

Bond Conflict Policy Group (CPG)

Submission to International Development Select Committee inquiry on the effectiveness of UK aid

May 2020

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This submission draws on the collective experience of the Bond Conflict Policy Group (CPG) in fragile and conflict affected countries. The CPG welcomes the International Development Select Committee Inquiry on Aid effectiveness, as the committee looks to contribute to the UK Government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence and Foreign Policy.
- 1.2. As the UK seeks to redefine its role in the world, it is an important time to make the UK's foreign policy and development assistance work to prevent conflict overseas, and help people affected by it. The CPG views the Integrated Review as an opportunity to assess, review and ensure cross-government policy, practice and investment are in place to address the root causes of conflict and protect people in the UK and vulnerable populations around the world. Government engagement with civil society will be crucial to this: programmes and policies are most powerful when they are shaped by a diverse range of civil society voices, and this must be done in an inclusive, meaningful, and deliberative way.¹
- 1.3. In particular, the Integrated Review is an opportunity for the UK government to
 - 1.3.1. reaffirm and strengthen the focus of UK aid on reducing conflict and addressing its root causes, being a global champion of conflict prevention, international norms and multilateral action, and maintaining its pro poor focus.
 - 1.3.2. ensure the administration of UK aid includes multi-year, flexible and scaled up funding for responding to rapidly evolving context and conflict dynamics. This should be through investing in standing peace capabilities, such as mediation expertise and partnerships with local civilian peacebuilders for example. Its approach should be both conflict and gender sensitive. The current COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on conflict dynamics is a prime example of why this type of aid is necessary.
 - 1.3.3. ensure that any definition of national interest is viewed through a shared security lens with an emphasis on the importance of international development, and within this conflict prevention as well as conflict resolution. This shared security lens should then provide a strong framework to improve UK cross government policy coherence and coordination, including a consolidated peacebuilding and conflict prevention strategy.
- 1.4. Given the postponement of the review by the UK government and the current situation with COVID-19, we urge the committee to be flexible with the insights they draw from any evidence received, and revisit it when the review process recommences, refreshing if necessary. This will be particularly needed if there are updated terms or scope for the review and considering the changing context of COVID-19. We stand ready as a group to update our own evidence if required, including bringing in any new information, and to be available for further input if helpful.
- 1.5. Bond has submitted additional evidence addressing the wider aspects of the effectiveness of UK aid, with specific recommendations that the UK should continue to provide at least 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) as Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) and respect the internationally-agreed Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) rules governing ODA. Bond is clear that all UK aid should be sufficient, targeted, rules- and values-based, effective, climate- and nature- positive, conflict-sensitive, transparent, and coherent and that the best way of ensuring this is for the majority of UK aid to be spent through an independent Department for International Development (DfID) with cabinet-level representation.

¹ For more information see [Ensuring civil society is heard](#), Bond, 2019

2. About the Bond Conflict Policy Group (CPG)

- 2.1. This submission has been prepared by the Bond Conflict Policy Group, a group of peacebuilding, development and humanitarian organisations that work in conflict affected contexts.² The CPG aims to promote best practice on what works to address conflict and fragility.
- 2.2. The CPG was pleased to see the inclusion of international development in the Prime Minister's commitment to undertake the Integrated Review.
- 2.3. Our submission responds to questions 1 and 3 of this inquiry, focusing the definition and administration of UK aid and how the national interest should be defined in relation to targeting UK aid. The content and recommendations in this document reflect wide consensus across the sector. However, this does not necessarily mean that all organisations endorse every point made.
- 2.4. The CPG's evidence is based on the group's combined experiences in a range of countries and engagement with HMG. The group provides advice and feedback to officials in Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), DfID and Stabilisation Unit on conflict related policy, and holds ongoing policy dialogues with the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) and the Deputy National Security Advisor.

3. The definition and administration of UK aid – who should be responsible, and accountable, for targeting and spending aid?

3.1. "The definition of UK aid"

3.1.1. Over many decades, the UK has been at the forefront of work on conflict issues. It has used its considerable financial and political influence, as well as intellectual leadership, to help support those trapped in crisis situations. We support an independent DfID, with its own Cabinet and National Security Council representation. We also support the UK's commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on aid to help alleviate global poverty, maintaining the integrity of UK aid as per its current definition, and the focus of 50% of DfID's budget in fragile states and regions. **UK aid can play an important part in reducing conflict and addressing the root causes and this is a critical component of its definition.** For example, work in Afghanistan³ and Somalia⁴ demonstrated that a combination of short term successes, through immediate economic relief and community service, plus an opportunity for longer-term investment in livelihoods and in education, had a significant effect on reducing willingness to join violent groups. However, this research and other programme evaluations⁵ highlight that unemployment is often overemphasised as driving young people's engagement in violence when injustice is the primary motivator.

3.1.2. **Investing in reducing the root causes of violent conflict through peacebuilding and conflict prevention approaches, as part of UK aid, has a measurable impact, is cost effective and is in the national interest.** Interventions to prevent violent conflict helps avoid destroying infrastructure, damaging livelihoods, and creating aid-dependence. Peacebuilding approaches also include establishing early warning systems and local systems to manage and transform conflict before it escalates into widespread violence. They can help create the conditions conducive for humanitarian and development assistance to be delivered effectively and cost efficiently in fragile and conflict affected states. Peacebuilding also helps address barriers to access to education for girls and young women, including intercommunity tensions and sexual and gender-based violence and promotes good governance, democratic participation and accountability of the political process by giving opportunities to hold elected leaders to account.

² The CPG is made up of over 100 organisations, with a steering committee consisting of nine organisations providing support for planning and implementing the groups' activities: Conciliation Resources, International Alert, Mercy Corps, Oxfam GB, Peace Direct, Saferworld, Search for Common Ground, Women for Women, and World Vision UK.

³ Mercy Corps (2018). ['Can economic interventions reduce violence?'](#)

⁴ Mercy Corps (2018). ['If youth are given a chance'](#)

⁵ Mercy Corps (2015). ['Youth and Consequences'](#)

3.1.3. We welcome the UK government's recognition of the need to deal with the root causes of conflict in its development and security policies as originally set out in the 2015 National Security Strategy. We hope that the upcoming Integrated Review will **reinforce this contribution of UK aid for longer-term efforts to address root causes of conflict and promote better governance**, as part of a whole of government response to working towards a sustainable vision for international peace and security.

3.1.4. In order for UK aid to maximise this contribution to international peace and security it requires a **strengthening of the UK's engagements with, and support to, locally-led efforts to prevent and respond to conflict**. Local communities and NGOs play a vital role in conflict transformation and sustaining peace, from mediating social tensions and providing for local security needs, to playing roles in democratising security sector policy making. Yet, they are systematically neglected and marginalised from the international peace and security funding ecosystem. A growing body of evidence demonstrates the efficacy of locally-led peacebuilding for preventing and resolving violent conflict; and underpins the building of sustainable and just peace.⁶ To be effective in addressing the causes of conflict overseas, the Integrated Review must assess the strengths and weaknesses of UK aid's current support for local peacebuilders and find ways to strengthen it. It must look at ways to sustain and where possible scale up UK investment in conflict prevention and peacebuilding which seek to reinforce local and nationally led efforts to respond to the drivers of conflict. Such support for local capacity for conflict resolution and violence-prevention may require choosing long-term goals over short term gains and adjusting expectations of impact accordingly.

3.1.5. As the UK strengthens its engagement with and to locally led efforts to respond and prevent conflict, this should correspond with a **stepping up of the UK's role as a global champion for conflict prevention and a renewal of its commitment to global norms, multilateral action and Sustainable Development Goal 16** on peaceful societies in its bilateral and multilateral engagement. The UK played a crucial role in the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions in 2015, ensuring that the framing for the goal went beyond the "absence of conflict", in recognising that positive peace⁷ contributes to development and poverty eradication. SDG 16 plays a particularly important role as a standalone goal in the opening of space for dialogue on contested issues such as peacebuilding, gender, justice, and human rights⁸ but also as a key cross-cutting enabler of the SDGs. The UK should promote SDG16 both in international policy discussions and through UK Government programming and resource allocation.⁹

3.1.6. The Integrated Review should ensure that the UK, including through its aid:

- **renews its commitment to global norms and multilateral action**, including continued respect of, and ensuring respect for protection of civilians, International Humanitarian Law and refugee law. This includes sustained political and financial support for:
 - the UN 'Sustaining Peace' agenda;
 - the peaceful, just, and inclusive societies elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
 - the Youth, Peace and Security agenda, as articulated in UN Security Council Resolution 2250; and
 - Full implementation, protection, and strengthening of the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.¹⁰

⁶ Vernon, P. (2019). '[Local peacebuilding: what works and why](#)'. Peace Direct and Alliance for Peacebuilding.

⁷ Positive peace is defined by a more lasting peace that is built on sustainable investments in economic development and institutions as well as societal attitudes that foster peace – it can be used to gauge the resilience of a society, or its ability to absorb shocks without falling or relapsing into conflict.

⁸ Saferworld (July 2017) '[Peaceful, just and inclusive societies: what role for the 2030 Agenda in the Horn of Africa?](#)'

⁹ Saferworld (2019) [IDC Enquiry Evidence](#)

¹⁰ Rethinking Security (November 2019). '[General election 2019: key issues for peace and security](#)'.

- actively promotes respect for universal human rights, democratic public participation, and a free and dynamic civil society, supporting individuals and organisations that work at national and local levels to act as SDG16 champions (in both government and civil society).
- supports multi-sectoral consultation to identify national priorities and build on or reinforce existing initiatives for peace, justice, and inclusion.
- promotes the participation of women, children, and young people at all levels in work on peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

3.1.7. UK aid should continue to **protect the pro-poor focus of development assistance**. Cross government strategies and plans must be transparent and accountable to parliament, and aid priorities must not be set by narrow national security objectives. UK aid should embed the leave no one behind principle through all its programmes to ensure that aid is focused on helping the most vulnerable and marginalised. In looking to not only protect but empower the most vulnerable, the Integrated review should ensure DfID and other departments spending UK aid:

- Maintain and scale up a commitment to women’s empowerment (as per SDGs Goals 1 and 5) and more consistently integrate it into economic, humanitarian and conflict UK aid approaches.
- Develop a coordinated cross-governmental strategy for protecting children from abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture. Mainstream children’s wellbeing and rights across the various policy portfolios.

4. **“The administration of UK aid”**

4.1. Building peace takes time; but it also requires **flexible multi-year funding modalities to respond to rapidly evolving context and conflict dynamics**. We support the commitment to spend 50% of DfID’s budget in conflict affected countries, however it is also important *how* the money is spent. Initial analysis of OECD-DAC figures indicates that in 2018 the UK only disbursed 3.8% of the total ODA budget under the OECD-DAC *“Civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution”* coding.¹¹ Funding models need to enable local actors to take a prominent role in long-term peace efforts.

4.2. **Through UK aid, further investment is needed in standing peace capabilities beyond current funding cycles:** this includes mediation expertise, partnerships with local civilian peacebuilders and funding models that support flexibility, innovation, long term approaches, and smart risks to respond to rapidly changing conflicts in between lengthy and bureaucratic procurement or grant cycles. The current COVID-19 crisis demonstrates how important it is to be able to pivot in times of crisis. We support the acceleration of the implementation of DfID’s Building Stability Framework, which offers guidance about how the department’s programming could help build long-term stability based on a series of progressive ‘building blocks’ and ensure interventions reinforce the conditions for peace in fragile and conflict affected contexts.

4.3. By introducing new resources into an area, or by altering how decisions are taken and policies made, humanitarian or development assistance – as well as international business investment – inevitably has an impact on peace and conflict dynamics in recipient countries.¹² Too often there is a risk that the UK’s actions unintentionally fuel conflict and gender inequality. It is therefore critical that **UK aid is administered in an approach that is both conflict and gender sensitive and that this is a ministerial-level commitment**. This includes monitoring changing dynamics and acting on conflict sensitivity risks from the outset of any programmes and allowing time and budget within programming to ensure this, as well as constantly reviewing existing conflict analysis methodologies (for example in light of COVID-19) so they are fit for purpose. Moreover the UK needs to ensure that all those receiving UK aid have information and expertise to make conflict-sensitive decisions, are supported to become/remain conflict sensitive and demonstrate its practice in their approaches, and are held to account on this. This may involve investing in further conflict sensitivity capacity building.

¹¹ OECD-DAC’s wider definition of ‘peacebuilding’ has 16 codes, including ‘Civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution’. Analysis of spending based on Query Wizard for International Development data.

¹² Saferworld (June 2015). [Conflict sensitivity: Saferworld’s approach](#).

4.4. **All UK aid in fragile and conflict affected countries should be conflict-sensitive, including the current COVID-19 responses. Likewise, the design of UK aid should be based on analysis of gender dynamics in order not to reinforce inequalities.** There is little indication in the current global response to COVID-19 for example, that lessons from the 2014-2016 Ebola crisis on the importance of conflict and gender sensitive approaches have been learned. Recognising how women and men experience both conflict and disease outbreaks differently is a fundamental step to creating and supporting effective policies and interventions. Experience from the Ebola and Zika crises,¹³ and emerging evidence from COVID-19, demonstrate a distinct effect on women, such as increased gender-based violence during lockdown or increased care burdens. The Integrated Review should assess to what extent these principles are being applied across the whole UK aid portfolio in conflict affected contexts.

5. **How should the national interest be defined, and what weight should it be given, in relation to targeting UK aid?**

5.1. **The UK's national interest should be defined through a shared security lens.** A shared security lens recognises that we can only achieve sustainable outcomes when we see the wellbeing of others as important as our own. At its core, this requires actively seeking to prevent conflict, rather than just responding to or suppressing it.¹⁴ Like the current COVID-19 crisis, many of the most pressing challenges - violent conflict, climate change and inequality - are not contained by national borders. They require intensive international cooperation as well as urgent action at home. Those most secure are only as safe as the most vulnerable. We would recommend that a shared security lens is applied to all Integrated Review policies and objectives, with a view to consider, and measure, the wellbeing of others as well as our own.

5.2. **The shared security lens provides a strong framework to improve UK policy coherence and coordination.** Globally, we want to see inclusive societies that can resolve conflict peacefully and an international system that focuses its resources on conflict prevention rather than crisis response. To ensure policy cohesion, the UK must prioritise international peace and security as a top-level objective of a transparent national foreign, development, security, and defence policy, with a corresponding conflict strategy, to guide cross government policy decisions. This should require all aspects and tools of the UK government, including trade, development, diplomacy, military deployments, stabilisation efforts and other security initiatives to contribute towards this, and have clarity on different roles and responsibilities. Greater cohesion across government should ensure that some of the worst examples of disjointed action in conflict situations, such as selling arms to one side in the Yemen conflict while supporting humanitarian and mediation efforts, become less likely.

5.3. **The current COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the importance of cohesive policy and action across UK foreign policy and development.** COVID-19's spread is outpacing the global response and threatens health systems and economies worldwide, undermining development gains. As always the most devastating effects will be felt by those already most vulnerable and there are likely to be severe implications for populations in both ongoing conflicts and fragile states. A challenge for the Integrated Review will be to mitigate sources of instability that COVID-19 will compound such as food security, resources competition and grievances with governments, while standing firm against states using the crisis as a pretext to impose restrictions on civil society, target human rights defenders and curb online freedoms. There is also an opportunity to capitalise on temporary gains in global peace and security, such as potential ceasefires in the Philippines and Yemen, while standing firm against states using the crisis as a pretext to impose restrictions of civil society, target human rights defenders and curb online freedoms.

¹³ Wenham, C., Smith, J., and Morgan, R. (2020). 'COVID-19: the gendered impacts of the outbreak' in *The Lancet* vol 395 issue 10227 p846-848

¹⁴ Cohen, J, Dumasy T., and Reeve, R (2020). 'Shared security: humans and humanity in national security policy' in Adam Hug et al (ed) *Finding Britain's role in a changing world*. Foreign Policy Centre and Oxfam