included. Hence, the endline surveys provide an additional insight into how certain proportions of beneficiaries perceive the project impact. This has helped to illustrate the synthesis with more details. On the other hand, the contribution of the endline surveys to other criteria is limited and they are sharply focused on a few aspects. Furthermore, as other evaluations do not present this quantitative aspect, the findings cannot be aggregated for the entire ARC programme.

For the reports where the content was deemed suitable or largely suitable, the findings were extracted and categorised under the questions of the research matrix. The analysis was first conducted per evaluation question and thus included into the findings section. On a parallel trail, the findings were compared to the findings and the analysis of the Mid-term Review (MTR, see section below).

The findings were subsequently analysed under the criteria effectiveness, sustainability and impact. The study has also compared findings, to assess whether there were patterns under the thematic areas. A bibliography of all documents that were studied can be found in Annex 4.

#### **Mid-term Review**

An MTR was conducted in 2019,<sup>5</sup> and it brought out a number of findings, including against the DAC criteria relevance, efficiency and coherence.

The current assessment was informed by the MTR, among others by comparing its findings against observations from the MTR, taking into consideration that the MTR was conducted against different DAC criteria, since the synthesis study focuses on effectiveness, impact and sustainability. On the other hand, this approach did facilitate generating lessons learned on the criteria relevance, efficiency and coherence, which relate to in the second half of the project period. The extent to which the MTR recommendations<sup>6</sup> have remained valid has also been assessed.

#### **Approach to analysis**

Based on the research questions (section 4.2), a research framework for the evaluations and studies under assessment has been developed, which includes the framework for assessing findings against the MTR report (Annex 4). This framework has formed the basis for the analysis and final synthesis of the findings and facilitated drawing reliable conclusions and formulate lessons to feed into the development of future similar interventions in a structural manner.

A description of the research phases and the workplan has been included in Annex 5.

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<sup>4</sup> “Reducing Root Causes of Conflict, Instability and Irregular Migration Sustainable Livelihoods, Improved Governance, and Functioning Rule of Law” in Afghanistan, and “Addressing Root Causes of Violent Conflict in Jonglei” in South Sudan.

<sup>5</sup> Mid Term Review Addressing Root Causes (July 2020) Ecorys

<sup>6</sup> Focus in reporting on capturing context-specific results; Alignment with country-level frameworks and mechanisms by consortia; More strategic use of central programmes as a lever to additional funding.

## Limitations

Upon in-depth study, the reports have appeared to considerably differ in quality, approach and methodology. This has constrained developing a full synthesis; whilst some reports contain information relevant to each question, others do not.

Furthermore, the synthesis study is fully or almost fully desk-based, and hence relies only on secondary data. As a result, all the limitations of each evaluation had its bearing on the reliability and quality of the synthesis study.

The reliability of the findings could not be checked. This may have a bearing on the truth value of the findings in the evaluation report, which were often based on perceptions of consortium partners, field partners and beneficiaries, and may therefore tend to be too positive. This echoes the findings of the evaluation of the Reconstruction Programme (2012 – 2015) and ARC’s tender process,<sup>7</sup> which warned “*be aware of the incentive to over-report results given the competition for limited funds in tender procedures*”. This synthesis is based on existing text of evaluation reports and hence, the scope for triangulation of findings was almost absent.

## 5 Findings

The findings have been discussed following the questions in the research matrix (Annex 4). In the text, the numbers of the projects are reflected in brackets (where relevant) as below and as per Annex 3, to allow interested readers to find more information.

**Table 1: List of assessed projects with consortium lead and country**

#	Country, consortium lead	#	Country, consortium lead	#	Country, consortium lead
1	Afghanistan, CORDAID	6	Ethiopia, ZOA	11	Pakistan, Helvetas
2	Afghanistan, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	7	Ethiopia, Woord en Daad	12	Somalia, Saferworld
3	Burundi, Oxfam	8	Lebanon, Mercy Corps	13	South Sudan, CARE
4	Burundi, Red een Kind	9	Lebanon, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)	14	Sudan, Saferworld
5	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), ZOA	10	Mali, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)	15	Sudan, ZOA

### 5.1 Effectiveness of individual projects

**What has been the effectiveness of the individual projects and of the ARC programme as a whole in reducing conflict, instability and irregular migration?**

This section has been divided according to the thematic areas of ARC. With 11 projects including this thematic area, “Social and economic reconstruction” is the thematic area that is most used by the ARC partners; five projects have even adopted it as their only thematic area. “Rule of Law” and “Peace Processes and Political Governance” on the other hand have been included by only four projects. Eight projects had included “Human security” (see also Chart 1). The effectiveness of the projects is discussed below, categorised per thematic area and subsequently at output, outcome and impact level (to the extent that the information could be thus distinguished from the various reports). It needs to be kept in mind, that evaluations take a different view on the necessity of reporting all levels of the intervention logic; some report outputs, some report outcomes, yet others impact – or a combination of two or three levels. Only a few compare the achievements consistently to the planned targets. This report has reflected the most interesting examples. While reading those, however, a number of considerations should be kept in mind. Many of the reports suffer from limitations, and the MEAL systems are of very variable quality; moreover, depending

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<sup>7</sup> IOB Evaluation Less Pretension, More Realism. An evaluation of the Reconstruction Programme (2012 - 2015), the Strategic Partnerships in Chronic Crises Programme (2014 - 2016) and the Addressing Root Causes Tender Process

on who was interviewed, findings and results may be biased. Aggregating results has therefore hardly been possible.

### **Area I: Human security**

Reporting under this area was often less clear and detailed when compared to the other thematic areas, and frequently more strongly based on perception. The reasons are probably that consortia see results in this area often as (partly) coming from work under the other pillars, and partly because the results here are difficult to measure. Reporting is lacking clarity, where some projects report an achievement under outcome, others see it as impact.

**Under human security, outputs and outcomes were very differently formulated, but many evaluation reports perceived the achievement as reasonable, with achievements close to target. Beneficiaries saw improved cohesion and decreasing grievances; only in Mali, outcomes were poor. As for impact, evaluations reported less conflict and increased safety and security, but it was difficult to assess impact at beneficiary level.**

Many reports come up with various types of achievements against outputs, but constraints were also reported. In DRC (5), security plans of the local authorities could not be fully implemented due to lack of resources, often due to a context of “flawed money flows”. In Mali (10), the number and percentage of communities and CSOs that report having the capacity to influence formal and / or informal human security authorities”, increased from 72.6% in 2017 to 96.5% in 2020. In Sudan, microgrants were found most effective to support income generation (14).

At outcome level, in Burundi (4), personal grievance had considerably decreased through self-help groups. In South Sudan (13), the evaluation reported that social cohesion and trust had been enhanced (though only slightly) through Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) groups, and the feeling of safety had also improved under the project. In one of the projects in Sudan (15), in the final year, many outcomes had been achieved, which included a reduction in the number of new conflicts and solution of some pre-existing conflicts by the newly established community-based conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms in most locations, except for those that had seen larger powershifts from government-backed tribes to rebel-backed tribes. In Mali, (10) the proportion of beneficiaries who felt safe in their locality had severely decreased, instead of increased as was aimed for, as a result of the deepening crisis.

As for impact, it was reported in Burundi (3), that the majority of programme beneficiaries perceived a safer and more secure future for themselves, and the evaluation attributed this to the intervention. Almost all respondents judged that the project had had a big impact on reducing conflict in their community, which included intimate partner violence, drunken behaviour related issues, conflicts over land, and ethnic and political conflict. In Somalia (12), significant project impact was noted in solving local level safety and security issues, but it is found very difficult to estimate, how many beneficiaries benefit from this. The evaluation team acknowledged here that it cannot really assess impact, since data had not been available.

### **Area II: Rule of Law**

It was difficult to distinguish outputs and outcomes under this thematic area, so these have been taken together. Some indicators are very similar to those reported under thematic area I, such as those relating to reduced conflict.

**In almost all reports, beneficiaries say they understand and exercise rights more often. Some projects have led to actual changes at impact level, like increased freedom for refugees and conflict solution, but others do not demonstrate any practical achievement that goes further than increased awareness.**

Related to outputs and outcomes, in one project in Afghanistan (1), more than half of the beneficiaries (close to target) reported to have exercised their rights, however, confidence in the judicial system remained low and had even decreased over the project duration. In the other project in Afghanistan (2), 99% of respondents confirmed having received legal assistance or counselling. In Burundi (3) achievements include reductions in conflict in the community, increased knowledge and ability to stand up for one’s rights, and increased knowledge of the core messages promoted by the community-based reconciliation and transitional justice activities. The project was perceived to have contributed at least in part to these positive changes. In Ethiopia (6), the legal status for



refugees had improved to allow for increased freedom of Out of Camp Movement. The project also achieved to more information sharing, among others on labour rights. Youth at risk of migration have an increased awareness of potential risks of migration. In Mali (10), the percentage of beneficiaries, who feel represented by the government, had decreased instead of gone up as was aimed for.

Under impact, in one project in Afghanistan (2), 90% of respondents reported improved ability to claim their rights. People had been able to get identity documents, and community conflicts with internally displaced persons (IDPs) and divorce and other conflicts had been solved. Wellbeing and empowerment, though ranked by beneficiaries, could not be interpreted for lack of baseline. In Burundi (3), the majority of respondents found that the project had helped them to stand up for their rights through increased access to justice and mediation, and increased respect for land rights. Though beneficiaries mentioned living in harmony and community-based reconciliation, there was no evidence that the community-based reconciliation messages were put into practice and were leading to substantial changes in the community. In the other project in Burundi (4), the confidence level in transitional justice was high, but had still decreased after 2020 instead of increasing as per target. In Somalia (12) the evaluation found it difficult to assess access to justice and suggested a further in-depth study.

### **Area III: Peace Processes and Political Governance**

Some of the reported outcomes, notably related to perception of a safer future, also overlap with area I and II.

**Under Peace Processes and Political Governance, improvements were noted in terms of strengthened community members' knowledge, coordination between CSOs and dialogue with local authorities. As a result, people feel they have contributed to and benefited from local peace. Apart from in Mali, most beneficiaries perceived a decrease in conflicts and a safer future.**

Under outputs, in DRC (5), the support for community structures was largely effective, thanks to capacity development, financial support and the linking of civil society actors. There was evidence of enhanced knowledge and skills of community members to solve conflicts and to engage in a dialogue with local governments, increased coordination of CSOs; and increased community capacities to deal with sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In Mali (10), three-quarters of CSOs say they have approached authorities to influence them on peace and security issues; a similar proportion of beneficiaries feel they have the capacity to contribute to conflict resolution (close to target).

Under outcomes, in Mali (10), threequarters of beneficiaries claim to have personally contributed to the current peace in their communities. On the other hand, the proportion of beneficiaries who feel that community grievances (lack of economic opportunity, poor access to basic social services (education, water, health, poor state security and youth unemployment) are addressed by the government had sharply decreased. In Somalia (12), the ARC partners and stakeholders have through advocacy initiatives contributed to the drafting of the Land Law, and formulation Detainee Policy and Sexual Offenses Bill. These have, however, not yet been adopted and signed into law, or legal framework for enforcement, and many obstacles were still seen to this process. In South Sudan (13), respondents felt confident to speak up in peace meetings. Threequarters of the respondents found that peace committees had helped resolve conflict in the community.

Related to impact, in Burundi (3), 85% of respondents had experienced a reduction in conflict, which the evaluation perceived as attributable to the project. In Mali (10), the proportion of beneficiaries who saw a safer and more secure future was decreasing, contrarily to targets. In Pakistan (11), virtually all respondents were able to see a better future situation in their area and did not want to migrate. In South Sudan (13), positive interactions were developed in the market between different clans and ethnic groups due to the engagement of VLISA members in income generation. In Sudan (14), there was some evidence that violent conflict had reduced since programme inception, with 61 percent of respondents reporting reduced conflict levels compared to the year before.

#### **Area IV: Social and Economic Reconstruction**

As this area was included by many consortia and since it is a relatively concrete topic and thus easy to report on for the evaluators, this section contains a relatively large body of findings.

**Under Social and Economic Reconstruction, outputs were mostly achieved or exceeded, and a large number of consortia reported to have achieved outcomes notably on improved livelihoods, increased incomes and start up and growth of small businesses.**

In most projects, planned outputs were usually achieved or even exceeded. Achievement of outcomes was reasonably good as well, but there were challenges.

In Ethiopia (6), the evaluation found that 85% of youth at risk of migration had market-driven local economic opportunities that corresponded with their aspirations. Furthermore, 80% of beneficiaries indicated the project had contributed to improved livelihoods, improved food and nutrition security, increased incomes, and enhanced coping capacity of the community. In South Sudan (13), 85% of VSLA members reported that they had started a business in the last year. This has led to an increase of incomes and general confidence in facing their future. In Pakistan (11), the project had successfully supported micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to enhance their businesses and small-scale producers in the agriculture and livestock sector had been incentivised to take up new innovations and establish improved collaborations with service providers, agricultural extension services and input suppliers, which had resulted in higher crop yields and increased milk production ultimately increasing their income and growing their business. In Sudan (15), the evaluation saw vulnerable groups having enhanced access to livelihood opportunities, but this was only for a small group of beneficiaries.

VSLA activities in Burundi (3) were successful with almost all of their members reporting to conduct income generating activities. In the other project in Burundi (4), the evaluation concluded that social resilience has been strengthened and foundations for economic resilience have been laid. In DRC (5), there was increased access to agricultural credits and work for women and youth, through developed capacities and provided microcredits, loans and agricultural tools.

Achieving outcomes on people finding a job or getting access to loans was sometimes more difficult (1,9). In Afghanistan, the deterioration of the situation had led to enterprises in the project-targeted service sector being reluctant to scale up and had to lay off people instead of hiring them. In Ethiopia (6) though, most technical and vocational education and training (TVET) trained students had found employment. In Pakistan (11), by supporting TVET institutions to be more market oriented, the project had successfully fostered self-employment and employment opportunities for vulnerable groups. In Lebanon (9), the evaluation found it difficult to assess whether the outcomes of the project intervention were achieved, since the indicators were perceived as “hugely subjective”.

**Reporting on impact was imperfect and often anecdotal. Reported impacts under Area IV were mixed and affected by external factors; positive impacts were observed in increasing youth empowerment, confidence level, and in small business and income growth, but when it came to TVET and livelihood training, impact at beneficiary level could not always be measured.**

On impact, achievements were mixed well and reportedly influenced by many external factors, which include COVID-19, economic crises, and conflict-related developments. A number of evaluation reports admitted to facing a dearth of data and came up with mainly anecdotal impacts, though some studies did produce some quantitative data, including the two endline surveys.

In Burundi (4), empowerment of youth steadily improved over the years (measured in an index), which was interpreted as self-help groups having led to improved resilience. In Afghanistan (1), the interviewed beneficiaries were positive on the impact of the project, notably on the growth of their business, but only a few beneficiaries were interviewed, and the project itself had not monitored impact indicators. In Ethiopia (7), impacts of training on trainees were found diverse and hard to measure. Though interviewed youth reported to be pleased to have been trained, the number of young people, who had found employment, had not been measured. Many of the multi-stakeholder platforms, set up under this project, did not achieve as per expectation. In Lebanon (8), only 40% of participants managed to secure employment. As a result, though confidence level



and interest in learning were strengthened, especially for women, confidence level in finding a job had decreased. Still, the project was found to have positive impact on MSMEs, especially in the areas of job creation, business growth, and cost reduction. There was also considerable impact on private TVET institutions, more so than on public ones due to bureaucratic limitations and budget cuts in the public sector. Nonetheless, despite beneficiaries being trained as planned, the number and percentage of students and teachers who report improved organizational capacity and services at the government as well as private TVET centers was considerably lower than planned.

In Lebanon (9), 74% of beneficiaries had not been able to land any job/internship or start their own micro-business following the end of the project, given the current economic context. Linked to that, around half of the beneficiaries still felt unable to meet their household's minimum needs and expected it to be the same in one year. The consortium blamed this poor achievement on the crisis. Still, supported TVETs had improved their quality of services and many beneficiaries with MSMEs explained that the project increased their resilience and improved their ability to sustain themselves and grow. In Pakistan, the project enabled 95-100% of the young trainees to meet current and future needs because of increased incomes. An effect study for skills an employment demonstrated that jobless as well as unskilled workers had become able to generate an income and financially support their families.

In South Sudan (13), though a part of the VSLA members reported an increase in income, flooding and insecurity challenges had been major challenges that prevented other members to achieve this. The respondents also showed a dissatisfaction with the size of the incomes they were generating from their income generating activities. The coping strategy index had decreased since the mid-term review.

In DRC (5), the evaluators admitted to not having collected impact data and therefore not being in a position to make statements about impact.

**The demand in the job market was taken as an external factor by many consortia, leading to a disconnect between participants' training and their finding an employment; where projects did address the demand side, results were more positive.**

The job market demand was an important factor, that a number of consortia working in TVET, or training otherwise jobless or unskilled workers overlooked or ignored, leading to less-than-optimal result. A number of evaluations (1,5,6,8,15) observed a disconnect with demand, either project wide, or in specific activities. For instance, vocational training was provided in remote areas has provided employable skills but there is limited evidence that beneficiaries could gain employment in the local labour market (6). In Afghanistan (1) people were trained to find jobs in the service sector, without activities on the demand side, whereas many young people are unemployed in that sector, including well-educated youth.

In Lebanon (8), this disconnect had negative consequences for the project itself, when managing the expectations of beneficiaries. Participants held an understanding that participation in the project would result in increased access to employment whether through the sharing of job opportunities or direct hire, partly caused by their required participation in an extensive monitoring process. Ultimately, many of them were disappointed.

Some projects had assumed that jobs would just be or become available. In one of the projects in Sudan (15), the assumption was that "if youth receive appropriate business and vocational skills and training based on market demand and are actively coached and linked to the private sector, they will find livelihood opportunities", which the evaluation found to "largely not hold true"; the consortium attributed the lack of demand to "the changed situation".

Nonetheless, whereas a large number of projects just took market demand as an external factor affecting their demand, some did consider and/or tried successfully to take adaptive measures (7,9,11). The EYE project in Ethiopia (7) acknowledged market demand as a largely external factor having its own history, logic and characteristics, but managed to connect market demand with the supply of TVET students, through job matching services and agreements with job market segments. In Pakistan (11), the demand was regularly assessed, and activities adapted. A labour market survey was conducted, which had helped identify available jobs for specific target groups

and the extent to which the actors working in these sectors are capable of employment creation and absorption.

## 5.2 Context specificity of intervention strategies and localisation of solutions

To what extent has the ARC programme allowed for context-specific intervention strategies or ToCs that support local solutions to conflict, crisis and Instability?

**Engaging local partners helped the consortia to strengthen the context-specificity of the intervention, but the more than half of the consortia had not engaged local organisations as consortium partners.**

At the tender phase, through using the consortium approach and emphasising the importance of responding to the local context, the applicants were encouraged to engage local partners. The MTR brought out that involving local partners within the consortia had been key for contextualisation of the projects. In the synthesis study, local organisations were equal partners in their relationship with international members of the consortium during the implementation, whether they were consortium partners or implementing partners. Nonetheless, in some of the consortia, the local partners were not consortium members, but engaged as implementing partners. Only five out of fifteen consortia had engaged local partners as part of the consortium, and sometimes, the local partner is a Dutch NGO with a local affiliation. From the reports, the study cannot judge that local partners in the consortium are better off than local implementing partners, but different dynamics are assumed and moreover, the local implementing partners would not have been engaged at the design stage.

When working with implementing partners, the evaluations reported that their capacity had improved through workshops, trainings and on-the-job learning and on specific topics such as gender transformative strategies. Respondents saw the engagement of local NGOs as a way to bestow legitimacy on the programme in the eyes of the local population (3). In Burundi, the Catholic Church has appeared a good partner in terms of its willingness to take over support to mediators and paralegals (4). Still, in other reports, it was difficult to assess the real level of localisation, since commonplaces are used such as “*engagement of the local stakeholders and communities is a key ingredient in designing and implementing programmes, especially those that target the most disadvantaged*” (5).

**By working with and building capacity of authorities, most consortia were able to ensure the linkage to local realities.**

ARC Fund grantees had to apply a context-specific approach in their proposals, based on the Dutch policy on Security and Rule of Law, with a view to achieving the greatest possible added value. The MFA had provided consortia with guidance to include context and local realities in the project design and development phase,<sup>8</sup> but it also gave organisations a level of flexibility in proposing the appropriate intervention strategy and design within the local context. The MTR found that the projects’ evidence-based selection of the type of activities, beneficiary groups, geographic areas, had been a key factor in ensuring that the projects’ designs were well-grounded in the realities, which, apart from a few exceptions such as those related to lack of acknowledging the labour market conditions, is confirmed by this study.

Many projects work with local and national authorities, such as the Ministries of Education (7,8,9,11) and the Ministry of Agriculture (8). In South Sudan, the project collaborated closely with the State Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare (13). Stakeholders perceived the close involvement and support from local authorities as a factor that facilitated change. They also found that this involvement gave the local population confidence in the programme and increased their interest and support (3). Strengthening authorities’ technical capacity is often part of the collaboration. Nonetheless, one evaluation in Afghanistan mentioned that attracting the right Government participants to attend trainings and round tables had been difficult (1).

**Most projects used existing mechanisms as a basis of their interventions, but some had been too positive in their judgement of the situation.**

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<sup>8</sup> MFA (2016). Guidance Programme Development. Addressing Root Causes Fund.

Working with local partners, and building on existing practices and mechanisms, was seen as having contributed to the programme's social sustainability. A Burundian example is the use of existing Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Municipal Community Development Plans (4). In Mali, the project strengthened the capacity of conflict management mechanisms that existed well before the ARC programme (10). In Somalia, the ARC programme sought to expand Police Accountability Committees<sup>9</sup> to serve as a bridge between communities, civil society and the police, and provide civilian oversight of security provision. The evaluation saw these committees as effective in establishing collaborations between local communities, local administrations, and local security agents in safety and security decision making processes (12). In South Sudan, the project worked through community-level peace committees, and local Special Protection Units, social workers, and police in addressing SGBV (13). In Sudan, the evaluation indicated that microgrants had helped quick adaptation to the local context, since it allowed communities to decide on how to spend the money instead of having to participate in predesigned activities (14).

Too positive judgement of the local context, such as the mentioned assumption of the local job market, or the estimated potential of local authorities in continuing what was achieved under the project, constrained consortia in their achievements. In a number of countries, the markets were already flooded with young, and even well-educated people looking for jobs, so training and supporting TVET was not the best solution in the local context (1,5,6,8,15). In Mali, where the project had taken a highly localised approach, the improvement of the functioning of the government of Mali had not been achieved due to too positive judgement of the development of the conflict situation (1).

### 5.3 Validation of assumptions

To what extent have underlying assumptions been validated at programme and at project level?

At programme level, the main assumptions of ARC that have been identified concern coherence, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEAL) and embassy engagement.

#### Coherence

The assumption related to coherence was "Fewer projects in fewer countries would positively contribute to more coherence at programme-level".

**Internal coherence among ARC and other Dutch funded projects working in the same thematic areas was limited, and neither the consortia nor the Dutch embassy had put sufficiently strong efforts into it.**

The study looked at internal coherence, in particular to synergies within and between ARC implementing consortia in the same country or between countries in the region, or with other Dutch funded interventions, who were working in the same or similar thematic areas. The MTR had already found that while the ARC programme had overall improved coherence in relation to similar previous centrally managed tender programmes, alignment and coordination with other similar projects implemented in the local contexts was still insufficient. External country-level coherence with other donor-funded civil society projects, programmes, platforms, fora or coordination mechanisms was found insufficiently prioritised. This was seen as a result of the passiveness of implementing consortia as well as the Netherlands embassies, despite the enthusiasm during the start-up phase.

Embassies were expected to continue their engagement and use their political leverage and take up coordination between ARC partners and with others, linking and embedding the ARC programme locally. Still, the initial enthusiasm with the embassies had appeared to dissipate fairly quickly. The ARC programme saw a gradual disengagement by the majority of embassies, among others because between 2016 and 2019, there were serious capacity constraints at embassies, resulting from the staff cuts in preceding years. Moreover, the initial commitments towards the ARC programme did not always feature in the briefings for new staff.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Establishment of Police Accountability Committees had been started in 2005 by UNDP in Mogadishu

<sup>10</sup> Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 July 2020. Addressing Root Causes Programme, Mid-Term Review. Final Report.

Even just between ARC consortia at country level, there had been sufficient scope for coordination: 10 among the 15 selected projects were working in the same country as another project. In the proposals, consortia had claimed that they would mutually collaborate, but in practice, in-country cooperation between consortia was hardly followed up. Only a few consortia reported on such internal coherence. In Burundi (3, 4) for instance, collaboration between the two ARC projects had been strong from the onset, and this was already mentioned in the MTR as a positive outlier. This coordination had indeed continued until the projects' end. The consortia met regularly, had a joint website, a joint report about stories of change, cooperation on research on refugee returns and internal displacements and other important themes. There was also cooperation on research on the dynamics of refugee return and internal displacement impact on relations between citizens, authorities, and conflict dynamics. It was interesting to notice though, that the cooperation and coordination were neatly described in one report (4), whereas the other report hardly mentioned it (3).

In Ethiopia on the other hand, the collaboration between the two ARC co-funded projects had remained limited to information exchange (6,7). One of the consortia (6) had tried on several occasions to stimulate exchange but had not been successful. In Lebanon (8/9), neither of the two consortia reported coherence or collaboration, even though both were only working under thematic pillar IV and there was sufficient subject-wise overlap. In Afghanistan (1,2), and Sudan (14,15), the report made no mention of exchange or coordination. On the other hand, one organisation had been leading two consortia, one in Sudan and one in Somalia, where there had been some collaboration, including an MTR on learning and various follow-up studies (12,14).

**External coherence was even weaker than internal coherence and reported only by few evaluations.**

External coherence looks at the consistency of the projects with other actors' interventions, which includes complementarity and avoiding duplication. According to the MTR though, for political reasons, more countries and projects had been added than originally foreseen, making the ARC more fragmented, at the same time making it more difficult to achieve external coherence.

In this study, there were very few positive findings on external coherence within or between countries, also since most reports had not included information on this topic. In Ethiopia, linkages were identified with other projects in terms of objectives and outcomes, including the MFA funded Girls Advocacy Alliance programme, but there was no evidence of actual coordination and alignment (6). In Mali, the project was reportedly complementary with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and with programs of the Dutch Embassy in Mali (P-GLR and Debbo-Alafia), as well as other NGOs, particularly in supporting the Government in implementing the action plan on violent extremism and terrorism. Nonetheless, there was only occasional exchange of information about activities<sup>11</sup> and no reporting on actual cooperation or coordination (10). In South Sudan on the other hand, the project assisted in the building of a safe environment for survivors of SGBV by educating Special Protection Units, social workers, and police officers on SGBV and applicable legislative frameworks in collaboration with UNDP. In Somalia (12), good cooperation was reported with NRC, but not with other organisations working in the same field.

### Embassy support

The assumption under ARC was that if DSH would engage embassies at an early stage, this would raise their involvement and enhance country-level ownership. Embassies would then help flagging issues that would require project revisions, as some Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between consortia, DSH and embassies mention that "the embassy will inform the ARC partners on relevant issues that may affect their programme implementation."

**The engagement of embassies has been limited; the embassies had hardly been engaged as informant in or in the (de)briefing of the evaluations and there was little mention in the reports of embassy engagement.**

DSH had assumed that embassies would take up roles such as monitoring, technical/thematic oversight, and country-level information exchange and coordination, but this did not materialise as

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<sup>11</sup> Findings from field research under another IOB evaluation

expected. The MTR observes that the role and contribution of embassies on M&E had not been sufficiently specifically included in the various MoUs, and the input of the embassies has been limited, as observed in the MTR and in the synthesis study.

The allusion to embassies in the evaluation reports is scant. To begin with, embassy staff had often not been included as interviewee, which did not prevent some of the evaluators from developing recommendations for embassies or the MFA (1,2,3,5,10,12,15).<sup>12</sup> Others do mention donors in general but not the MFA in particular (9,14). Only in Pakistan, the Netherlands Embassy had been well engaged in the evaluation and mention was made of regular contact and yearly workshops. One of the Sudan's reports praise the Embassy's flexibility. In Burundi (4), some more engagement with the embassy is mentioned.

### **Monitoring, evaluation and learning**

The assumption related to MEAL had been that consortia and their lead organisations had sufficiently robust systems in place, as M&E capacity had been included as criteria for the ARC tendering process.

**MEAL capacity had been an indicator in the ARC selection process, and some consortia had adequate capacity and frameworks, but many also had not, and there was a large variation in quality..**

It appears that M&E capacities vary greatly between consortia, which was also translated into the quality of the endline reports under assessment. Some ARC consortium leads have a well-institutionalised MEAL culture with good-quality M&E systems, processes and procedures. In other cases, though, consortia rely strongly on local partner organisations to collect indicator data, without robust data quality control mechanisms in place. Moreover, the quality and reliability of data in the reports was not sufficiently monitored by the MFA. The role of field monitoring was assumed to be appropriated by the embassies, but they finally appeared to have insufficient capacity and time to monitor ARC projects.

In Burundi, the MEAL systems were overall seen as of good quality, even if case studies were not used for measuring progress. These had been gathered for fundraising and public relations rather than critical analysis (3,4). In Ethiopia, the evaluation found that the Hope project had a strong fully operational and thorough M&E system, simple to use and with clear formats. Furthermore, the project had a comprehensive beneficiary feedback system, which facilitated problem-solving and enabled feedback, including feedback given anonymously (6).

In the Acted project in Lebanon (9), the overall monitoring and evaluation system was found to be quite solid, with baselines set for each indicator. Indicators were by and large well-defined, measurable and relevant. At the output/sub-goal level, indicators were specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (SMART), clear and much easier to achieve and measure. However, at the outcome level some indicators were rather subjective. In the FORSA Lebanon project (8), the M&E process was found to be successful, having provided sufficient depth of information. Only in outcome 1, the process was deemed too extensive, resulting in the expression of grievances by participants.

In Sudan (14), outcome harvesting had been useful for many of the partners and introduced the idea of thinking about changes above activities but had not been fully effective as collected outcomes collected throughout this programme were not always accurate or relevant.

In Afghanistan (1), the evaluation found the M&E system to be not working very well and observed a lack of agreed indicators and measurement between partners. The results framework provided a weak managerial and administrative anchor for the programme. With overly ambitious and poorly defined goals, indicators and targets, the results framework had been a source of friction between

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<sup>12</sup> The evaluators of the DRC project (5) come up with the heaviest list of recommendations for the MFA: work on migration in Ethiopia and the greater Horn of Africa; should address the wider, interlinked factors driving irregular migration (climate change, conflict, repressive governance, and corruption) rather than focusing on reducing the numbers reaching Europe's borders in the short term. Should include climate change as a priority, should prioritize the inclusion of women in livelihood programs by setting 50 percent quotas for women



partners. Moreover, personal judgement instead of a systematic approach was often used to assess growth.

For the EYE project in Ethiopia, the design of the logframe and monitoring framework was found weak. The results framework was found elaborate but also highly complicated, and most impact and outcome indicators were assessed as not adequately SMART. The three outcome pathways were open-ended, were hard to measure and did not indicate what the project would contribute to their achievement. (7).

### **Project-level assumptions**

Some of the evaluations also included observations on assumptions at project level, but not all of them, and the assumptions were very different as they depended on context and project content.

**Only a few reports discussed project-level assumptions, and for those that had been assessed, the truth was found mixed. Only one project had actively assessed the assumptions over the project period and adapted those accordingly.**

Drawing up a ToC had been mandatory in the design phase and all projects had a ToC and project-level assumptions. Nonetheless, less than half of the reports had assessed the validity of project assumptions. As brought up above, job market related assumptions often turned out not to be valid, which was either because of labour market conditions, or because the project had created an inflated sense of entitlement (1). Assumptions made in Ethiopia about limited prospects for social and economic empowerment as an important incentive for youth to seek a better future elsewhere had remained true (6). In Somalia, assumptions were made at the level that could be influenced by the project itself, i.e., community participation, and hence these were valid. In South Sudan (13,14) and Sudan (15), assumptions were partly valid. In Mali, many assumptions were made about Malian authorities, the democratic process and the willingness of communities to change norms, however, these were all out of control of the project and mostly did not hold true. Also, one of the assumptions was “Communities are open to changing negative social norms and manage their natural resources more equitably.” The assumption was found only partially true, which was subsequently reported to be outside of control and a very long-term process. It was only in Pakistan (11) that the assumptions were regularly reviewed in a joint process with partners, and all of these were still valid.

## **5.4 The influence of ARC Strategies**

How and to what extent have the efficiency and effectiveness of the interventions been influenced by the ARC strategies for risk management, adaptive programming and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEAL)?

The ARC strategies are aimed at MEAL, learning and adaptive programming. Obviously, none of the three topics was operational in a vacuum since they all mutually influence each other. The sections below elaborate on each of the three topics.

### **Monitoring Evaluation and Learning**

The ARC MEAL results framework<sup>13</sup> was designed to not only assess progress of projects against planning, but also to have a central role at the core of M&E, allowing learning and adaptive programming. The purpose of the framework was to facilitate:

1. Effective accountability reporting to the Dutch parliament by DSH on progress and results
2. Effective steering and learning by DSH and the ARC programme partners, to allow adjustments on the basis of lessons learnt during the implementation

M&E capacity and related track-records were included as selection criteria for the ARC tendering process, which led to the assumption is that the consortia would have sufficiently robust systems in place to be able to report against the results frame indicators (see also the sub-section on MEAL under section 5.3). The quality of indicators, on the other hand, was not an explicit part of the tender process.

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<sup>13</sup> MFA, 23 January 2017. Guidance note ARC common results monitoring framework

**Compulsory ARC outcome and impact indicators were designed to allow aggregation of and comparison between different projects; however, the projects were too different to do so, and the consortia saw them as a burden rather than a help.**

Outcomes and impacts were meant to be aggregated and/or compared between projects in different country contexts, which the MTR and this study have observed to be unrealistic. The MTR found that the results framework and associated monitoring and reporting regimes were too ambitious and not context-specific enough to accurately capture and aggregate the programme's progress and impact. The vast differences between the contexts were overlooked, which prohibited simply adding or comparing indicators. The consortia were struggling with the MEAL framework, as was already observed by the MTR, and confirmed here. As a result, outcome-based reporting was not operationalised consistently by implementing consortia, and data could not be aggregated effectively.

In this study, whenever outcomes and/or impact was reported, this mainly related to the indicators at project basis, and did not provide much insight into the overall result or impact created by the ARC programme. If consortia did report on the compulsory indicators, they did not distinguish these indicators clearly from their own indicators in the reports, nor did most of them refer to the compulsory indicators when reporting on outcome and impact. Some of the consortia found that reporting on the compulsory outcomes helped to understand the context in which they operate but provided little information on whether the project had been successful. Outcome-based reporting did not have a practical purpose for learning and steering, which was already observed by the MTR.

In a few evaluation reports, the ARC programme level indicators were mentioned, and their use discussed, in others this was not the case. The latter does not mean that the indicators were not used at all, but as they were not reflected as part of the evaluations, it prevents drawing conclusions as part of this study. Only few consortia report directly on ARC indicators, such as the report in South Sudan, that reports changes on two indicators.

Even if the reports did not clearly report on the indicators, a number of them did contain opinions about their usefulness. In Afghanistan (1), the evaluation considered the results framework as an obstacle rather than an aid. In fact, annual reports reported on different (the project's own) indicators. In Burundi, the MEAL frameworks of both projects (3,4) were still largely based on MFA-prescribed indicators. The consortia had added some other elements following the same MEAL logic. Biases in the MEAL data were established in two categories: biases due to respondents' biases and biases due to auto-reporting staff. This is in line with findings from the ARC MTR regarding outcome-based reporting, as it is presented in the ARC: 'One problem in this regard is that the type of data that was being collected was very subjective (especially for the perception-based indicators), and thus prone to bias. There were too many tools and questions, and staff had to spend a lot of time at the expense of implementation.

In DRC (5), the M&E process of ARC was confirmed to be complex and creating multiple challenges. The compulsory ARC indicators were perceived as not sufficiently SMART, the reliability of data was questioned, and ownership was limited among consortium partners and implementing partners. The indicators were not seen as necessarily apt and sufficiently context-specific to monitor the programme. In Pakistan (11), it was reported that among the outcome indicators, 11 were set by the donor, being identical across countries for harmonization purposes, where the Consortium would have preferred the flexibility to amend. These observations align with a finding from the MTR, that the monitoring and reporting regimes were too ambitious and not context-specific enough to actually track progress and impact.

## Learning and adaptive programming

The “global” learning agenda was one of the flagship components of ARC, and learning was supposed to inform and lead to adaptive programming. Since 2016, the Learning Agenda was under the responsibility of the Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL).<sup>14</sup>

**The Learning Agenda had not been implemented as envisaged or to its full potential, even though towards the end of ARC, the process had picked up a little steam.**

The learning agenda had at the time of MTR not delivered fully on its potential to optimise learning between consortia. The MTR observed a lack of clarity about the specific objectives of the “global” learning agenda, though it was also acknowledged that the agenda was on the right track to respond to organisations’ learning needs within the ARC programme. Despite KPSRL having produced relevant learning events, the MTR found that their mandate was weak and expectations between the MFA and KPSRL on what the KPSRL can and should do to effectively fulfil its role within the ARC programme were different. The MFA expected the KPSRL to take on the full responsibility for developing and implementing an ARC learning agenda, whereas the KPSRL saw its role primarily as being a facilitator.

This had only slightly changed over the last half of ARC. During the 2022 regional workshops, it was found that the global learning agenda lacked an implementation roadmap for the functioning of the groups and for answering the questions. Moreover, the role of the KPSRL was also perceived as too much hands-off on learning.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from a kick-off event 2017 and a closing event in December 2022 to discuss common lessons, one of the activities by the KPSRL was an event headed by Oxfam Novib in September 2020, to share key lessons on real-time evaluation, conducted as part of the ARC programme in Burundi.<sup>16</sup> Also, in 2019 a survey was held, and a paper produced on enabling factors for adaptive programming.<sup>17</sup>

Some ARC implementing organisation had very limited awareness of the ARC global learning agenda, and the MTR found that KPSRL mainly worked with consortia that had already a strong organisational learning culture. The synthesis study confirms this, as only one of the evaluations refers to KPSRL events or workshops (12) mentioning a three-day learning event in Nairobi.<sup>18</sup> Analysis of the workshop proceedings brought out, that despite learning agenda being central to the ARC programme, workshops conducted did not translate into robust transformative events where information generated was being documented and distributed internally or at different stakeholder levels.

The MFA had played an important role in steering the development of the ARC global learning agenda and supported the KPSRL change the approach in 2019, to favour regional events over global events to better enable learning between ARC organisations. The regional learning event in Burundi and Uganda (which was after the evaluation reports were produced, and hence could not contribute to ARC itself), was attended by a large number of ARC consortia. A number of insights were documented.<sup>19</sup> Positive contribution to social cohesion at community and sometimes inter-community level was reported, and ARC projects with a livelihood component also claimed contribution to expanding well-being across the community. Nonetheless, it was recognized that interventions mostly remained at community level and did not meet all, or most of, the root causes

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<sup>14</sup> The KPSRL, presented by a consortium of Clingendael, IDLO and Saferworld, was established by the MFA in 2012 to support the ministry in knowledge generation, research and network with experts and practitioners to improve the application of evidence in policy and programmes in the area of Security and Rule of Law. See <https://www.kpsrl.org/about-us>.

<sup>15</sup> Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law. 13 June 2022. Addressing Root Causes - Regional Learning Sessions in Uganda and Burundi Report.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.kpsrl.org/event/arc-webinar-real-time-evaluation-for-learning>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.kpsrl.org/publication/arc-learning-group-enabling-factors-of-adaptive-programming>

<sup>18</sup> Learning event from 9–11 July 2019, to enhance peer to peer learning, and share experiences on sustainable community approaches to peacebuilding and to explore the relationship between community-level work and accountable policing in securitised environments.

<sup>19</sup> Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law. 13 June 2022. Addressing Root Causes - Regional Learning Sessions in Uganda and Burundi Report.



of conflict. Participants experienced the spaces for learning as expanding, but revealed serious gaps in learning results, especially at the level of cross-project and cross-country learning.

The Burundi workshop participants found that learning was not integrated as a theme and not well understood among the various ARC implementing organizations. The ARC learning questions were seen as top down and not aware of realities in the field. One endline evaluation was more positive and reported that the ARC learning questions were reviewed regularly by the project and jointly with external partners (11). This evaluation concluded that the learning agenda was an effective and innovative tool that had been integrated in the overall monitoring framework of ME4PS and was aligned with other ARC projects in Pakistan and globally, and that it had been useful in integrating adaptive management techniques. Only three others mentioned an internal learning agenda (1,3,4).

Several learning activities were implemented in Burundi, even if only in the final stages of the programme. For the Afghanistan project (1), it was found that funding allocated for external research and learning was not commensurate with the nature of the undertaking, leaving the learning agenda under-resourced.

In Ethiopia, the embassy had seen opportunities in learning together at the onset, but the subsequent MoU had been phrased much more conservatively (7,8). The endline report of ARC does not even mention the embassy nor has it included embassy staff as respondent; EYE reports “*Good contacts with EKN Addis at start but faded later on*” and embassy staff had not responded to an invitation for interview.

**There was no common understanding on adaptive programming, and most consortia dealt with it in terms of operational changes; there was insufficient guidance and support to strengthen this adequately.**

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) defined adaptive programming as follows:<sup>20</sup> “*Adaptive programming suggests, at a minimum, that development actors react and respond to changes in the political and socio-economic operating environment. It emphasises learning and the development practitioner is encouraged to adjust their actions to find workable solutions to problems that they may face.*”

From the survey and paper done by KPSRL in April 2019, it had appeared that most organisations did not have such common understanding of what Adaptive Programming entails, even though all survey respondents’ organisations had made certain adaptations to their initial programmes. The structure of ARC was seen as enabling for programme adaptation, but this was more valid for programmatic elements, such as logical frameworks, than for administrative elements, such as procurement rules and contracts. This observation was repeated during the 2022 learning workshop in Burundi, where the capacity to implement the adaptive programming was seen to remain uneven inside and between implementing organizations and the programme management structures put in place by the MFA were perceived as not facilitating learning.<sup>21</sup>

From the studied reports, it appeared that adaptations were made by some consortia also in the second half of the projects’ duration, but mainly at the operational level. Thus, the synthesis study confirms the view of the MTR, that consortia have used adaptive programming mostly to make operational changes, to ensure quality delivery against planned objectives without revising the goals themselves, also because there was little incentive to do so. Moreover, for adaptive programme to work well, a robust M&E system needs to be in place to collect timely data and allow analysis, that can inform learning and decision-making. The M&E frameworks at country level would then be used for assessing the projects’ ToC, and at the same time be linked to a programme wide framework – as had been the intention under the ARC programme. As discussed above though, the quality of M&E varied hugely between consortia, reflecting also on the potential for

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<sup>20</sup> ODI (2016). Putting Learning at the Centre. Adaptive Development Programming in Practice. See <https://www.odi.org/publications/10367-putting-learning-centre-adaptive-development-programming-practice>

<sup>21</sup> Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law. 13 June 2022. Addressing Root Causes - Regional Learning Sessions in Uganda and Burundi Report.

adaptive programming. Also, the learning, that could have supported the adaptive programming was less profound than expected, as explained above.

Whereas the reasons to adapt the programmes had been documented, most ARC partners had not evaluated the effect of the adaptations.<sup>22</sup> In October 2020, a learning brief was published on COVID-19 and adaptive programming.<sup>23</sup> In December 2020, a workshop was held on Collaborative Learning and Programme Adaptation in Fragile Contexts. From the reports under study, however, it does not emerge whether and to what extent this information has been useful.

One consortium in Ethiopia asked the embassy how to proceed with adaptive programming, but they were referred back to the MFA. Finally, though the evaluation report called the project “remarkably flexible”, only small operational changes were reported on (6). The other project in Ethiopia had made adaptations along the recommendations of their own MTR (7), a practice that was not followed by many other projects. A project in Lebanon adapted their training approach to the apparent lack of jobs in the sector where they originally trained (9). A project in Somalia had built flexibility in implementation by giving the local partners leeway to adjust and adapt to context specific security and conflict challenges (12). In Sudan, besides adaptations to activities to rectify delay, there were also shifts in advocacy focus made in response to the political context, even though the ToC and its assumptions were left untouched (14).

A few evaluations have adapted the ToC and took relevant management measures (4, 11). One project indeed used the results framework as a management tool for adjusting strategies and based its approach on piloting activities and scaling up the most successful ones (11). In Afghanistan, repeated failure to reach outcome targets (whilst outputs were achieved) did not provoke a rethinking of the TOC and approach (1). One project adapted project strategies based on progress monitoring and beneficiary feedback. The consortium felt that the flexibility of the MFA had been instrumental to do so (15). Some evaluation reports state that there is no evidence of adaptation at all, despite changes in the context, and that findings from the MEAL system are not used to inform decision-making. Even deepening crisis and assumptions not holding true did not give rise to adaptations (3,10, 13).

Often, adaptations were made at operational level, and it is questionable whether there has been any effect on the results. For instance, in Lebanon, promoting women’s participation to a level of 40% appeared challenging; the consortium’s response was to adapt organization of training for women in sectors where women were traditionally active, which may not necessarily be beneficial to gender equality (8).

One evaluation report remarked on a more strategic level, that ARC had lacked a learning culture, because insufficient resources were made available for this and there was insufficient commitment to adaptive programming. The uptake of the MTR was seen as very limited at the consortium level (5).

### **Risk management**

Risk management was mentioned in only two reports. In DRC (5) there was mention of an enhanced risk to “do harm” by stirring unnecessary conflict between communities, as a result of insufficient budget to cover the entire geographical area. The consortium partly managed to mitigate this risk by cooperating with local leaders, to include at least a proportion of each group. In Sudan, risks were mentioned in balancing the ambitious scope with the deteriorating operating environment.

## **5.5 Unintended effects**

[Have unintended effects been identified and, if undesirable, been mitigated?](#)

**Most evaluation reports had not assessed unintended effects; where this had been done, positive effects were found in women’s empowerment and negative effects in confidence level on the job market,**

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.kpsrl.org/publication/arc-learning-group-enabling-factors-of-adaptive-programming>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.kpsrl.org/publication/arc-learning-brief-covid-19-and-adaptive-programming>

Assessing unintended effects is a regular part of an evaluation methodology but still, only four reports had looked into this, despite promises by almost all evaluators in the description of the methodology. It is unclear whether there were no unintended effects, or if these had been overlooked. Of course, the nature of these effects (not being comparable to targets) makes it difficult to identify them. In addition, the indicators against which ARC project had to report did not allow to collect interventions' unexpected effects and were therefore not always relevant.<sup>24</sup>

In Burundi (4), positive unintended effects were noted. (Unplanned) sports events were organised, leading to strengthened social cohesion. Also, community group members became involved in communal tax collection, which was seen as a result of increased self-esteem and a positive perception of the local government.

In one project Lebanon (8), there were negative unintended effects, in terms of participants' lowered confidence level in gaining employment, when they appeared unsuccessful after training. A positive effect was that existing Business Development Support service providers, who do not usually operate with small family businesses, started working more closely with them.

In the other project in Lebanon (9), the report mentions explicitly that there were no unintended effects, though there was some reference to women whose self-confidence had increased as they had moved out of their comfort zone under the project and were now more able to speak out their opinions. A similar effect was observed in Sudan (15), where the project was perceived to have considerably improved the position of women in some of the target locations, which was not among the planned outcomes.

## 5.6 The costs of interventions

[How do the costs of the interventions and their outcomes compare among the projects?](#)

**There was almost no information on costs in the evaluation report. Where such information was available, the assessment on the capacity of consortia related to financial planning and forecasting was mostly negative.**

The evaluation reports rarely discuss cost effectiveness and efficiency adequately,<sup>25</sup> and many do not discuss it at all. And even if details are available, it is difficult to aggregate and unfair to compare the cost for lack of detailed information and insufficient comparability of the interventions. Not only are the projects very different in terms of approach and target groups, but without all projects having the same amount and quality of data available, a comparison is simply impossible. This section therefore focuses on general findings related to cost and efficiency, to the extent that they could be derived from the selected reports.

One category of observations in the report related to the limited strength of strategic planning and financial forecasting (1,3,9,10,14), which was perceived to have led to underspend and resources not being available at the right time. Wasting resources as a lack of delay in the project was also brought up (8). Specifically, delays in making financial resources available had an impact on the implementation and caused withdrawal of agents from the field (10). One report assessed financial accountability as sufficiently strong (1). One evaluator mentioned that the project could have been managed more cost-efficiently, and that especially working with government had been a challenge in this regard (9). For one project (13), it was said that financial capacity and rigour were not matched to programme requirements. There had been difficulties in basic budget management (expenditure tracking, forecasting, underspend management, and reconciliation of funds) and delayed disbursement of microgrant funds. In another project, over-budgeting was said to have led to reaching more project participants than planned (8).

As for human resources being available in sufficient quality and quantity, there was only one report that provided feedback (15), saying that staff throughout the implementation period had been spread rather thin.

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<sup>24</sup> Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law. 13 June 2022. Addressing Root Causes - Regional Learning Sessions in Uganda and Burundi Report.

<sup>25</sup> As an example of poor assessment, one evaluator said: "the project appears to be cost effective in the sense that most projects reviewed by evaluators created impacts with a relatively small investment" (6).

One report stated that working through local structures had been the most efficient solution (3). Only one report (7) discusses the cost per beneficiary and proportions spent on programme delivery, but again, comparison is impossible for lack of data from others.

## 5.7 Exit strategies

Have project exit strategies been developed and to what extent were they based on (local) evidence?

**Exit strategies are not frequently described in the reports. At best, consortia see embedding their projects in the communities and local structures as the best (though undocumented and thus not officially agreed) exit strategy.**

Exit strategies, even if this an essential component in good project design, was another topic that was scantily discussed in the evaluation reports. Only eight out of fifteen evaluation reports touch upon an exit strategy, at least on thinking behind such a strategy. But even if thoughts have been paid to it in various levels of detail, only once there is mention of a documented exit strategy. There is no mention of any agreement with relevant stakeholders on their roles and timelines as part of such exit strategy.

In Afghanistan (1), there had been initial plans to test willingness and ability of jobseekers to pay for their training; to speak to potential angel investors to establish a permanent grant fund for the incubator; or to test SMEs' willingness to pay for accelerator support. In the end, these options could not be tested.

Working on behaviour change and embedding in local structures was mentioned as a good strategy (3,13). Planning for replicating and scaling up is another avenue, though this remained at the level of potential (11).

In Burundi (3), there is mention of an overall exit strategy, but no details are provided. The consortium had foreseen that working with local committees and community development plans was perceived a good exit strategy (4,14). Another report (5) however noticed that there may be a sense of ownership of the supported pre-existing community structures, but their institutional and financial sustainability is less certain. Supporting community development plans could work well but only with attention for actual implementation of the plans and allocation of necessary resources. Rotating credit funds were found more likely to continue. This project even came up with a recommendation on developing an exit strategy for future projects.<sup>26</sup>

In Ethiopia, the evaluation deemed that "forcing" youth to join groups in order to get loans had not been a good exit strategy, since this has proven challenging and often led to business failure in the past (7).

## 5.8 Sustainability

To what extent have the interventions of the individual projects proven sustainable?

**The ARC projects' timeframe and budget are too limited to ensure long-term duration of achievement and sufficient scale of behaviour change**

A number of evaluation reports (1,3) state that the comparatively small scale of ARC projects makes it difficult to register positive changes at impact level. In Afghanistan, targets were very high and implementation time relatively short when compared to interventions with the same approach in Afghanistan, for instance by the World Bank (1).<sup>27</sup> The most mentioned hindering factor was the limited reach of the project, either in terms of the number of people reached, the number of activities implemented, or the budget available for activities (3,5).

In terms of sustainability of impact, as also indicated in the MTR, working on addressing root causes in fragile and conflict-affected context needs continuity and long-term support, and addressing root causes requires a long-term concerted effort. In support of this thought,

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<sup>26</sup> Assure a comprehensive exit strategy, with due focus on financial sustainability and complementarity, already in the design phase of a project

<sup>27</sup> World Bank's Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Programme (AREDP), <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P110407>

sustainability had been a compulsory section in the project proposals, hence, in the design, the consortia had paid sufficient thought to it, and most had followed through as planned. As indicated in the assessment of the quality of the project reports, the two endline studies did not provide information on sustainability (see also Annex 2).

A number of evaluations in this study had brought up that the budget, duration and approach of the ARC programme did not allow for such long-term achievement. It was perceived, for instance, that funding was (much) too limited to sustain behaviour change at a sufficient scale. For instance, though some SGBV-related behaviour had changed at local level, the scale was too small to allow a change of norms within the community changing on SGBV (3). The available timeframe also constrained the consortia to complete long-term endeavours, such as laws where drafting could be supported but that were not adopted yet.

This was also already found by the MTR, where it was written: “Consortia needs were well understood and addressed, although ARC project budgets and timeframes are too limited to warrant long-term engagement.”

**Broad acceptance by most community members, income generation and behaviour change were factors that contributed to beneficiaries’ sustained ability to continue using their acquired skills and assets, even though considerable scale was seen as a condition.**

Projects tried to come up with approaches that would allow beneficiaries to continue using their acquired skills, knowledge and assets, but the success varied between consortia.

In Burundi (3), community members valued the services that had been provided by Peace Club members. In Sudan (15), strong community buy-in from all community groups including farmers, pastoralists, women, and youth in particular, and the cooperation with local law enforcement was found to indicate the sustained capacity of communities to resolve and prevent conflict.

Beneficiaries in Burundi (3) reported that they had changed their ways of dealing with and diffusing conflicts. This is seen as positive; however, it is not yet possible to conclude how these changes will stand the test of time and whether the number of people reached by the programme will be sufficient to create a critical mass of change in the communities, thus changing social norms around conflict and rights.

In Burundi (3), the success of VSLA activities in generating income were assessed as factors for sustainability. The income generation activities of self-help groups in another project (4) were believed to be a motor to their sustainability, but under the condition that more of those groups would link their activities to a broader commercial, market-based context. It was also deemed probable that a number of the groups would become inactive in future, if they were no longer supported. Nonetheless, the groups had reportedly contributed to a feeling of cohesion and increased resilience. In South Sudan, beneficiaries had increased incomes which had potential to continue, but nonetheless, the evaluation noted that the economic and social context still proves a challenge to sustainability of businesses regardless of the interventions provided.

In Afghanistan, testing a membership fee structure for a business hub failed due to in-country developments (1). In Ethiopia (7), the sustainability of the established Community Business Groups was found uncertain.

**Capacity built in existing local structures and mechanisms and those that were officially recognised by local authorities was perceived as sustainable, but less so if these were newly set up. Some capacity was expected to expire with time though or need follow-up.**

Capacity building had been part of most projects and focused on local organisations, community committees, authorities and academia. In Burundi, this had been perceived as leading to positive relations with the local authorities, which were seen as likely to continue into the future, even in case of elections (3). In Mali, all actors including the local peace committees were confident that the capacity of the (pre-existing) community mechanisms to continue activities and promote change after the end of the programme (10).

Also, community mechanisms to deal with conflict and issues of rights violations had been supported to provide services swiftly and free of charge. In one Burundian project (3), respondents

believed support to community development plans to be less sustainable since they had had insufficient training to implement those. In the other Burundian project (4), the majority was positive about the survival of the supported local structures and saw no obstacle to the continuation of their activities. This includes the Truth and Reconciliation Commission support but also the support for the Municipal Community Development Plan processes. Here, respondents were less positive about structures that were newly set up, such as self-help groups and Cluster-Level Associations. In DRC (5), institutional sustainability of the structures and plans that had been officially recognised by local authorities was perceived as stronger. For the structures, whose legal status did not allow this, the longevity was seen as less likely. In Somalia (12), Police Accountability Committees had gained the confidence of Ministry of Interior and Justice, which allows them to continue accessing police stations, prisons. Nonetheless future continuation is not ensured since local administrative structures can change over time. Moreover, the sustained ability of communities to resolve and prevent conflicts had been halted as a result of major powershifts between government-backed and rebel-backed tribes.

In Lebanon (9), beneficiaries with MSMEs felt positive about their future and believed that they will be able to sustain and grow their economic activities. Participants whose capacity was built in recent training stated that they have continued to use the skills learned in various forms of employment. On the other hand, participants who had participated in trainings 1-2 years ago but failed to gain employment, expressed that they were losing their skills due to lack of practice and experience in the field (8).

In Ethiopia, savings groups were established but the evaluation found that quantity often prevailed over quality. Implementing partners solely reported the number of established savings groups and assumed that they remained active after the project had ended, without putting in place a mechanism (6).

TVET institutions in Ethiopia were found likely to provide continuity to capacity built under the project (7). In Afghanistan, Kabul University Careers Department and Erasmus University had been engaged and there had been discussions on taking over the jobs' readiness training in the future, but due to the Taliban taking power, this never materialised (1).

**Financial sustainability is limited for most projects, often due to local authorities having many priorities and few funds; if future allocations were foreseen by the projects, they would mainly be external.**

Budgeting and allocating funds for after-project continuation, where needed, is not often an automatism. In DRC (5), local authorities face a lack of resources, and money flows are not systematically captured. Also, in Burundi (4), 40% of respondents see lack of financial support and cooperation by the local administration as possible obstacles. In Ethiopia (6), sustainability is expected to be adversely affected by lack of public funds for continued basic social service delivery and lack of active private sector involvement in service delivery. For regional and local governments, the issue of refugees and reintegration of migrants is competing for funds with other national priorities, such as high youth unemployment and coping with the economic downturn from COVID-19. For CSOs, programming for refugees and returnees and migrants was reported to be contingent on project-based funding. In Lebanon (8), independent of government budget cuts already had severely impacted public sector centers and are a threat to further sustainability.

TVET institutions in Lebanon and Pakistan (9,11) were found unlikely to sustain the trainings, as they expressed their need for financial support to be able to continue delivering livelihood-related services in the future – which was not automatically available.

With high levels of donor dependency, beneficiaries are seen as insufficiently prepared to secure and attract financial resources to continue their activities. In DRC (5), this is seen as due to the voluntary nature of structures built under the project, and because the project's approach to link these structures to an income generating activity had failed. Partners were willing to continue serving refugees, host and returnees after the end of the project, but it is unclear to which extent they will have the financial capacities to do so. In Pakistan (11), lack of access to financing for entrepreneurs, MSMEs and start-ups was reported to pose a considerable challenge to sustainability. In Somalia (12), financial sustainability, was relying on community resource

mobilization, which the evaluation assessed as not tenable in the long run without any training or strategy.

In Sudan, community-based organisations were expected to be able to (partly) finance future activities, since they had been trained in writing simple proposals had built up a track record of managing budgets, implementing small initiatives, and reporting on them (14).

## 6 MTR recommendations and validity

The full recommendations as per the MTR have been included in Annex 7. The section below looks at to what extent the first two of those have been followed up (if information was available). The third recommendation, on strategic use by the MFA of centrally funded programmes, will not be discussed here since this was first and foremost directed to the MFA.

### Follow-up on MTR recommendations

**To what extent and how have the MTR recommendations been followed-up during the second half of the program? Are MTR recommendations still valid in the light of the synthesis?**

In this section, the two questions from the study matrix related to the MTR recommendations have been taken together, looking into whether the recommendations have been followed up, and if these recommendations would still be valid in the light of this synthesis. The latter question is especially relevant for the recommendations made in the light of potential future programmes. For easy reference, please see Annex 7.

The first MTR recommendation, in brief, is:

#### **1. Focus reporting on capturing context-specific results**

The MTR recommended for the ARC projects to focus tangible process at local, country, and regional level (if warranted), and if possible, already do this for the remainder of the programme. This has been discussed at length under section 5.4, under the subject Monitoring Evaluation and Learning. Only six out of fifteen selected reports specifically mentioned the compulsory indicators, most of them coupled with negative feedback. We may therefore conclude that the recommendation has been followed up to a large extent, probably because the consortia also struggled with the indicators. The current study confirms that the approach is better and understandably more useful to the consortia themselves, and that the compulsory indicators have not added much value.

On the other hand, in the same recommendation, the MTR states that “by nesting regional results frameworks into an overarching meta-framework and contextualising these using region-specific theories of change, centrally-managed programmes can still demonstrate their upward accountability to parliament”. This seems easier said than done. With the lack of coordination and coherence as described in section 5.3, it would have been very difficult or even impossible to merge the ToCs, even per region, and “nest” the results into one framework. Moreover, even within regions, the contexts can be different to begin with and are continuously evolving. Also from this study, it has become clear how difficult that would be. Nonetheless, the necessity to be able to report on a programme such as ARC is shared here as well. In order to make this possible, the MFA should start thinking from the beginning about how to facilitate this. The step suggested in the MTR, to have a lean regional ToC and a few indicators only would be a good first step. Nonetheless, it would probably only work if fewer regions and/or countries were selected for implementation, so that more than one consortium could implement their intervention in the same country. The overarching ToC must be developed with and agreed by all selected consortia, so that they can ensure that their own indicators feed into the required “programme indicator”. One indicator per thematic area should be sufficient. The consortia should include the indicator in their own MEAL framework and the MFA must follow up whether data are adequately collected and reported on at regular intervals. Whilst aggregating the data, the MFA can then steer and adapt the process from a very early point of time, if aggregation does not work as foreseen.

For a future programme, the MTR recommends allocation of budget to strengthen the capacity of consortium partners and embassies. This study fully agrees, provided that the engagement of embassies is ensured throughout the entire programme period. And as the MTR also stipulates, this can be further facilitated by developing a MEAL plan at the onset, where a time plan and roles and responsibilities of embassy staff are laid down.



## **2. Alignment with country-level frameworks and mechanisms by consortia**

Under this recommendation, the MTR suggests stronger internal and external coherence and for consortia, to assume pro-active responsibility for the project's coherence, coordination and complementarity. Under the section on Coherence, this report demonstrates that, but for a single exception, internal coherence has been poor and external coherence even poorer. If anything, coherence has probably gotten worse since the MTR, with consortia focusing on bringing their own intervention to a good end. Moreover, the embassies have appeared to have not been engaged in this process as expected, either. Even though coherence is essential if the MFA wants to achieve effectiveness and even more sustainability in a country, this will not come automatically. If such processes are not ensured in the design stage, it is very unlikely that coherence will suddenly emerge. If the MFA wants embassies to engage more strongly, budget allocation and an agreed plan would have been helpful. Without all of these, it is no surprise that coherence did not happen in an environment where consortia and NGOs are competing for donor funds.

Under this recommendation, the MTR also suggests that consortia should bolster the leadership of local partners. In this study, it has appeared that local consortium partners have worked as strategic partners, and there was no reason to assume that local implementing partners were not strategically engaged, even though the information was insufficient to fully confirm this. Section 5.2 and Conclusion 4 provide more insight into the findings of this study on this topic. The impression is, nonetheless, that leadership remained in the hands of the INGO that led the consortium, and although local partners were well engaged, they did not assume leadership. Also, since the MTR nothing has changed to the relations between INGOs and local partners, so no follow-up has been given to this recommendation.

The MTR furthermore suggest that embassies should become more engaged for the remaining duration of the programme, which does not seem to have happened. Also, embassies are advised to use their political leverage to support coherence for the last ARC years, but the study has not found evidence. The thematic areas were suitable to encapsulate this relevance, be it that human security may be considered as crosscutting or as a result of the three areas. There was very little attention towards gender. If gender-related needs and opportunities were to be further emphasised in a potential next programme, this would make it even more relevant and at the same time respond to the policy priorities of the MFA.

For a future programme, the MTR recommended that roles and commitments of embassies are discussed in more detail at kick-off meetings and laid down better in MoUs. The current study doubts whether this recommendation would be sufficient to create tangible improvement. Even under the projects where details had been discussed and agreed for ARC at the onset, the role of the embassy in most cases has remained limited. Apparently, such a step at the onset is insufficient and should be followed up throughout the project. Additionally, as long as the embassies suffer from a lack of capacity, it will be difficult for them to assume a stronger role in centrally managed programmes, despite good intentions and commitments. The MTR indeed recommends strengthening more capacity, and "more designated capacity", but that may not be so easy just to honour engagement into centrally managed programmes with the MFA facing many competing priorities.

## **3. Strategic use of central programmes**

The MTR finds that central programmes should provide a flexible funding mechanism to make strategic investments to support (local) processes within the thematic scope and processes of the programme. This should be done among others through ensuring coherence and local leadership. For the remainder of the ARC programme, the MTR suggest that the consortia, who are performing best in this regard, should be supported more strongly by embassies in creating coherence and developing an exit strategy. This study has not found any evidence that this has indeed happened, and it is doubtful whether it would have been a good strategy to single out the best performers from a programme that was designed to be consistent.

The MTR suggests that consortia in future should be selected on the basis of a track record in the selected country and based on the strength of existing partnerships with other local partners. This study cannot confirm this recommendation, since the evaluation reports that have been studied are not suitable to confirm or deny this recommendation. Though it is probably a good idea if having



evidence of relations with local partners becomes a selection requirement (and also that local partners become consortium partners), the reports do not provide sufficient evidence for this study to confirm that this would have led to better outcomes.

When it comes to track records of MEAL capacity, this study confirms that it is important but also that assumptions of MEAL capacity of selected consortia did not always materialise as expected (Section 5.3).

Lastly the MTR finds that future central programmes should be designed jointly and based on the country strategies. This is agreed here, especially if it is coupled with an even further enhanced geographical focus and resource allocation and guidance for the embassies to engage more strongly.

### **Additional lessons learned**

**Can additional lessons be drawn regarding the coherence, relevance and efficiency of the programme?**

In this study, there were quite a few findings on coherence. The main conclusion was, as also outlined elsewhere in the report, that internal coherence was limited and external coherence even more so. This was already noticed by the MTR. The additional lesson from this study is, that coherence does not come automatically. Even if consortia and embassy have promised support and commitment at the onset, this will either slowly wither away if not nurtured, or be prevented by lack of capacity or the necessity to focus on other priorities, including bringing the intervention to a good end. Therefore, even though this study fully endorses the importance of coherence, notably in view of effectiveness and sustainability, it also demonstrates that having an objective and commitment is not sufficient. Coherence must be ensured, as outlined above, by for instance requirements in the tender phase and plans for engagement, which cover the entire duration of the intervention, and which are adapted on a regular basis.

Even though relevance was not specifically assessed under this study, from the selected reports it can be confirmed that the interventions have remained relevant to the context and needs of the beneficiaries.

As for efficiency, this study has little to contribute, since the evaluations and endline studies hardly reported on this topic. The lesson learned here would be, therefore that the MFA emphasises that efficiency should be included into the endline evaluations, so that for a future programme, information will be available on this important topic.

## **7 Conclusions**

Below are eight conclusions, which were derived from the consultant's interpretation of the findings of the evaluation and endline reports as well as from looking at the MTR recommendations, and which follow the questions in the research framework. Conclusions on two questions, related to unintended effects and comparing costs of projects are missing, because the reports under study provided too little information to come to a credible conclusion.

### **Conclusion 1: ARC has contributed to long-term processes that address root causes**

**Most ARC projects have contributed to or supported long-term processes that address root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration, but they have not brought substantial sustainable change to the root causes.**

This conclusion aims to respond to the central question of this study. More details on each of the components can be found in the conclusions following this one.

The ARC programme impact has been defined as addressing root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration. Consortia reported achieving impact mostly against their own indicators, which would then feed into the overall ARC indicator. And even if impact was specifically reported, many consortia did not discuss attribution of the project.

Consortia found achieving impact to be often challenged by external factors, such as developments in the conflict situation, economic crisis and COVID-19. Also, the lack of demand in the job market was mentioned as hampering achievements, even if consortia could have taken steps to rectify this, as some did.

This synthesis study cannot provide a firm conclusion as to whether the root causes have been addressed. Contributions have been made by various projects, which may have helped to establish a conducive environment for addressing root causes. This includes improved cohesion, reduced conflicts, stronger belief in a safe and secure future and better outlook for income generation. However, it is unlikely that root causes, which have existed for decades and are engrained in societies, have been substantially affected by the total of all projects or by individual projects in the various countries. Moreover, the lack of or limited achievements in countries, where adverse developments had been experienced, such as Afghanistan, Mali and Lebanon, or power shifts in project areas such as Sudan, indicates that the achievements have far from fully been embedded in society.

The lack of a firm conclusion is partly due to the impossibility to simply add achievements, in this study, but also during the MTR. The assessed lack of likelihood is based on the size of each project, which was too small to expect such achievement. Moreover, most projects covered two or even three thematic areas (see also Annex 3), leading to a certain fragmentation. Also, projects operated under very different and changing contexts and sometimes had a considerable geographical scope notwithstanding the limited budget. Therefore, this study confirms the finding of the MTR, that ARC-funded activities were at most able to support or catalyse longer-term processes that address root causes of conflict and irregular migration.

### **Conclusion 2: ARC interventions were context-specific but with insufficient duration**

By engaging local partners, and building forward on existing local mechanisms, to a large extent the consortia have been able to design and implement a context-specific programme in each country. Nonetheless, some consortia were too positive in their estimation of the local context. Also, even if the interventions were context-specific, their duration and resources constrained the report from a meaningful contribution to the ARC's objective.

The ARC consortium-based approach was meant to facilitate local CSOs to participate as consortium members, thus getting direct access to the MFA donor funding and engage at an early stage. Not all consortia had engaged local partners as actual consortium partners, but they did engage them in implementation in an equitable manner. Nonetheless, this study does not have the means to conclude whether local partners engaged as implementing partners were equally well-off as those involved as consortium partners.

Many projects used existing mechanisms to build forward on, instead of reinventing the wheel. Whilst this increased social acceptance and sustainability and has worked out well in most cases, at times the too-positive estimation of the consortia led to limited achievements.

Working with local organisations as well as building their capacity has contributed positively to the design and implementation of context-specific interventions. At the same time, providing funding through local and international NGOs, with a maximum duration of five years and without follow-up funding perspectives, does not sufficiently allow the long-term concerted effort that is needed to address root causes in fragile and conflict affected context as was aimed at by ARC. This standpoint was also shared by the MTR.

### **Conclusion 3: Sustainability of ARC results in terms of acquired skills and capacity is limited**

As interventions did not have exit strategies, activities often did not have sufficient scale and follow up was not ensured for built capacity, sustainability is only expected in terms of acquired skills and changed behaviour at community level. As for financial sustainability, apart from more external funding, the outlook is dim.

Exit strategies are not a common component of the project design under ARC. That is not to say that consortia have not paid thought on how to make results and potential impact sustainable, but they failed to document this in a structural manner. As a result, roles, responsibilities, allocation of funds and time frames remain unknown.

Even though many consortia have tried to make their project sustainable by working with local partners, authorities and communities to the extent possible, their timeframe and budget are too limited to ensure long-term duration of achievement and sufficient scale of behaviour change. Nonetheless, evaluation reports observed a number of factors that would help beneficiaries to continue using acquired skills and knowledge, such as broad acceptance by most community

members, income generation and behaviour change, but many reports also noted that a condition would be a critical mass or a considerable scale. Also, capacity building in existing local structures and locally acknowledged mechanisms were mostly perceived as sustainable. Also here, the evaluators noticed that regular follow up would be a condition to longevity.

Financial sustainability was assessed as limited by almost all evaluators. If funds would be needed to continue certain activities and results, internal mechanisms were not mentioned, and (local) authorities were seen as unable to make such funds available. The only way projects were seen as contributing to financial sustainability was if they had trained local organisations in proposal writing and fund raising. Even if this would allow them to generate funds though, these would still be external funds and not necessarily a solution to the lack of financial sustainability.

#### **Conclusion 4: Results of different ARC projects lack aggregation potential**

The considerable variation in the selected evaluation reports' quality and the depth and detail of information, as well as the lack of reliable impact data, has hampered the process of synthesis, aggregation and comparison of results.

There is a large variation in the quality of the reports under study, which includes the approach, data availability, in particular reliable quantitative data related to impact, and use, the number of people interviewed, the subject and the level of detail. The discrepancy between outcome and impact level achievement has been detailed further in conclusion 3.

The reports do not contain information on the level of budget which is available for evaluation or endline studies but judging by the content and quality of the reports, and the estimated working hours that must have gone into it, the difference between allocated funds for the evaluation must have been considerable as well.

This makes comparison and aggregation very difficult, since many reports do not contain the needed parts of information but at the same time, missing the information does not mean that achievements were made or not made. The quality of evidence and attribution to the intervention was discussed in only a few reports, which makes it hard to judge effectiveness and impact. Impact data are often lacking, and findings based on anecdotal evidence, sometimes of less than ten respondents. As a result, the reader may get the impression that good achievements are partly the result of good descriptions.

It was assumed that all implementing consortia would avail of a good quality MEAL system, which as confirmed by this conclusion, does not always appear to be the case. The varying quality and use of these systems has created a considerable barrier for aggregating results in this study.

#### **Conclusion 5: Project effectiveness was reasonable to good at outcome level, but reported impact was mixed**

Most projects were effective when it came to achieving their outputs, and a good number of projects also achieved (their own) outcomes against plan, but there was less evidence of impact achieved. The latter was hampered by lack of data, subjectivity of data or a lack of baseline, missing links between various levels in the intervention logic, insufficiently SMART formulation of outcomes, and over-reliance on anecdotal evidence.

Under Human Security, many projects had struggled with defining indicators for measuring progress under Human Security, and the achievement against the projects' indicators was reasonable, apart from in Mali where the results had plummeted due to the deteriorated situation. Evaluators reported mostly perceived improved cohesion, reduced conflict and a better and safer future. Most found it difficult, however, to assess how many beneficiaries had benefitted and to what extent.

Under Rule of Law, most evaluation reports were positive about lower-level achievement such as having achieved legal assistance and counselling, improved awareness and knowledge about rights and how to exercise them. When it comes to tangible impact, a number of projects demonstrate actual progress in freedom of refugees and people having solved conflicts, but other projects have no such progress to report, since they do not have such data or did not assess behavioural progress beyond improved knowledge only.

Under Peace Processes and Political Governance, apart from in Mali, improvements were noted at output, outcome and impact level, which ranged from better knowledge, better CSO coordination

and enhance dialogue with local government, leading to a perceived decrease in conflict and more trust in the future. “Hard” achievements, however, such as new laws, were stuck at the level of drafting without security for future progress.

Under Social and Economic Reconstruction, lower-level indicators were achieved, and outcome reporting was mostly positive on improved livelihoods, increased incomes and started and growing small businesses. Reporting on impact, however, as in the other areas, suffered from constraints, leading to a mixed assessment. Related to the positive outputs and outcomes above, the evaluation reports noted increasing youth empowerment, confidence level, and in small business and income growth. Nonetheless, a less clear picture was observed in TVET and training of people looking for employment. What hampered a good achievement for more than half of the project engaged in this line of business, was the neglect of the importance of demand on the labour market, and the overreliance on sufficient opportunities for trained people. Where consortia had taken measures and studied the assumptions more closely, achievements were made.

### **Conclusion 6: The validity of ARC assumptions was very limited**

From the three assumptions underlying the ARC programme, two have appeared not valid, namely on strengthened coherence and the role of embassies, and the one on the implicitly assumed MEAL capacity of selected consortia was only partly valid. Project-level assumptions were scantily discussed in the reports.

The first one was on strengthened coherence: “Fewer projects in fewer countries would positively contribute to more coherence at programme-level”. This study sees this assumption as not valid. Internal coherence among ARC and other Dutch funded projects had been limited during the MTR, and this had not improved. External coherence, with non-ARC and non-Dutch funded interventions, was even weaker than internal coherence and reported only by very few evaluations. Only a handful of consortia had put efforts into coherence, even if they were present in the same country or region and working on similar subjects (the two projects in Burundi being a positive example). Dutch embassies in the project countries, who were supposed to contribute to this coherence and most of whom had been enthusiastic at the onset according to the MTR, had not been able due to capacity constraints or other reasons.

The second assumption was on engagement of embassies, that if DSH would engage embassies at an early stage, this would raise their involvement and enhance country-level ownership. This assumption was not valid, either. Whereas their engagement in supporting coherence had been limited, they had not been engaged much in other areas either, including MEAL. Even in the evaluations, embassy staff was often not interviewed and there was little mention in the reports of embassy engagement.

The third assumption had to do with the MEAL capacity of selected consortia, namely that consortia and their lead organisations had sufficiently robust systems in place, as MEAL capacity had been included as criteria for the ARC tendering process. This assumption was partly true. A number of consortia had adequate capacity and frameworks, but definitely not all, which translated itself among others in the varying quality of the reports under study. A comprehensive assessment could not be made, since only a part of the evaluation reports had assessed the quality of the MEAL system and framework. Five consortia were found to have a reasonably good MEAL capacity. For the others, shortcomings were noted in terms of mixing output, outcome and impact levels, indicators not being SMART, subjective measurements, incorrectly using outcome harvesting and lack of agreement between consortium partners. Though the embassies were supposed to have participated in field monitoring, thus enjoying the opportunity for rectification, this did not materialise.

As for project assumptions, few consortia had assessed those regularly to inform adaptations, and even less evaluation reports had assessed in how far the assumptions had remained valid.

## **Conclusion 7: ARC strategies have had less influence than envisaged on the effectiveness of interventions**

The influence of the ARC strategies for risk management, adaptive programming and MEAL have had less influence on interventions' effectiveness than was envisaged for different reasons. The MEAL strategy was too complicated for the large body of different projects in diverse contexts that ARC was. As for learning and adaptations, learning was not sufficiently structurally implemented and adaptive programming not well understood by consortia. Furthermore, consortia did not seem aware of a strategy on risk management.

The ARC programme was based on three overarching strategies. If working well, these would mutually feed into each other, however, this was not always the case.

One strategy was on MEAL (which would allow collecting and aggregating results from individual projects to derive the results and impact of the entire ARC programme. Even though the idea between compulsory ARC outcome and impact indicators, designed to allow aggregation of and comparison between different projects, is understood, in practice the projects were too different to make that happen. If the evaluations reported on this topic, they stipulated that the consortia saw the compulsory indicators as a burden rather than a help. They felt that these indicators were beyond their control and thus did not facilitate learning. A number of evaluation reports did not even mention the achievement against the compulsory indicators at all.

Another strategy was on learning and adaptive programming. The "global" learning agenda was one of the flagship components of ARC, and learning was supposed to inform and lead to adaptive programming. The Learning Agenda had not been implemented to its full potential though, not at the time of MTR, and though some improvement was noted in terms of a regional approach, the implementation was still limited. As a part of the work was done towards the end of the projects, the remaining scope for adaptation was small to none. Moreover, most learning was reported within projects, and not so much between projects or even countries.

As for adaptive programming, the lack of common understanding hampered progress, as most consortia dealt with it in terms of operational changes. Only a handful had understood what it meant and dealt with it accordingly. There was insufficient guidance and support available to implement and strengthen adaptive programme adequately.

The last strategy was on risk management. This study abstains from making any conclusion, since almost none of the evaluation reports brought up any finding or indication related to risk management.

## **Conclusion 2: Only one out of three MTR recommendations has been (partly) followed up.**

As per recommendation 1, consortia focused on their own results, but this was more done for convenience reasons than consortia actively following the MTR recommendations. The other two recommendations have not been followed. Nonetheless, most of the recommendations are still valid.

The first recommendation of the MTR on measuring context-specific results was followed to a large extent, but more by convenience than deliberately. The consortia found the ARC framework to complex and the indicators too difficult and not fully relevant to their own situation, and hence concentrated more on their own logframe, without really mentioning the progress against the compulsory indicators as such.

The second recommendation of the MTR, stronger alignment of the consortia with country-level frameworks to allow for more coherence, had not found fertile ground. Embassies had not become more strongly engaged, probably because their capacity had not grown. Consortia had not improved their approach, since they relied on their original design, where coherence and coordination often had been mentioned but without any concrete plans.

For the last recommendation, strategic use of the central programme, the part of the recommendation that was relevant for the second half of the programme has not been followed up either. The MTR suggested that the best-performing consortia would receive additional support to strengthen coherence, but there is no evidence that this has happened.



The recommendations are still seen as largely valid though, especially those that were forward looking, and meant for future programmes. These indicate more coherence, more local leadership and the design of a programme with an even stronger focus and stronger local leadership. These recommendations resonate with the recommendations of this study.

## 8 Recommendations

### Recommendation 1: On further strengthening coherence

To strengthen the potential for a future project to contribute to a discernible change in root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration, further steps need to be taken to achieve more coherence. A number of ways are suggested to do so.

- A potential new programme needs to focus on even fewer countries and fewer regions, if possible. This will allow to allocate larger budgets to each selected consortium, so that they are better able to create scale and a critical mass.
- A track record of working with various stakeholders in the country and region must be part of the selection conditions.
- Internal and external coherence must be better ensured throughout the duration of the programme. This can be done by requiring coherence to be an intrinsic part of the project proposal and clarifying with which projects and stakeholders such coherence is foreseen. Also, selected consortia, together with the relevant embassies, will need to come up with plans for engagement of partners in terms of roles and timing.

### Recommendation 2: On ensuring impact and sustainability

To be able to report on impact, impact must be achieved as well as properly recorded. More impact can be achieved when other recommendations are followed, notably by allocating larger budgets, and improving coherence. Also ensuring that assumptions are correct and adapting those on a regular basis would help improve impact. To know whether impact was achieved, however, it needs to be measured, which was rarely the case. As part of the MEAL system, conducting at least a baseline and endline survey must become obligatory. Also, subjective measurements and anecdotal evidence need to be avoided, even if the consortium may want to use these for PR purposes. Additionally, in order to strengthen reliability of data and allow triangulation, the project should collect additional data, for instance from stakeholders working in a similar subject area, or (sub)national data if available. The MFA should allocate budget under the programme for capacity building on designing impact indicators and measuring these.

To ensure that the impact is also sustainable, first of all it is recommended that the duration of a potential future programme would be longer than the current ARC, perhaps as long as ten years, coupled with the potential to make changes to the approach (in consultation with MFA) if the intervention appears insufficiently effective. Effectiveness needs to be measured at a regular basis to facilitate this, for instance by a full-scale mid-term evaluation and two smaller scale effectiveness studies in each project, which should be all sufficiently budgeted and planned for in the design of the projects.

This would give the consortia a fair chance to address the deeply entrenched root causes. The proposal must be built on existing mechanisms and work with local leaders, and engage local organisations as consortium partners, as this has appeared in the study to boost sustainability.

### Recommendation 3: On development of a ToC and indicators that can be aggregated in a future programme

This study agrees with the MTR, that the potential to aggregate results of any future programme should be strengthened and explored, but also simplified. In order to achieve this, the following points can be considered:

- Develop an overarching ToC in collaboration and agreement with all selected consortia.
- Assign one indicator per thematic area (if thematic areas will be part of the programme). Encourage consortia to design their own indicators in a way that they can have them feed into the programme indicators. These indicators should be allowed to have a certain diversity, but also be formulated in a way that facilitates comparison. A workshop at the start of the

programme would benefit the formulation of such indicators, ensure that the indicators match the needs of MFA and at the same time strengthen ownership of the consortia.

- Follow the indicators over the duration of the programme and make adaptations where needed.
- Allocate budget for strengthening the M&E capacity for consortium partners and embassy staff.

# **Synthesis Addressing Root Causes Programme**

*Terms of Reference for consultants*

November 2022

Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands



# 1 Introduction and Rationale

These Terms of Reference (ToR) present the outline for a synthesis of seventeen end evaluations of Addressing Root Causes projects.

## 1.1 Background

The MFA developed the Addressing Root Causes program (ARC) with the objective to support international and national civil society organisations<sup>1</sup> within Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries<sup>2</sup> (FCAS) in addressing the underlying causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration.<sup>3</sup> This was in line with the Dutch Development Policy "Investing in Global Prospects" (2018), which aimed to intensify efforts to address conflict and insecurity in relation to migration.

## 1.2 Objectives

Now that the ARC projects have come to an end, in 2022 the ARC partners have submitted their end evaluation reports to the commissioning department.

IOB wishes to make a synthesis of the seventeen available end evaluations, implemented by thirteen partner organizations, with the aim to draw conclusions as to the appropriateness of the ARC instrument in view of its intermediate and ultimate policy objectives and to draw generic lessons for future application.

The present study will first assess usefulness of the available project end evaluation reports for the present synthesis and then synthesize the program findings.

## 1.3 Evaluation Context

The present synthesis is meant to feed the 2023 Policy Review of the "Peace, Security and Sustainable Development" ambitions of the Dutch government between 2015 and 2021. The Terms of Reference for this Policy Review will be available on the IOB website shortly. In annex A you will find an overview of all the building blocks of this Policy Review, including the present study.

The set-up and scope of the Policy Review have been communicated to the Dutch Parliament in September 2022.

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<sup>1</sup> International and national NGOs were invited in 2016 to respond to the ARC programme's Call for Proposal by submitting proposals in the form of consortia.

<sup>2</sup> The MFA selected the target countries of the ARC programme due to them experiencing major migration-related challenges, oftentimes also simultaneously suffering from situations of armed conflict and instability. In the MFA's policy approval of the ARC programme (see Ministerial Order no. DSH\_2016.18114), the term Fragile States is used. However, Ecorys (= MTR consultant) will use the term fragile and conflict-affected settings, countries or situations, as this is commonly employed by the United Nations (UN), World Bank or the European Union.

<sup>3</sup> See Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Mid-Term Review of the ARC programme.

## 2 The object of evaluation

### 2.1 Development of the ARC program

The ARC programme was an important vehicle for the MFA to implement its Policy on Security and Rule of Law.<sup>4</sup> The programme was implemented in 12 countries.<sup>5</sup> The projects covered the thematic areas of:

- (I) Human Security;
- (II) Rule of Law;
- (III) Peace Processes and Political Governance;
- (IV) Social and Economic Reconstruction.

The ministry's Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid Department (DSH) is responsible for managing the ARC program at central-level. With the revision of DSH's Theory of Change (ToC) on Security and Rule of Law in 2018, the ARC program's thematic component on socio-economic reconstruction was placed under the Sustainable Economic Development Department (DDE), although the responsibility for managing these related projects, including quality assurance and oversight, have remained with DSH.

The tender process for the ARC program was initiated in early 2016. After completion of phase 1 of the tender process and review of the submitted project notes, 21 consortia representing 60 organisations (international and national) were invited to submit a project proposal for funding. The ministry awarded funding to all 21 shortlisted proposals. Project implementation began at the start of 2017. See Annex A for a summary overview of the projects funded through the ARC programme.

According to the 2019 MTR<sup>6</sup>, the MFA generic ToC and the logical model on Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) presented organisations with well-defined guidance on the policy and programmatic framework of the ARC program to steer the organisations through the project design process.

### 2.2 Programme objectives and intended results

The MTR describes the goal behind the ARC program as ambitious. While the program implemented projects as part of a diverse project portfolio<sup>7</sup> across multiple country settings<sup>8</sup> and within migration-oriented political-institutions settings, it needed to retain thematic and programmatic coherence to be able to deliver on the ministry's policy objectives and priorities. The ARC programme sought to address root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration in 12 countries, namely Afghanistan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Syria.

Context-specific Theories of Change determined the specific objectives of the ARC projects in alignment with the overall program objectives.

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<sup>4</sup> The ARC programme was developed based on and in alignment with the Theory of Change (ToC) on Security and Rule of Law (2016) and the Logic Model on Security and Rule of Law (2017).

<sup>5</sup> The countries are Afghanistan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Syria. It is to be noted that implementation in Syria was discontinued in 2018. The project in Syria was therefore not included in the scope of the MTR.

<sup>6</sup> Mid Term Review Addressing Root Causes (July 2020) Ecorys

<sup>7</sup> Out of the total of 21 projects, 5 (22%) focus on Human Security, 4 (17%) on Rule of Law, 7 (30%) on Peace Processes and Political Governance and 7 (30%) on Socio and Economic Reconstruction.

<sup>8</sup> Some countries included in the ARC programme face currently ongoing and active conflict (e.g. Afghanistan, Mali, Somalia and Syria), whereas other countries deal with legacies of violence (e.g. Burundi, DRC, Sudan and South Sudan), or are under significant internal and external pressure (e.g. Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon and Pakistan).

## 2.3 Programme resources

The programme had a duration of 5 years (2016-2021) and a total budget of EUR 126 million. Management capacity at MFA in The Hague was 1 fte.

## 2.4 Mid-Term Review and its recommendations

The MTR answered the overall question of "Whether the ARC program is on the right track to achieve its intended objectives." The ToR for the MTR highlighted the 'special design of the ARC programme,' which encompass a number of key aspects.<sup>9</sup> These aspects can be seen to collectively represent a set of "processes" through which the ARC program ought to be delivered. The MTR thus focused at the programmatic-level to understand how these processes, following their (intended) design, have been put into practice.

The MTR was mainly driven by a purpose to *learn* what has worked and not worked within the ARC programme. However, the MTR also had the purpose to contribute to an understanding of the accountability of the ARC program.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, the MTR provided the MFA with a number of recommendations aimed to improve the performance of the ARC program for the remainder of its implementation (2020-2021). In addition, the MTR outlined a number of recommendations for improving similar centrally-managed programs such as ARC in the future.

The MTR found that while the ARC programme has overall improved coherence in relation to similar previous centrally-managed tender programmes, alignment and coordination with similar projects implemented in the local contexts was still insufficient. Both the implementing consortia themselves and the Netherlands embassies in the ARC countries, which were given a pivotal coordinating role during the programme design phase, were too passive to ensure adequate country-level coherence. The ARC "global" learning agenda, one of its flagship components as a centrally-managed programme, has not yet delivered fully on its potential to optimise learning between consortia. With regards to relevance, the MTR found that while individual ARC projects were overall well designed to respond to the needs identified at the local level of end-beneficiary communities, the programme's responsiveness to institutional needs and policy priorities tended to favour upward accountability. With regards to efficiency, the MTR found that the current Results Framework and associated monitoring and reporting regimes are too ambitious and not context-specific enough to accurately capture and aggregate the programme's progress and impact.

When assessing "whether the ARC programme is on the right track", it is found that ARC-funded activities are at most able to support or catalyse longer term processes that address root causes of conflict and irregular migration. Even though ARC-funded activities are well aligned to the local contexts of end-beneficiary communities, the programme's responsiveness to country, or regional conflict dynamics is often lacking. While the ARC programme has provided the space for consortia to develop more equal and effective partnerships, the tender modality favours upward accountability and is inherently less sensitive to the needs of local CSO's in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). External country-level coherence with other donor-funded civil society

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<sup>9</sup> These include: (1) Results Framework ARC; (2) Design of the final project; (3) Learning agenda; (4) Adaptive programming; (5) Cooperation with consortium partners, the Ministry and Embassies; (6) Cross-cutting themes; (7) Thematic Helpdesks; and (8) Reporting. See ToR, p.4-5.

<sup>10</sup> The MTR will focus at the programme-level and will not focus on the results achieved on the ground through the projects funded under the ARC programme.

projects, programmes, platforms, fora or coordination mechanisms was found to be insufficiently prioritised.

The MTR recommended that reporting focuses on capturing context-specific results at the regional level in order to improve measurement of the programme's progress and impact. Alignment with country-level civil society frameworks, programmes, fora and mechanisms by consortia was to be enhanced to strengthen the programme's internal and external coherence. And finally, the MFA was to strengthen the strategic use of centrally-managed programmes through closer engagement with embassies to decide on local funding opportunities and implementing partners.

## 3 Purpose and focus of the assignment

### 3.1 Research aim

The implementing consortiums have conducted a final programme evaluation of the programme's effects with regard to (1) the overarching goal of the ARC Fund (Address Root Causes of Conflict, Instability and Irregular Migration) and (2) the country-specific goal(s) selected by the applicant/consortium. Evaluations have used the mandatory baseline of the program-outcome indicators that was done at the start of the projects.

The overarching question for the present evaluation is therefore whether the ARC program has successfully contributed to addressing the root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration. After the 2019 MTR shed some light on the programme's coherence, relevance and efficiency, the present synthesis of the program end evaluations is to specifically reflect and report on the programme's effectiveness, sustainability and ultimate impact.

Also, we want to find out the extent to which during the second half of the program the recommendations of the MTR have been given follow-up. They concern:

- Focus in reporting on capturing context-specific results
- Alignment with country-level frameworks and mechanisms by consortia
- More strategic use of central programmes as a lever to additional funding

Although the ARC programme as such will not have a direct sequel, ARC does not only connect to themes such as Human Security, Rule of Law and Peace Processes and Political Governance; it also encompasses themes like Social and Economic Reconstruction and Migration, that are relevant to other departments within the MFA. As such, the results of this evaluation will directly feed into the development of relevant new activities, enriching them with findings and evidence from ARC

### 3.2 Specific objectives

More specifically the synthesis is supposed to:

1. Assess the quality of the 19 end-evaluations for evaluating effectiveness, sustainability and impact. (inception phase)
2. Draw generic conclusions as to the effectiveness, sustainability and impact of the ARC program/instrument
3. Verify to what extent and how the MTR recommendations have been followed-up during the second half of the program;
4. Check the validity of the MTR recommendations in the light of the present synthesis and draw additional lessons regarding the coherence, relevance and efficiency of the programme.
5. Formulate lessons with a view to the development of similar interventions in the future.

### 3.3 Research questions

The main questions IOB wants to be answered are:

1. What has been the effectiveness of the individual projects and of the ARC program as a whole in reducing conflict, instability and irregular migration?
2. To what extent has the ARC programme allowed for context-specific intervention strategies or TOC that support local solutions to conflict, crisis and instability?
3. To what extent have underlying assumptions been validated at programme and at project level?

4. How and to what extent have the efficiency and effectiveness of the interventions been influenced by the ARC strategies for risk management, adaptive programming and Monitoring/Evaluation & Learning?
5. Have unintended effects been identified and, if undesirable, been mitigated?
6. How do the costs of the interventions and their outcomes compare among the projects?
7. To what extent have project exit strategies been based on (local) evidence.
8. To what extent have the interventions of the individual projects proven sustainable

## 4 Evaluation Methodology

### 4.1 Research methods (To be further elaborated by the consultant)

- Inception: Assessment of the usefulness of the available project end-evaluation reports for the present synthesis and then synthesize the program findings
- Desk review of program and project documents, MTR and end evaluations.
- Additional online interviews with policy makers, implementers and/or evaluators.
- Analysis/synthesis

### 4.2 Sources selection

The MTR report can be found at: <https://www.kpsrl.org/publication/addressing-root-causes-arc-programme-final-report>.

The end-evaluations are internally available at:

[https://247.plaza.buzaservices.nl/subject/DSH\\_ARC/Shared%20Documents/ARC%20Final%20Evaluations?Web=1](https://247.plaza.buzaservices.nl/subject/DSH_ARC/Shared%20Documents/ARC%20Final%20Evaluations?Web=1)

### 4.3 Limitations

To be described in inception paper

### 4.4 Ethical considerations

N/A as this is a document study.



## 5 Organisation and management by IOB

- a. IOB Rob van Poelje will be the leader of this project, commissioning the assignment to the consultant. He will be assisted by Bas Limonard and other colleagues at IOB.
- b. A contract for the duration of this assignment will be signed by IOB and sent in duplicate to the consultant. The consultant agency will send an invoice detailing the billable hours and consultants deployed.
- c. The leader of the consultant's team together with Rob van Poelje will monitor and ensure the quality of the research undertaken, in a weekly consultation.
- d. There will be regular contact between the main researcher of the contractor, and IOB, to discuss progress and possible adaptations in the plan and activities when needed.
- e. Quality control will furthermore be ensured by the IOB internal sounding board group (*Klankbordgroep*), which will be consulted periodically.

### 5.1 Consultant qualifications

- Strong analytical skills
- Demonstrated knowledge of the subject and type of interventions under investigation: conflict resolution, mediation, community organisation, job creation, gender.
- Ability to work self-reliant and deliver on time.
- Consultant should be independent from the organisations under review in present and in the past.
- Understanding and acceptance of this Terms of Reference

The consultant will be asked for an methodological offer, including an assessment of the limitations and indicating the person(s) to be involved, with their experience (CVs), and the number of days that these persons will be involved.

### 5.2 Budget

The budget shall not exceed 33,000 euros, including all costs, excluding VAT.

### 5.3 Timeline

The study is planned to start December 2022 and end on March 2023.

The consultant will put forward an Inception report with a proposal on methodology and analysis by December 10th 2022.

There will be weekly contacts between the consultancy's research team and IOB's team.

A draft report will be presented and discussed with IOB (and probably other MFA colleagues) by February 28, 2023.

## 6 Organisation

### IOB internal peer review

De intercollegiale toetsing wordt gedaan door de volgende IOB-staffleden:

*Tabel 5: Internal Peer Review Group*

Naam
Rens Willems
Bastiaan Limonard
Johanneke de Hoogh
Rob van Poelje (chair)

## Annex A: Summary Overview of ARC-funded Projects

Countries	Title	Organizations	Duration (years)	Budget (EUR mil.)	Results areas *
Afghanistan	A Bright Future	Cordaid / The Bayat Foundation / 1% Club / The Hamida Barmki Organization For The Rule Of Law (HBORL)	5	€ 5.8	2 & 4
	Sustainable Livelihoods, Improved Governance, and Functioning Rule of Law in Afghanistan	Nowegian Refugee Council / Stichting Vluchteling (SV) / DACCAR	5	€ 8.1	2 & 4
Burundi	Nyubahiriza 'Respect me'	Oxfam novib / Stichting CARE Nederland, Stichting Impunity Watch*	4	€ 6.0	1 & 2
	Building Bridges in Burundi	Stichting red een kind / Stichting Mensen met een Missie; Cord (Christian Outreach); American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)	5	€ 8.1	1, 2 & 4
DRC	Tinawezekana (It is possible) Enabling Government, Civil Society and Communities Addressing Root Causes of Conflicts in the Hauts Plateau de Kalehe	ZOA / War Child	5	€ 8.2	3 & 4
Ethiopia	Hope and opportunities for people in Ethiopia	ZOA / International Medical Corps (IMC) / Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) / Plan	5	€ 9.5	4
	Employable Youth in Ethiopia - Moving Towards a Better Future	Woord en Daad / Dorcas Aid International / HOPE Enterprises / Hiwot Integrated Development / Selam Addis / Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT)	5	€ 6.1	3 & 4
Jordan	A New Holistic Approach between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the International Community to deal with the Syrian Refugee Crisis	Mercy Corps Europe / Stichting Vluchteling	3	€ 4.7	2 & 4

Countries	Title	Organizations	Duration (years)	Budget (EUR mil.)	Results areas*
	Improving access to justice and basic services for Syrian refugees and members of the Jordanian host community	Norwegian Refugee Council / Justice Center for Legal Aid	3	€ 3.5	2 & 4
Lebanon	Fostering Resilience by Strengthening Abilities (FORSA)	Mercy Corps Europe	3	€ 4.5	4
	Enhanced capacity of Vulnerable Youth affected by the Syrian Conflict to access educational and livelihoods opportunities	ACTED international / Concern International / Hivos / Cesvi Overseas	3	€ 5.0	4
Mali	Human Security Approach to Address the Root Causes of Conflict and Violence in Mali	NCA / ICCO / Human Security Collective	4	€ 4.5	1 & 3
Pakistan	Improved Access to Fair, Legitimate and Effective Justice in Pakistan	Oxfam Novib / Saferworld	5	€ 5.0	2
	Market and Employment for Peace and Stability (ME4PS)	Helvetas / ACTED / Plan International	5	€ 3.8	2 & 4
Somalia	Restoring Stable Communities in Somalia	Saferworld / Somali Women Development Centre (SWDC)	5	€ 7.9	1 & 3
	Political Accommodation and Reconciliation in Somalia	Conflict Dynamics / Somali Youth Development, Network Forum of Federations	5	€ 6.7	1 & 3
South Sudan	Generating Sustainable Livelihoods and Leadership for Peace in South Sudan	ACCORD / Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) Dan Church Aid (DCA)	5	€ 8.2	1, 3 & 4
	Addressing Root Causes of Violent Conflict in Jonglei	CARE / Humanitarian and Development Consortium (HDC)	5	€ 5.9	1, 3 & 4
Sudan	Building Constituencies for Peaceful Change in Sudan	Saferworld / SUDIA	5	€ 6.2	1
	Enhancing stability through community resilience	ZOA / World Relief	4	€ 4.2	1 & 4
Syria	Strengthening Local Governance in Eastern Ghouta and Western Aleppo Countryside	LDSPS / Kesh Malek / RM Team	3	€ 3.6	1 & 4

Source: MFA/DSH (2019). Summary overview of ARC project

## Annex 2: Selected endline reports and their suitability for assessing effectiveness, impact and sustainability

	Country	Lead agency	Project name	Suitable for assessing		
				Effectiveness	Impact	Sustainability
1	Afghanistan	CORDAID	A Bright Future	Yes	Qualitative findings	Yes
2		Norwegian Refugee Council	Reducing Root Causes of Conflict, Instability and Irregular Migration Sustainable Livelihoods, Improved Governance, and Functioning Rule of Law in Afghanistan	No	Quantitative and qualitative findings	No
3	Burundi	Oxfam Novib	Nyubahiriza 'Respect me'	Yes	Quantitative and qualitative findings	Yes
4		Stichting Red een Kind	Building Bridges in Burundi	Yes	Quantitative and qualitative findings	Yes
5	DRC	ZOA	Tinawezekana (It is possible) Enabling Government, Civil Society and Communities Addressing Root Causes of Conflicts in the Hauts Plateau de Kalehe	Yes	Qualitative findings	Yes
6	Ethiopia	ZOA	Hope and opportunities for people in Ethiopia	Yes	Qualitative findings	Yes
7		Woord en Daad	Employable Youth in Ethiopia - Moving Towards a Better Future	Yes	Qualitative findings	Yes
8	Lebanon	Mercy Corps Europe	Fostering Resilience by Strengthening Abilities	Yes	Qualitative findings	Yes
9		ACTED international	Enhanced capacity of Vulnerable Youth affected by the Syrian Conflict to access educational and livelihoods opportunities	Yes	Qualitative findings	Yes
10	Mali	Norwegian Church Aid	Human Security Approach to Address the Root Causes of Conflict and Violence in Mali	Yes	Qualitative findings	Yes
11	Pakistan	Helvetas	Market and Employment for Peace and Stability (ME4PS)	Yes	Qualitative and anecdotal	Yes
12	Somalia	Saferworld	Restoring Stable Communities in Somalia	Yes	Qualitative findings	Yes
13	South Sudan	CARE	Addressing Root Causes of Violent Conflict in Jonglei	Yes	Quantitative and qualitative findings	No
14	Sudan	Saferworld	Building Constituencies for Peaceful Change in Sudan	Yes	Qualitative findings	Yes
15		ZOA	Enhancing stability through community resilience	Yes	Qualitative findings	Yes

### Annex 3: Details of ARC projects and their endline evaluation and survey reports

	Country	Consortium	Project name	Duration	Budget (million EURO)	Thematic areas <sup>28</sup>					# pages body	Which DAC criteria are covered	Brief assessment of report quality
						I	II	III	IV				
1	Afghanistan	Cordaid, Crosswise works, Asara, Civic, and Bright Point	A Bright Future	01.01.2017-31.12.2021	€ 5.8					Pathway 1: training to jobseekers; Pathway 2: business incubator; Pathway 3: accelerator for SMEs Pathway 4: strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem Pathway 5: strengthening rule of law.	42	All criteria, includes anecdotal impact evidence, no quantitative data (16 KII, 8 BNF) <sup>29</sup>	The quality of the evaluation is limited to reasonable. Evaluation is sufficiently critical, not very positive about results, efforts are acknowledged but results are not assessed as impressive.
2		Norwegian Refugee Council, Stichting Vluchteling, Danish Committee of Aid for Afghan Refugees	Reducing Root Causes of Conflict, Instability and Irregular Migration Sustainable Livelihoods, Improved Governance, and Functioning Rule of Law in Afghanistan	01.01.2017-31.12.2021	€ 8.1					1. Raise awareness of local communities on human rights and basic rights of citizens (training, awareness, counselling and legal assistance). 2. Provide training and capacity-building on formal (for example, judges) and informal (for example, members of Community Development Councils) justice actors, which included facilitation of exchange visits.	18	Full focus on impact, quantitative and qualitative (380 BNF respondents, 12 FGDs with justice actors)	This is a very short report, which contains very little useful information. It only looks at the effect of counselling and legal services under pathway II and not pathway IV. It is unclear whether more assessments have been done.
3	Burundi	Oxfam Novib, Stichting CARE Nederland, Stichting Impunity Watch	Nyubahiriza 'Respect me'	01.09.2016-31.03.2021 (two extensions)	€ 6.0					Objectives 1. Women, men and youth in 70 targeted communities experience an improvement in adequate responses from relevant community structures and authorities to guarantee security for all, irrespective of political or ethnic affiliation, or gender. 2. Women, men and youth in 70 communities have increased	39	180 respondents from various backgrounds in 3 provinces with a focus on storytelling	Quality of the evaluation is reasonable. The assessment used a combined qualitative and quantitative methodology, called Sprockler. Some of the opinions of respondents have been quantified, but quite a large part of the

<sup>28</sup> I = Human Security; II = Rule of Law; III = Peace Processes and Political Governance; and IV = Social and Economic Reconstruction

<sup>29</sup> BNF = Beneficiary interviews or surveys; KII = Key Informant Interviews

									socio-economic resilience against political and identity-based manipulation towards recruitment into armed groups or other violent behaviour. 3. For women, men and youth in 70 target communities, community-based transitional justice initiatives have contributed to social reconstruction and addressing historical legacies of violence, while national- level transitional justice mechanisms are being influenced to respond to citizens' needs.			evidence are quotes of beneficiary groups. Feedback from many key stakeholders is missing.
4		Stichting Red een Kind, Stichting Mensen met een Missies, Christian Outreach, American Friends Service Committee	Building Bridges in Burundi (BBB)	01.12.2016-30.12.2021	€ 8.1				BB was an integrated peacebuilding programme with many (sub-)activities Outcome 1 and 2: Social and economic resilience Outcome 3: Support by Local Committees for Good Governance Outcome 4: Support by paralegals/mediators and transitional justice	70	44 FGD s in 15 communities; 21 KIIs (10 (local) authorities, 9 BNF and 2 others Workshop with 34 BBB staff and interviews with 9 IP staff	Quality of the evaluation is very good, even if it is also long. It contains a lot of interesting and clarifying information, which many of the other reports lack. The evaluation is also sufficiently critical.
5	Democratic Republic Congo (DRC)	ZOA, War Child	Tinawezekana (It is possible) Enabling Government, Civil Society and Communities Addressing Root Causes of Conflicts in the Hauts Plateau de Kalehe	01.04.2016-31.12.2021	€ 8.2				Outcomes: (1) Democratic dialogue: Communities deal with conflicts without violence and, with support of Civil Society, constructively engage in dialogue with government to contribute to stabilization (2) Local governance: Local governments act and behave in such a way that the population develops a positive perception of their performance, services and management of local resources and thereby promote mutual accountability.	58	22 KIIs, one workshop with 5 organisations, 19 FGDs	The report is of good quality, well-structured and easy to read. Contribution analysis has also been included, which most of the other evaluations have not done, leaving the reader in doubt to what extent the intervention had been at the basis of achievements.



									(3) Improved livelihoods for women and youth: Empowered and engaged youth and women have improved their livelihoods through better and more equitable access to resources and opportunities.			
6	Ethiopia	ZOA, International Medical Corps, Norwegian Refugee Council, Plan	Hope and opportunities for people in Ethiopia	01.01.2016-30.04.2021	€ 9.5				Project is aimed at improving knowledge of refugee legislation for increased freedom to exercise legal rights and supporting market-driven local economic opportunities that correspond with youth aspirations, increased knowledge of and access to quality basic services, increased awareness of potential risks of migration, and access to trustworthy sources of information on opportunities in Ethiopia and possible destination countries – enabling these youth at risk of migration to make an informed decision.	41	431 BNF were interviewed through FGDs, 70 through interviews. 18 KIIs were held. A quantitative survey was conducted in 2 regions.	The quality of the report is limited. The quality of the English language use is low, and the executive summary lacks important information. The feedback on the intervention is very positive but hardly sustained by evidence. The report reads like an advertisement.
7		Woord en Daad, Dorcas Aid International, HOPE Enterprises, Hiwot Integrated Development, Selam Addis, Digital Opportunity Trust	Employable Youth in Ethiopia – Moving Towards a Better Future	01.01.2017-31.12.2021	€ 6.1				The project had three pathways: A. Communities support youth to be and become employable B. Employability is increased through qualified TVET and matching market demands C. Employers and markets express an enhanced demand for employable youth.	44	175 people (BNFs and KIIs) were interviewed in individual and group interviews	Very good quality report, well written, evidence base explained and containing all of the necessary information.
8	Lebanon	Mercy Corps Europe	Fostering Resilience by Strengthening Abilities	01.12.2016-31.12.2019	€ 4.5				Three outcomes: • Improving access to employment opportunities through market-led skills training courses for men and women (Outcome 1);	81	17 FGDs and 24 KIIs	The report is of good quality, but the writer has struggled with attaining the necessary level of detail and as a result, there are too

									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting the creation of start-ups and the growth of MSMEs through in-kind support and technical assistance (Outcome 2);</li> <li>• Building the technical capacity of both private and government-run vocational and professional training centers to provide sustainable high-quality training programs (Outcome 3).</li> </ul>			many details and the report is very long.
9		ACTED international, Concern International, Hivos, Cesvi Overseas	Enhanced capacity of Vulnerable Youth affected by the Syrian Conflict to access educational and livelihoods opportunities	15.05.2017-31.03.2020	€ 5.0				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcome Pathway A: Building the capacity of SDCs leads to an improved delivery of livelihood-related services</li> <li>• Outcome Pathway B: Improving the technical and soft skills of vulnerable individuals to ensure increased participation in the private sector job market</li> <li>• Outcome Pathway C: Improving the capacity of the private sector leads to growth and job creation</li> </ul>	31	18 KII 15 IDI; telephone survey with 350 BNF	Report quality is good and provides access to easily digestible information. The report provides a table with a colour coding for a quick overview of performance per DAC criterion/evaluation question.
10	Mali	NCA, ICCO, Human Security Collective	Human Security Approach to Address the Root Causes of Conflict and Violence in Mali	01.01.2017-31.12.2021	€ 5.4				There are 3 axes: (i)improving practices in terms of good governance and accountability (ii) building community capacities in conflict prevention and management (iii) developing networks enabling communities, civil society organizations and marginalized groups to participate in the various conflict transformation processes at national and supranational levels.	27	357 people interviewed in KIIs	The fully qualitative report is of limited to reasonable quality, it is sometimes wide-ranging with for instances quotes and definitions of DAC criteria being included/explained in the executive summary. Due to the lack of structure, it is difficult to get a picture of overall effectiveness, sustainability and other criteria. MEAL and quality not addressed. On the other hand, the report elaborates in a way that most do not, i.e., linkage to the

												thematic areas of ARC and an analysis of the assumptions of the project TOC.
11	Pakistan	Helvetas, ACTED	Market and Employment for Peace and Stability (ME4PS)	01.01.2017-30.06.2022	€ 3.8				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Outcome 1: Women and men from vulnerable groups (youth, women headed households and widows, disabled, conflict affected, displaced persons and host communities) enter into gainful employment</li> <li>● Outcome 2: Entrepreneurs/MSMEs are strengthened to use business opportunities for job creation and income generation</li> <li>● Outcome 3: The market environment is conducive to inclusive business growth</li> </ul>	38	58 KIIs, 88 BNFs	Whilst on the one hand the report seems to reflect a lot of information, it had used many sources and is easy to read, on the other hand it lacks criticism. Thus, it seems a bit like an advertisement rather than a thorough evaluation. This may be caused by the assessment being an internal review being done by someone who is linked to Helvetas with one independent expert.
12	Somalia	Saferworld, Somali Women Development Centre	Restoring Stable Communities in Somalia	01.01.2017-31.12.2021	€ 7.9				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Outcome 1: Communities and civil societies, including marginalized groups such as women and youth, work together across clan lines to resolve safety and security issues, advocate with relevant authorities for appropriate responses and promote cross-regional cooperation.</li> <li>● Outcome 2: Police and state institutions coordinate, share information, implement inclusive responses to communities' security needs and are actively engaging with Police Advisory Committees to discuss and respond to issues and concerns raised by the Community Action Forums, resulting in increased citizen-state trust.</li> </ul>	28	20 KIIs, 70 FGDs	Reasonably good report. Though the two thematic areas and related activities are quite complex to evaluate (more so than for instance TVET and skills training), the report demonstrates a good effort with mentioning of resources. On the other hand, the executive summary has an unnecessary level of detail, and the efficiency section addresses a number of issues, which do not belong under this criterion.

									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcome 3: National, regional and international policymakers reflect the security needs of local communities, in particular, the concerns of women and youth across clan divides, in policies and practices on security</li> </ul>			
13	South Sudan	CARE, Humanitarian and Development Consortium	Addressing Root Causes of Violent Conflict in Jonglei	01.01.2017-28.02.2022	€ 5.9				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcome 1: Empowerment of women and youth to pursue economic opportunities and diversify livelihood through the support of men and boys and increase positive relations between different clans and ethnic groups.</li> <li>• Outcome 2: Establishment of peace committees and peace clubs as key stakeholders for preventing violence, revenge and addressing conflicts in the communities and between clans and ethnic groups. Increasing the formal and customary justice and security actor capacity to deliver good governance.</li> <li>• Outcome 3: Aligning communities together to enhance social cohesion through implementing community micro-projects (Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) with a focus on building economic opportunities and organizing events that bring communities together.</li> </ul>	35	20 KIIs, 10 FGDs, survey with 627 respondents	The report contains some interesting information, especially coming from the survey with some background from KIIs. Still, it still contains quite some errors and inconsistencies, and it is not clear why the selection of topics for assessment was made – though this is also partly a shortcoming of the evaluation TOR. Efficiency was foreseen to be assessed but did not take place. A number of other topics were not included, i.e., coherence, quality of MEAL system.
14	Sudan	Saferworld, SUDIA	Building Constituencies for Peaceful Change in Sudan	01.01.2017-30.06.2022	€ 6.2				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcome 1: Local communities and civil society across Darfur and Eastern Sudan (including vulnerable groups such as women, youth, refugees, and IDPs) build local social cohesion, and work together to improve human security in their local areas.</li> </ul>	37	95 people were interviewed in 49 interviews (some group interviews, some individual)	The evaluation is of good quality, using a hybrid methodology combining process tracing, contribution analysis, and outcome harvesting. The description is well structured and well

								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Outcome 2: Darfuri and Easter Sudanese civil society and national civil society networks, organisations, and leaders (from inside and outside of Sudan) build solidarity and promote social cohesion with the wider Sudanese people by connecting local actors and priorities with national ones.</li> <li>● Outcome 3: National-level comparative analysis and research informs national, regional, and international advocacy messages and cross-border policy recommendations for addressing deficiencies in human security in Sudan and the root causes of armed conflict, instability, and irregular migration.</li> </ul>			balanced, as well as easy to read.
15	ZOA, World Relief	Enhancing stability through community resilience	01.01.2017-31.12.2021	€ 4.2			<p>Project aims at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The strengthening of inclusive community-based conflicts prevention and resolution mechanisms reduce the numbers of newly arising conflicts (prevention) and resolve increased numbers of existing conflicts</li> <li>● A sustainable reduction of conflicts over access to natural resources, including water and grazing land; and</li> <li>● Enhanced access to livelihood opportunities for vulnerable groups through a using market-driven approach.</li> </ul>	21	27 KIIs, 28 FGDs, 30 case study exercises and 3 workshops	The report is of limited quality. The evaluation follows a path of its own, which makes it difficult to obtain findings related to the questions in this study, or related to effectiveness, impact and sustainability. This cannot be blamed entirely on the evaluation since it was based on the questions as they were formulated by ZOA. The analysis has been done in a reasonably structured manner, but nonetheless, the findings section report does not follow the sequence and content of the questions, affecting the	



## Annex 4: Bibliography

### Project documents

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- ZOA, World Relief, August 2021. Addressing Root Causes Programme, External Evaluation. Enhancing Stability Through Community Resilience. South Darfur and West Darfur.

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- Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 July 2020. Addressing Root Causes Programme, Mid-Term Review. Final Report.
- Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law. 13 June 2022. Addressing Root Causes - Regional Learning Sessions in Uganda and Burundi Report.



## Annex 5: Research matrix

	Research question	Sub-question	DAC criterion	Assumption
1	What has been the effectiveness of the individual projects and of the ARC programme as a whole in reducing conflict, instability and irregular migration?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has been the effectiveness of each individual project?</li> <li>• How convincing is the evidence in the reports that the synthesis draws on?</li> <li>• How has the effectiveness of each project contributed to the effectiveness of the ARC programme?</li> <li>• Were there synergies, duplications or overlaps where more than one project in a country are under study?</li> </ul>	Effectiveness	
2	To what extent has the ARC programme allowed for context-specific intervention strategies or ToCs that support local solutions to conflict, crisis and Instability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What context-specific intervention strategies were used?</li> <li>• To what extent did these strategies support local solutions to conflict, crisis and Instability?</li> <li>• If they did, how was it achieved? If they did not, what was the reason?</li> </ul>	(Potential for) Effectiveness, impact and sustainability	Intervention strategies are described in the endline reports
3	To what extent have underlying assumptions been validated at programme and at project level?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the assumptions at project and programme level?</li> <li>• Can these assumptions be validated, partly validated or not validated?</li> </ul>	(Potential for) Effectiveness, impact and sustainability	Assumptions are described in ARC programme reports and endline reports
4	How and to what extent have the efficiency and effectiveness of the interventions been influenced by the ARC strategies for risk management, adaptive programming and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the ARC strategies for risk management, adaptive programming and MEL?</li> <li>• How and to what extent have these strategies influenced the efficiency and effectiveness of the interventions?</li> </ul>	(Efficiency and) effectiveness	ARC strategies for risk management, adaptive programming and MEL are described and available
5	Have unintended effects been identified and, if undesirable, been mitigated?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have unintended effects been identified, and if so, what are these?</li> <li>• Was conflict sensitivity investigated by evaluations and if so, what was found?</li> <li>• If yes, have efforts been made to mitigate them? Was this successful?</li> </ul>	(Potential for) Effectiveness and impact	Endline reports include descriptions on unintended effects
6	How do the costs of the interventions and their outcomes compare among the projects?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the cost per project?</li> </ul>	(Cost) effectiveness	Cost details are included in endline reports

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the achieved outcomes and coverage?</li> </ul>		Relative costs of projects are comparable Outcomes are comparable
7	To what extent have project exit strategies been based on (local) evidence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the projects have an exit strategy?</li> <li>• If yes, do the evaluation reports provide proof that this is based on local evidence?</li> <li>• If yes, were assumptions to the exit strategy valid?</li> <li>• If no, has sufficient attention been paid to sustainability after the project's phasing out?</li> </ul>	Sustainability	Exit strategies are described in endline reports
8	To what extent have the interventions of the individual projects proven sustainable?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will beneficiaries be able to continue using their acquired skills, knowledge and assets?</li> <li>• Has capacity of local partners been sustainably built?</li> <li>• Have funds been allocated by local partners or authorities for continuation of activities, started by the project?</li> </ul>	Sustainability	
	To what extent and how have the MTR recommendations been followed-up during the second half of the program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the most important MTR recommendations?</li> <li>• Have these been followed up?</li> <li>• If yes, how? If no, what was the reason?</li> </ul>	(Potential for) Effectiveness, impact and sustainability	Endline reports allow assessing changes after the MTR report
	Does the synthesis confirm that MTR recommendations were valid? Are they still valid for future interventions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With hindsight, how valid have the MTR recommendations appeared for the projects?</li> <li>• What MTR recommendations are still valid for future interventions?</li> <li>• If yes, why have they remained valid? If no, why are they no longer valid?</li> </ul>	(Potential for) Effectiveness, impact and sustainability	
	Can additional lessons be drawn regarding the coherence, relevance and efficiency of the programme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can be additional lessons from the synthesis study relating to coherence, relevance and efficiency?</li> </ul>	Coherence, relevance and efficiency	Endline reports are sufficiently concrete on these topics.

## Annex 6: Research phases and workplan

### Inception Phase

The inception phase has started off with an assessment of the available project end-evaluation reports, to study their contents and usefulness for the synthesis. This included assessing the quality of the reports, whether methods were mixed (quantitative and qualitative) or fully qualitative, and the extent to which the contents have a comparable content. This has led to the synthesis approach, that allows using both evaluations and endline studies.

### Data collection phase

The data collection phase will start with an in-depth desk review of the selected evaluations and end-line studies and the MTR report. The findings will be categorised along the research framework that was laid out in the inception report. Subsequently, an information gap analysis will be conducted, and if and where needed, some online key informant interviews with well-informed people (policy makers, implementers and/or evaluators) can be conducted to obtain missing information. It is expected that most of the information can be collected through the desk review, but that at programme level there may be need for collecting additional information.

### Synthesis and analysis phase

In this phase, the synthesis and analysis will be conducted, using the frameworks that had been drawn up and filled out with the findings. As a result of the nature of the reports and methodology used for the 17 selected report, it is to be expected that findings will not be available for each and every project for synthesis. Where this is the case, the consultant will use the available material, and make a note for which projects the findings are valid.

Throughout the assignment, the consultant will remain in regular contact with the IOB team of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Weekly meetings with IOB have been agreed, to discuss progress and decide on possible adaptations to the timing, approach and activities if and where needed. It is foreseen, that the consultant will need some support of IOB during the synthesis study. This may be among others for providing additional documents, for linking to key informant interviews, or for ensuring that the findings and process continuously match the needs of IOB.

### Workplan

The synthesis study will take place starting as soon as possible and is foreseen to last until 31 March 2022.

	Months																Total
	Dec/22				Jan/23				Feb/23				Mar/23				
	Consultant input in working days/week																
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
Developing approach and inception report, first desk review			4														4
Feedback IOB Inception Report																	
Analysis and report writing V01				4	4	4	5	4	4	4							29
Feedback IOB Report V01																	
Report writing next versions and adaptation to feedback												3	2	1			6
Executive summary and adaptation to feedback														3	2	1	6
<b>Total</b>			4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4		3	2	4	2	1	45
Input consultant	#																
Input IOB																	

## 7 Recommendations

### 7.1 Focus reporting on capturing context-specific results

Results reporting should strive to **monitor tangible progress at the local, country and regional-levels (if warranted)**. By “nesting” regional results frameworks into an overarching meta-framework and contextualising these using region-specific theories of change, centrally-managed programmes can still demonstrate upward accountability to parliament. Where feasible, this should already be done for the remainder of the current ARC programme. This should trump the current practice of reporting against prescribed outcome-level indicators in a “global” results framework. The MFA should ensure that for the remainder of the ARC programme, it is recommended to revise the reporting requirements<sup>179</sup> for consortia as follows:

1. Group ARC projects by 5 regions: **South Asia** (Afghanistan, Pakistan), **Greater Syria** (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria), **Sahel** (Mali), **Horn of Africa** (Ethiopia, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan), **Great Lakes** (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo).
2. For each region, have the KPSRL<sup>180</sup> facilitate a mapping of existing intermediate outcome indicators from all ARC-funded project logframes, and facilitate **regional theory of change sessions** with partners where a new layer of **region-specific intermediate outcome indicators** can be introduced.<sup>181</sup> Note that this layer should be lean (few indicators, and simple reporting/data collection requirements), and that indicators should resemble the existing logframe indicators as much as possible.
3. This new layer of intermediate outcome indicators would replace the reporting requirements for the compulsory indicators in the Global RF. DSH may decide to have partners report on compulsory Global ARC RF indicators once more at the end of the projects, in which case it is recommended to focus this last round of Global RF reporting on narrative reporting rather than submitting numeric values<sup>182</sup>.

This approach would reduce the burden on ARC partners to report against the compulsory Global ARC indicators, while increasing the opportunity to meaningfully aggregate data and comprehend change within a shared (regional) perspective.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, by ensuring that these new regional indicators are adequately aligned with intermediate outcome indicators from the project logframes, the contribution of specific ARC-funded project interventions to intermediate outcomes will be easier to evaluate later on.

<sup>179</sup> To the extent that the MFA is able to substantively revise the existing ARC RF.

<sup>180</sup> Starting with existing logframe indicators, and enabling the KPSRL to facilitate the process of devising region-specific frameworks (in the regions, together with local partner organisations), is in line with the original participatory approach to developing a suitable ARC RF, and will hopefully contribute to increased ownership of consortia over ARC results and reporting.

<sup>181</sup> The use of *intermediate Outcome-level indicators* will enhance the ability of local organisations to report on significant changes and developments more directly tied to achieved progress and results on the ground. The MTR considers it more feasible for ARC organizations to contribute to tangible results at the Intermediate Outcome-level instead of at the Outcome-levels defined in the Global ARC RF.

<sup>182</sup> Narrative reporting by partners on intermediate and long-term outcome results is crucial for performing a contribution analysis for the programme's final evaluation, but numeric indicator data that cannot reasonably be aggregated has limited added value.

<sup>183</sup> The possibility of aggregating results will logically depend on the type and level of interventions supported through ARC projects within a specific region, as well as the projects' contributions to shared results' areas.

For any prospective ARC successor programme, it is recommended that:

1. A percentage of the overall programme budget is allocated to **boost monitoring and reporting capacity at regional level by providing bespoke M&E technical assistance (TA) and capacity building services to partners and embassy staff**. Services could be provided from a regional base, and could be institutionally hosted by the embassies, with remote support from the KPSRL. Sufficient support should harmonise data collection practices for compulsory indicators, and where possible enable partners working in similar localities to experiment with joint reporting. Furthermore, services can be tailored to the needs of embassy staff responsible for monitoring projects to conduct data quality assessments (DQAs), or alternatively the TA contractor can be assigned to conduct DQAs. This form of TA is different from traditional third-party monitoring (TPM), which focusses more on output verification.<sup>184</sup>
2. As part of an overall living programme document that outlines in sufficient detail what the programme's delivery model is (including what stakeholders are specifically responsible for what tasks), **develop an M&E plan whereby roles, responsibilities and procedures for results reporting, monitoring, evaluation and learning are clearly explained and defined**. To facilitate monitoring by MFA or embassy staff, a clear monitoring regime with timelines, templates, and guidance notes would be advantageous. The initial investment required to articulate this well, and in congruence with all parties involved, will mitigate the risks associated with the type of ad-hoc monitoring activities<sup>185</sup> conducted for the current ARC programme.

## 7.2 Alignment with country-level frameworks and mechanisms by consortia

The effectiveness and sustainability of interventions supported through centrally-managed programmes require **strengthening the internal and external coherence**. Support to local processes must be **embedded in broad(er) civil society frameworks** at the local, country or regional-level in order to sustain progress and results over-time beyond the limited duration (3-5 years) of ARC-funded projects. For this, it is paramount for the consortia and embassies to increase their role.<sup>186</sup>

For **consortia**, it is recommended that:

1. Consortia should assume pro-active responsibility for the projects' coordination, coherence and complementarity, based on updated stakeholder mappings. Consortia should urgently intensify the collaboration and coordination between consortia. They should also link to projects and similar initiatives and efforts both within the embassies' project portfolio and with these supported through other actors.
2. Consortia should bolster the leadership of local partners, and integrate their understanding of the context, political dynamics and their networks. Local organisations should be empowered to articulate the proposed intervention strategy and design considered to be best fit to the local contexts. The project design stage should allow candidate consortia to develop a more systematic approach by mapping out what other partners are doing in the respective ARC countries, what possible synergies with other stakeholders exist, and how alignment with other

<sup>184</sup> One approach to a more comprehensive form of TPM that could be learnt from for a successor programme is the Netherlands-MFA funded "Third Party Monitoring and Evaluation Agent (TPMEA) Civil Society Fund South Sudan" (TenderNed-kenmerk 84332). Although this specific contract did not deliver the expected results, how the mandate of the agent was conceived and how it was intended to be integrated into the rest of the CSF programme's M&E system is an appropriate format from which much can be learnt for a possible ARC successor programme.

<sup>185</sup> Monitoring activities are hereby understood as field visits performed by second party staff (DSH or embassy) to verify and validate data that is being reported by ARC implementing consortia.

<sup>186</sup> Consortia received funding based on a number of commitments. In most of the case studies included in this MTR, these commitments were not realised, whereas this was a condition for the programme to succeed. In the approval memo to the Minister in 2016, collaboration between consortia was mentioned as the first condition to the success of an NGO programme in the field of stability: "(...) Based on lessons learnt, DSH is convinced that a number of conditions are important for the success of NGO programs on this theme: 1) good interplay between NGOs (...)"

governmental and non-governmental national level frameworks and coordination mechanisms can be achieved.

3. Consortia, with technical support from the KPSRL, should continue identifying shared learning needs, priorities and objectives at regional level, where commonalities are easier to be identified and learning exchanges are more relevant considering the similarities in contexts and (regional) developments. The KPSRL should stay the course to develop and deepen their regional approach embarked on since 2018 for the ARC learning agenda.
4. Consortia should maintain their interventions' strategy and design specific, focused and coherent. If structural adjustments are to be conducted for the remainder of the ARC programme or for successor programmes,<sup>187</sup> consortia should take caution in ensuring that project revisions only structurally adjust the design when warranted by changed circumstances and conditions on the ground. Adaptive programming must preserve the project's coherence and not induce further fragmentation by allowing "mission creep" or be conducted to respond to newly imposed policy priorities. Consortia should take caution not to duplicate other in-country initiatives. The MFA should develop clear guidance and parameters to outline under which conditions substantive revisions can be undertaken.

For **embassies collaborating on the current ARC programme**, it is recommended that:

1. If possible - given that embassies in FCAS are in many cases already understaffed - embassies should use their political leverage for ARC projects to maintain coherence and guarantee alignment with relevant country-level frameworks (wherever this is desirable and feasible).
2. The MFA should provide clear guidance and advance communication towards partners about prospects for follow-up funding (especially for socio-economic reconstruction activities), to help mitigate uncertainties regarding the feasibility of longer-term objectives.
3. For the remainder of the ARC programme, policymakers from DSH should become more involved in technical and thematic oversight and monitoring of the programme, which is currently fully performed by DSH's policy implementation unit. This will make the feedback loop between the BU and the policymakers more effective.

For **embassies collaborating on any follow-up ARC successor programme**, it is recommended that:

1. Intentions and commitments identified during the early stages of follow-up programme design are discussed in more detail during kick-off meetings (including allocation of specific responsibilities), and are reflected more clearly in subsequent MoUs.
2. Possible ARC-successor project designs are evaluated more specifically to assess alignment with embassy MACS. More weight (higher score) could be associated with this criteria in the tendering process.
3. More capacity is designated to effectively deliver the role envisioned for the embassies with regard to technical/thematic oversight, information exchange, and coordination.
4. A combination of more designated embassy staff capacity to monitor projects, with additional monitoring capacity in the form of technical assistance (TA) and capacity building by a third party contractor, could be considered to ensure that results are more diligently verified and validated.

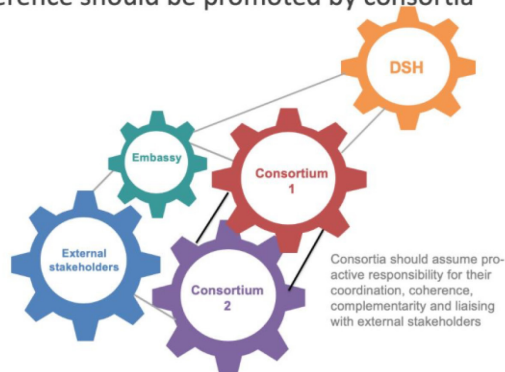
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<sup>187</sup> The MTR found that such substantive revisions had not taken place, although the MTR observes that this would be expected considering these projects operate in FCAS. The recommendation, however, is pertinent as substantive revisions, when inappropriately conducted, can contribute to further fragmentation by expanding the scope of activities beyond the original thematic and substantive remit of the project.



**Figure 3** Infographic: Country-Level Coherence Promoted by Consortia

Country-level coherence should be promoted by consortia themselves



### 7.3 Strategic use of central programmes

Central programmes should provide a **flexible funding mechanism** to make strategic and/or catalytic investments to support (local) processes within the thematic scope and parameters of the programme. The allocation and delivery of funding through centrally-managed programmes can thus be strategically used in contexts where critical local peace/development processes do not yet benefit from broad(er) support from national and international stakeholders. Providing funding to initiatives that support such processes in an early stage, if demonstrating relevance and tangible impact, can have a 'catalytic' effect to mobilise further resources. To achieve tangible impacts in FCAS, a long term approach is required. The MFA should ensure that:

1. For the remainder of the ARC I programme, it is clear that not all embassies in FCAS can help match and link consortia to other programmes, donors and multilateral organisations, for the sake of the continuity and sustainability of progress and results achieved so far. Therefore priority should be given to the consortia that are best at ensuring coherence at country-level (see previous recommendations) and facilitating local partners (and local actors) to assume leadership, in other words, those that have the best exit strategy. Embassies' endorsement generates trust, credibility and reputation in donor and other strategic networks.
2. Any future programming by DSH should be decided jointly, based on the country strategies (MACS). Embassies are to determine if and what would be the most suitable delivery mode to address local needs and priorities in FCAS. Embassies are closely involved in identifying the local needs, priorities and challenges and in identifying and selecting the local stakeholders most suitable and best placed to address these.
3. It is advisable to only select experienced consortia, having a track record of collaboration in the country context, given the start-up and other problems inexperienced consortia can cause. Organisations should be selected based on a proven and relevant track-record within the country context and based on the strength of existing partnerships with other local partners (in case of consortia) and (inter)national stakeholders with influence over the desired Outcome of the supported local processes. Experience and track-record (not only in the regional, but in the country context) should trump assessment criteria that reward innovative (or experimental) approaches of, for example, international NGOs that want to replicate their "best practices" from elsewhere in the world in that country.