

## INTERNATIONAL ALERT

### Submission to the International Development Committee inquiry into the effectiveness of UK Aid

International Alert has worked for more than 30 years in over 20 countries and disputed territories around the world on peacebuilding. This involves addressing underlying drivers of conflict, while building capacity to manage conflict peacefully. It takes a variety of forms, from working on community security, preventing violent extremism, to reconciliation, encouraging greater political inclusion at local and national levels, gender, peace and security, climate and security, better natural resource management and work with businesses. We work closely with the UK government including DFID and the FCO/CSSF in a number of conflict contexts, as well as providing research and analysis on policy and operational approaches to promoting peace and security at the global level.

#### Executive Summary

1. This submission responds to whether aid delivered by DFID is more effective relative to other agencies by first extrapolating what effective aid looks like in 2020. It highlights a marked shift in where aid is being delivered – fragile and conflict-affected contexts representing the ‘new normal’ - and the resulting demands that will need to be met, irrespective of which agency is delivering assistance. This analysis signposts the type of issues that will need to inform the Integrated Review.
2. It suggests that DFID remains the best placed agency to deliver on the type of interdisciplinary approach necessary to deliver more effectively in conflict-affected contexts. It also still dominates the expertise within HMG on conflict sensitive programming. This comes with caveats that DFID will need to address, in order to maintain the effectiveness and sustainability of its assistance. The challenge of such change should not be underestimated.
3. At the same time there is a clear and complimentary role for other agencies to play in advancing aid priorities. In the FCO’s case, the value-add comes in terms of applying its diplomatic assets to shaping, for example, the SDG16 agenda while also becoming a home for an overall UK strategy on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. A role for the MOD is also flagged.
4. In exploring what constitutes the UK’s national interest, it highlights the opportunity for the UK to renew its leadership on conflict prevention and peacebuilding to both face down the immediate challenges posed by COVID-19 but also deliver more durable development, peace and security outcomes. To do this we need to deal with the root causes of conflict: those things that motivate people to turn to violence, whether that is political or economic exclusion, historic injustices or oppressive regimes. The submission concludes by highlighting the absence of a baseline for assessing what might be described as the UK’s peace impact.
5. It would be remiss not to devote some attention to the repercussions of COVID-19 which are likely to be game-changing. How the UK responds will shape both its development ambitions and national security policy and it is critical that this is reflected in the Integrated Review. Any effective response to COVID-19, whether emergency public health or post-pandemic economic and social recovery, must necessarily be informed by peacebuilding, while the Triple nexus already provides a policy and operational framework for a more integrated approach. International Alert’s *submission to the IDC Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus’ inquiry* (May 2020) details the nature of the impact from COVID-19 ranging from further erosion of trust in government and stigmatisation of minority groups to the

ramifications of a global recession, increased competition over resources, instrumentalisation by both governments and armed groups and the destabilising impacts of food insecurity. It also spells out specifically, why and how peacebuilding organisations should be involved in the immediate response to ensure proper uptake of COVID-19 counter measures while also working to avoid increases in violence in the immediate as well as longer term as a result of the pandemic. It also cautions about the potential for a de-prioritisation of peacebuilding assistance in fragile states to undermine both the short and longer-term efforts to promote development and prevent future pandemics, whereas embedding peacebuilding means better pandemic response delivered in a more conflict-sensitive manner.

## **How effective and transparent is the UK aid spent by the Department for International Development (DFID) compared to aid allocated to other cross-Government funds?**

### **What does effective aid look like in the current global context?**

6. There has been a shift in the aid paradigm. With the majority of the world's poor now living in fragile and conflict-affected states (expected to reach 80% by 2030), delivering aid in conflict-contexts is 'the new normal'. This will require a **strategic, technical and psychological shift** in the way the UK delivers its aid, accelerating and significantly deepening the work that DFID has done to date in this space.
7. In Fragile and Conflict-affected States (FCAS), the 'how' is as important as 'how much' when it comes to aid delivery. The UN and World Bank suggest that aid actors should '**target action and resources to arenas of contestation**: power, resources, security, and services. As the spaces where access to livelihoods and well-being are determined and where power imbalances manifest most clearly. Governments [and donors] can help to ensure that contestation is productive (nonviolent)'.<sup>1</sup> Currently, peacebuilding, which this approach reflects, is not the point of departure for most programming in FCAS.
8. The **mental leap to working more effectively in FCAS** is a challenge. The UN-World Bank 2018 Pathways for peace report summed it up thusly: 'in high-risk contexts, development planners should recognize that groups with grievances might not be the poorest and might not be in areas of high potential for economic growth, yet failing to make investments that could channel their grievances into productive contestation can lead to violent conflict, which can wipe out larger development gains'.<sup>2</sup> In this sense a peacebuilding approach is essential to the **sustainability** of all aid interventions in FCAS irrespective of the sector. This is only thrown into starker relief by the pandemic.
9. Moving from the strategic to the practical, the application of a **conflict sensitive approach to interventions remains essential**. Where care is not taken to avoid exacerbating conflict dynamics, and opportunity lost to contribute to positive peace, the consequences can be grave. In Nepal, remote and marginalised communities were left out of the 2015 earthquake response which resulted in sharpening the political divides that drove that conflict as well as further entrenching economic inequalities<sup>3</sup>. In Ukraine, the delivery of aid and support to IDPs who had fled the conflict, increased tensions between IDPs and host communities leading to

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations and World Bank *Pathway's for Peace: Inclusive approaches to preventing conflict* (2018), p. 281

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.international-alert.org/blogs/recovering-nepals-earthquake-its-not-only-what-also-how-matters> and <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/28/nepal-villagers-swarathok-aid-beyond-the-capital>

marginalisation of IDP communities<sup>4</sup>. Similar examples, related to both humanitarian assistance but also longer-term development can be found across numerous contexts from Sri Lanka to Afghanistan, Nigeria to Lebanon. The breadth and depth of the COVID-19 pandemic and potential scale of the response makes such an approach critical.

10. It is important to stress that we are talking about efforts beyond 'Do no harm' or specific peacebuilding interventions. There is a need for all sectors, whether addressing education, security sector reform, governance, infrastructure or in the case of COVID-19, healthcare, to actively contribute to peace in terms of helping, where possible, to address inequalities and other causes of conflict, bridge divides and foster social cohesion. Institutional actors such as the UN and World Bank are increasingly making clear though that there is no linear relationship between more development and more peace. There is a need for interventions to be deliberately designed to be peace conducive – thus the application of a conflict sensitive approach. **Leveraging the full suite of UK interventions in FCAS will be increasingly important as ODA resources come under pressure** from a potentially shrinking aid budget in the face of a COVID-19 generated economic downturn.
11. But there is a further need. There is no guarantee that multiple projects working independently will add up to more than the sum of their parts when it comes to promoting peace<sup>5</sup>. As suggested earlier, there is a need to house development efforts, in their totality, in a **broader peacebuilding framework** and one that **fully leverages the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding Triple nexus**. Some commentators have argued that, in treating conflict sensitivity as a purely project-based rather than strategic exercise, development and peacebuilding actors have failed to consider the degree to which conflict sensitivity requires nothing short of a transformation of the organisations that operate in conflict affected and fragile contexts.<sup>6</sup>
12. Those delivering aid need the **right skills sets** to apply a conflict sensitive approach, including the ability to undertake context specific conflict analysis, conflict sensitive programme design and monitor the impact of their work on conflict and vice versa. But such skills do not evenly exist across either DFID or its partners. There is a particular need to ensure that partners are not only encouraged to take up this approach through integration into designs and reporting requirements but also actively through **supporting partnering with peacebuilding organisations**. DFID has a strong cadre of conflict advisers. Increasingly though, selection of DFID's in-country **leadership** in FCAS will need to factor in an ability to understand and deploy a peacebuilding framework to inform strategy, relationship management and programme choices and performance reporting to overcome gravitational pull towards 'business as usual'. Similarly, there will be a need for political leadership from the very top of DFID.
13. The **humanitarian-development-peacebuilding (Triple) nexus** is an important vehicle for realising the ambitions set out above. The global discussion however has been slow to translate into action. Those working at the coalface of conflict and development have been faster acting. In Lebanon, for example, International Alert is working with healthcare NGO Amel Association, supporting health and social workers to deliver services in a way that actively contributes to social cohesion.<sup>7</sup> There is a need to redouble efforts to get the policy and implementation in

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Ukraine\\_Synthesis%20Report\\_EN\\_2019.pdf](https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Ukraine_Synthesis%20Report_EN_2019.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) Basics. A Resource Manual*. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Handschin, S. The Institutionalization of Conflict Sensitivity: an Organizational Change Management Process. in *Conflict Sensitivity: Taking it to the next Level*. Handschin, S., Abitbol, E. Allure, R (eds) SwissPeace Working Paper: 16. Feb. 2016

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.international-alert.org/projects/access-healthcare-tool-preventing-tensions>

sync. Side-lining this work will negatively effect the quality and impact of the immediate and recovery response to COVID-19.

14. There will also need to be **greater duration of and flexibility in donor funding and designs** to take account of rapidly shifting dynamics in conflict contexts. Possibly the greatest challenge though is in understanding, **measuring and communicating what impact looks** like in FCAS and on peacebuilding where changes in perceptions and behaviour are key to sustainable outcomes. As part of this, DFID will need to build up capacity to monitor longitudinal data to measure structural change in the drivers that keep people poor and in conflict. If progress around the **localisation agenda** is to be made in FCAS then consideration will also need to be given to risk appetite.
15. **What of SDG16?** The delivery of the 2030 Agenda writ large, will be significantly impacted by COVID-19. Its flow on effects including economic and political instability will be felt in many developing countries. At such a time the role the SDGs have to play in promoting peace becomes even more critical, but currently they are not on track to deliver in this respect.
16. SDG16's pledge to tackle inequality, corruption and poor governance is highly politically sensitive amongst some member states while at the same time considered possibly the most transformative by others. This tension was apparent from the start of the SDG negotiation process. As Goal 16 discussions encountered headwinds, an emphasis on peacebuilding and 'positive peace' was side-lined. Resistance by member states largely centred on concerns about the potential intervention in their domestic affairs under the bolder label of peacebuilding.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the usage of peace in Goal 16 leans towards the absence of violence more than in the direction of building or cultivating the conditions for positive peace<sup>9</sup>. Five years into implementation, the experience among SDG16 stakeholders is that attention to the peacebuilding element is lacking. In a number of settings SDG16 has been instrumentalised by national governments, pursuing the more securitised dimensions of the SDG16 targets while the 2019 UNSG report pointed to scant evidence of progress on SDG16 and even regression in certain areas<sup>10</sup>.
17. This has grave flow on effects for the rest of the SDGs. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) forecasts that as many as 82 percent of fragile countries are off track to meet SDG targets<sup>11</sup>. Fundamentally, there is a need for those who support SDG16 to return to its roots. SDG16 is over reliant on its individual targets and indicators rather than the application of its underlying peacebuilding approach that is more adaptable to the demands of individual contexts. There is also a lack of clear guidance around how SDG16 supports the implementation of the other SDGs and therefore practical guidance on how it can be integrated into the delivery of the other Goals. As one of the strongest supporters of SDG16 during the negotiation process the UK has the potential to help turn around SDG16 focus and performance within the donor community.
18. Applying all these approaches will help to deal with COVID-19 now and its future fall out. To drive effectiveness and impact the UK will however need to prepare for some very specific shocks that will likely flow from COVID-19 and have particular consequences for FCAS.

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<sup>8</sup> Smith, D. "Sustaining Peace and Sustainable Development" SIPRI Spotlight on Sustainable Development, 2017. pg. 13.

<sup>9</sup> In 1964, Johan Galtung famously distinguished between what he called positive and negative peace, defining negative peace as a society in the absence of war, and positive peace as what can occur when the structural causes for war have been addressed, or stated differently, when there is the presence of justice. These basic definitions have informed decades of empirical research and they continue to provide a common framework for understanding and addressing the barriers that conflict, violence, injustice and exclusion can pose to sustainable development.

<sup>10</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>

<sup>11</sup> ODI and IRC SDG Progress report, 2018. pg. 8.

19. The prospects of a global economic downturn could have significant implications. Some projections estimate an additional 40 to 60 million people will be thrust back into poverty.<sup>12</sup> The World Bank forecasts that growth in Sub-Saharan Africa will fall sharply from 2.4% in 2019 to -2.1 to -5.1% in 2020, resulting in the first recession in the region in 25 years. Wages of informal workers in Africa are falling by 81% and it is estimated that export and import into Africa will drop by 35%, resulting in a loss of US\$270 billion<sup>13</sup>. This will impact negatively the very large youth populations that are found in FCAS. A 2018 UN review on youth peace and security highlighted that ‘young people were already experiencing a loss of confidence in economic systems that excluded them as key stakeholders’. COVID-19 will also reduce remittances which represent a source of resilience for conflict-affected communities.
20. It will also impact on food security, exacerbating an already dire situation. The UN World Food Programme estimates that by the end of 2020 130 million people will be on the brink of starvation as a result of COVID-19. In the worst-case scenario, they predict famine in up to three dozen countries<sup>14</sup>, noting the top ten countries currently worst affected are all fragile or conflict-affected<sup>15</sup>. We know that food insecurity can quickly lead to conflict.
21. As with Ebola, COVID-19 will further erode trust in government in contexts where it was already weak due to the presence or legacy of conflict, making these challenges all the harder to face down (see International Alert’s submission to IDC Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus’ inquiry, May 2020 for further detail).
22. As bills come due for domestic COVID-19 responses, pressure to divert or reduce aid spending will increase. Additionally, a likely global economic downturn may see GDP, and, therefore, UK ODA shrink. There will be a **temptation to skew international aid**, including that intended for the SDGs, towards recovery of healthcare systems and economies. **This is a false economy in conflict-affected contexts** as failure to simultaneously invest in peacebuilding means healthcare interventions are unlikely to be sustainable where conflict persists or re-emerges. Failure to address ongoing conflict will mean potential pockets of virus remain.

### How do UK agencies currently perform against this approach?

23. In terms of the paradigm shift, **DFID possesses the building blocks, but work is still required**. The main challenge for DFID is mobilising **internal political leadership** to ensure that policy such as DFID’s Building Stability Framework is deeply embedded in the minds and practice of its staff. This is not a challenge unique to DFID. The World Bank has a strong central team working on fragility and conflict and has just released a new strategy on Fragility Conflict and Violence. Its main and longest standing challenge though is **ensuring that country programmes adequately implement the changes needed to work more effectively in FCAS**, which so far has been highly variable.<sup>16</sup> As with other donors DFID still faces challenges around localisation and more flexible designs and funding models for FCAS but is ahead of other UK agencies in this respect.
24. What sets DFID apart from other UK agencies is that it is the **only institution currently capable of working at scale in the interdisciplinary way** described above. It remains best placed to tie in the UK’s efforts on emergency relief, security sector reform, rule of law, service delivery and other sectors under a cohesive peacebuilding framework with the skills and expertise needed

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<sup>12</sup> UN University working paper, Estimates of the Impact of COVID-19 on Global Poverty, April 2020.

<sup>13</sup> McKinsey & Company, 2020 <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/finding-africas-path-shaping-bold-solutions-to-save-lives-and-livelihoods-in-the-covid-19-crisis>

<sup>14</sup> See WFP statement to UN Security Council, 2020 <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-chief-warns-hunger-pandemic-covid-19-spreads-statement-un-security-council>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-52379956>

<sup>16</sup> See Fragile Reforms, International Alert, 2014 <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/fragile-reforms>

for this approach. It compliments this capability with the **largest pool of expertise within HMG on conflict-sensitive practice** in the form of its conflict advisers and central conflict team within CHASE. DFID also has the tools necessary to plan for and respond to the fallout from COVID-19.

25. The CSSF, ostensibly administered by the FCO, has been building its capacity for a conflict and gender sensitive approach, measuring impact in conflict contexts, in theory, bound together by dedicated country strategies. It is not clear whether these classified strategies apply a peacebuilding lens. Nevertheless, recognising that it has been used in a more responsive manner the CSSF was, prior to COVID-19 looking to play a stronger role in long-term peacebuilding interventions and we would urge the CSSF to stay the course. The quantum of spending on peacebuilding is smaller compared to DFID<sup>17</sup> and is set to be quickly outpaced by a significant margin as the US begins to operationalise the Global Fragility Act which will support action on root causes of conflict in ten countries over ten years – a genuine innovation. Whether and how COVID-19 will affect this initiative is still unknown but planning is continuing at this point. The bottom line is that, while still working on its capabilities to maximise its effectiveness, **if the CSSF did not exist we would need to create it**. See Alert's submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry into the FCO and Integrated Review May 2020, for further detail on ways to strengthen the CSSF.
26. But the Integrated Review represents an opportunity to think more creatively about where the FCO's comparative advantage lies in the development space. There is a need for one agency (we suggest FCO) to more effectively join up, under a **cohesive cross-government strategy the UK's approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding** and aid will be a key part of this. It will also help ensure that ministries do not work at cross purposes. For example, counter terror operations can undermine efforts by other arms other UK government to build trust between citizens and the state to erode the appeal of violent armed groups. In this last respect the FCO has a role to play in cross-institutional risk management.
27. A key reason **SDG16 has failed to deliver has been a lack of political strategy**. Almost exclusively driven forward by development agencies, SDG16 requires dedicated diplomatic efforts where national governments are intransigent in the face of political and economic exclusion that is driving conflict.
28. This lens would be highly **complementary to DFID's role in shaping the UK's relationships more broadly**. Aid programmes are not purely altruistic or just a technical delivery mechanism. They generate influence and develop relationships with partner ministers and ministries such as ministries of Finance, Interior, service delivery agencies and the judicial system. They often help ride-out difficulties within broader bilateral relationships through keeping channels of communication open. In many contexts aid agencies are a symbol of the seriousness with which donors are taking partner government agendas, which in the vast majority of developing country contexts rank poverty alleviation in their top tier priorities.
29. The MOD can also play a complimentary role to DFID's community security and security sector reform work which we explore in more detail in our submission to the Defence Committee inquiry the Integrated Review (section 3 pp 36-38 April 2020). The thrust is that there is an untapped opportunity for the MOD to use its defence engagement as a vehicle for conflict prevention, moving beyond train and equip to shifting internal incentives, accountabilities and

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<sup>17</sup> According to the CSSF annual report £1.25 billion in 2018-19, 45 percent of this is non-discretionary spending. Of the remainder, the CSSF Annual report indicates that £59.3 million is spent on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. We would assess that this figure probably underrepresents the CSSF peacebuilding spend, as activities that tackle underlying drivers of conflict also fall into other areas of expenditure, such as, civilian spending on tackling violent extremism and governance and justice.

culture to mitigate the role that security forces play in many contexts in feeding conflict dynamics.

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

30. **The UK's national interest, in the context of the Integrated Review, should be defined through a shared security lens<sup>18</sup>. In aid terms, this means a concentration on human security.** We can only achieve sustainable outcomes when we see the wellbeing of others as important as our own<sup>19</sup> Indeed, it is incumbent upon us to prioritise our shared security given the global challenges we currently face, whether the current coronavirus pandemic, growing global conflict, an eroding international multilateral system, polarising technology, violent extremism, climate change, or mass forced displacement.
31. As COVID-19 has dramatically illustrated, these threats are not confined to national borders and with the majority of the world's poor now living in FCAS, **the UK needs to position its national security strategy and resources to deliver more durable development and security outcomes.** In short – we need to reach sustainable security.
32. **The way to achieve this is to increase the focus on conflict prevention and peacebuilding.** As noted, delivering aid in FCAS has become the new norm. The coronavirus pandemic further challenges effective aid delivery in what are already difficult and complex contexts. The secondary impacts of the coronavirus crisis such as economic shocks, resource competition, soaring inflation, and severe price rises in food and goods exacerbates the vulnerability of already fragile contexts. In 2011 we saw how a doubling of global wheat prices and a tripling of bread prices in Egypt compounded the dynamics that lead to revolution in that state. **The need for up to date context analyses, conflict sensitive aid and an increased investment in peacebuilding are more critical than ever.**
33. Historically the UK has been at the forefront of conflict policy. DFID commits to spending 50% of its aid budget in FCAS and dealing and conflict features as the first priority in the UK aid strategy. Similarly, DFID's Building Stability Framework lays out a road map for changing the way DFID does business, to ensure it meets its mandate in fragile states. The Integrated Review, is now **an opportunity for the UK to take stock, build on its successes and to identify further opportunities to be a global leader in peace and security policy and practice.** The UK can show leadership in championing peacebuilding and conflict prevention, as a means to shift away from a crisis footing to one that delivers long-term durable security. This is critical in addressing both the immediate and long-term implications of COVID-19.
34. Failure to do this will not only result in an ineffective response to COVID-19 but it will further undermine the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. If the body of the pandemic takes two to three years to subside then that essentially leaves half a decade. The mantra of 'leave no one behind' is already ringing hollow to those living in FCAS – all of which are currently off track to meet the SDGs. A flailing SDG16 agenda in combination with the reality that the goal of attaining peaceful and inclusive societies is being very much 'delegated' to SDG16 rather than integrated into the other SDGs, combined with an overemphasis on technical targets at the expense of tailored peacebuilding approaches, demands an urgent course correction. The coronavirus crisis will make this harder but the UK can be a leader in this space.

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<sup>18</sup> Bond Conflict Policy Working Group Submission to the International Development Committee inquiry into the effectiveness of UK Aid, 2020

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

35. The alternative is seceding what has historically been a comparative area of innovation for the UK to other states. As noted, the US Congress has approved a new framework approach that will tackle the root cause of conflict in ten countries over ten years, underpinned by new metrics and drawing together USAID, DOD and State lines of operation. While we would wish that such an effort be extended across the full suite of US operations in FCAS the way in which this dedicated funding focuses on root causes still places it ahead of most other OECD donors including the UK.
36. Fundamentally, whether related to COVID-19 or conflict, those most secure are only as safe as the most vulnerable.<sup>20</sup> We recommend that a shared security lens is applied to all Integrated Review policies and objectives, with a view to considering, and measuring, the wellbeing of others as well as our own.

### **Accountability of the ‘Government systems and structures’ recommended by the Integrated Review (including arrangements for parliamentary scrutiny)**

37. Unlike other areas of the UK’s overseas efforts, there are no reporting or accountability requirements around the UK’s contribution to sustainable peace and security outcomes. For example, there is no statement to parliament or regular review by parliamentary committees of what impact the UK is having. **While there are some indicators embedded within individual ministries there is no comprehensive picture of what might be termed the UK’s collective ‘peace impact’.** As a case in point, while we welcome DFID’s commitment to spend 50% of its budget in fragile and conflict affected states, it is unclear to what extent this is contributing to building peace or whether it is business as usual.
38. **The CSSF, FCO, DFID and MOD would benefit from a unified whole-of-government strategy for peacebuilding and conflict prevention.** The Building Stability Overseas (BSOS) strategy started to fill this space but was never fully successful prior to it being defunct, setting a vision but lacking the specificity and accountability framework to drive a more strategic approach that identified and tied together Ministries respective capabilities. **A clear and measurable strategy is the first step towards amplifying the UK’s peace impact and must be a priority outcome of the Integrated Review.**
39. **The Review can also help set the stage for greater accountability by articulating clearly what impact looks like when it comes to achieving durable security outcomes.** Setting specific benchmarks that would inform a quadrennial review could go a long way to maximising impact and informing national security policy.

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<sup>20</sup> Bond Conflict Policy Working Group Submission to the International Development Committee inquiry into the effectiveness of UK Aid, 2020