



Working to prevent
violent conflict

Saferworld briefing

Building Stability Overseas Strategy: challenges and opportunities

A review of implementation to date and recommendations for the way forward

Overview

The Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS), published in July 2011, is the UK Government's first cross-departmental policy framework for preventing violent conflict overseas. Saferworld believes the BSOS provides a strong vision for the UK's conflict prevention work, which builds on the best available evidence for what works in preventing and reducing violence and fragility. While considerable progress has been made over the past year to implement this vision, it will be a significant challenge to ensure that the approach outlined in the BSOS is consistently adhered to throughout the UK's overseas engagements. This briefing outlines the successes that have been achieved so far, identifies challenges that have arisen, and makes recommendations for the way forward. It is based on Saferworld's research and ongoing dialogue with government officials on BSOS implementation.

The following provides a brief overview of progress so far and challenges still to be met, which are further elaborated in the rest of the briefing.

Positive developments

The government has made welcome progress in the following areas of BSOS implementation:

- Institutional structures have been set up to facilitate better cross-departmental working and provide oversight of BSOS implementation, such as the Building Stability Overseas (BSO) Steering Group and the BSO Board.
- Cabinet Office, Department for International Development (DFID), Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and Ministry of Defence (MOD) officials working on conflict issues at multiple levels of government are

meeting more regularly in order to co-ordinate their work.

- The new conflict early warning system and Early Action Facility are reported to be working well.
- The cross-departmental Joint Analysis on Conflict and Stability (JACS) methodology has been agreed and is already being used to conduct conflict analyses.
- The findings of two recent reviews of the Conflict Pool have been accepted and their recommendations are already being implemented.
- The Conflict Pool is functioning well, particularly as a source of small, flexible grants for innovative peacebuilding work.
- The MOD's commitment to shifting its focus away from short-term 'stabilisation' activities toward upstream conflict prevention signals a welcome commitment to BSOS objectives.
- The government has consulted with civil society organisations on many aspects of BSOS implementation.
- Some progress has been made on identifying potential areas for increased co-operation on conflict issues with Brazil, China, and South Africa.
- The government is developing a new, more systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation of conflict prevention activities.

Remaining challenges and recommendations

The following are areas on which there is still progress to be made and challenges to overcome:

Cross-departmental working

- The relationship between cross-departmental structures such as the Stabilisation Unit Management Board, Building Stability Overseas Board, and Conflict Pool Secretariat is not clear: making publicly available an organogram of structures and an outline of roles and responsibilities for implementing BSOS would enable more effective scrutiny.
- The government should consider carefully and articulate what will be the role of the Stabilisation Unit in upstream conflict prevention, including its relationship with parent departments.
- While a review of the Stabilisation Unit has been undertaken in 2012, the detailed results have not been made public, making scrutiny and external engagement very difficult. As much detail should be made public as is possible without revealing highly sensitive information.
- While considerable progress has been made on setting up the structures needed for BSOS implementation, effort and resources must now be invested in implementing the policy elements of BSOS, such as integrating its progressive definition of 'stability' into decision-making and programming work.

Early warning

- The BSOS definition of 'structural stability' should be incorporated into all measures of conflict risk, including early warning analysis and the risk assessments undertaken as part of arms transfer licensing.

Rapid crisis prevention and response

- It must be ensured that the Early Action Facility is used not only to address the crisis of the day but also to address more slowly developing or less high profile conflict situations.

Upstream conflict prevention

- Understanding of and buy-in to the idea of 'upstream conflict prevention' varies widely across and within government departments: a communications strategy is needed to tackle this.
- A plan is needed for ensuring that engagements by departments other than DFID, FCO, and MOD in conflict-affected countries adhere to the BSOS approach.

- A common cross-departmental approach must be agreed on difficult strategic issues on which departments' viewpoints differ – this is more important than focusing on areas where there is already considerable agreement.

Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS)

- The need for the JACS process to be flexible for all contexts must not lead to key elements being left out, such as gender analysis.
- The government should ensure that wherever possible, conflict analysis is inclusive of the perspectives of communities affected by conflict, and consider using participatory conflict analysis processes as peacebuilding interventions in themselves.

Country strategies

- While joint country strategies are classified, it would be beneficial to find ways to ensure external challenge, including parliamentary scrutiny, of strategies for BSOS implementation in-country without divulging classified information.
- Most importantly, the UK Government should find ways to ensure that communities and civil society organisations in countries affected by conflict and fragility are supported and have opportunities to participate in the design and implementation of country strategies.

Conflict Pool

- Attention is needed to look at how small scale peacebuilding work funded by the Conflict Pool can be scaled up to be commensurate with the scale of the conflicts it seeks to address.

Mainstreaming gender

- A strategy is needed for ensuring that a gender perspective is mainstreamed throughout BSOS implementation, including in the JACS, joint country strategies, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Partnerships with others

- The UK should provide support for EU initiatives to translate upstream conflict prevention into practice and work to establish a broader base of political support for this work among other key member states.

- **The UK should share with the EU its experience of developing a systematic approach to conflict analysis and early warning to inform programming decisions in the next EU programming cycle (2014 – 2020).**
- **The UK should support the development of shared conflict analysis among EU Delegations and Member State representatives to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of European engagement in conflict-affected countries.**
- **The UK should encourage the US administration to adopt a similar vision of structural stability as that outlined in the BSOS and to prioritise upstream conflict prevention.**
- **The UK should aim to influence the US to adopt a progressive vision of security and justice sector development which prioritises the establishment of transparent, accountable, and responsive security and justice systems and puts the security needs of communities at the heart of the approach.**
- **The UK should encourage the US Government to take a consistent approach to conflict-affected and fragile contexts, including in policies around development assistance, arms transfer controls, and other related issues.**
- **The UK's work with China on conflict and fragility must move beyond co-operation on peacekeeping issues to look more at upstream conflict prevention.**
- **As part of its international outreach on BSOS, the UK Government should advocate for the inclusion of peacebuilding commitments in the post-2015 global development framework.**

Monitoring and evaluation

- **The new system of monitoring and evaluation of conflict prevention activities must avoid imposing an overly simplistic or unrealistic results framework which could distort funding priorities and provide results which are not meaningful.**
- **New mechanisms are needed for collating the lessons learned from the UK's conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities, in order that they can be shared with others.**

Scrutiny and accountability

- **The government should continue to foster and seek to broaden dialogue with civil**

society on BSOS implementation at the UK and country levels.

- **More opportunities should be made for debate on conflict issues and parliamentary scrutiny of BSOS implementation.**

This briefing now considers progress made toward greater cross-departmental working before going on to address the three pillars of BSOS.

Preparing government for joint working

The move towards greater cross-departmental working which is at the core of the BSOS requires a significant shift in the way that DFID, FCO, and MOD interact with each other when it comes to conflict issues. It has been necessary to ensure that the government has appropriate management structures in place to support and incentivise close collaboration between the three departments. Significant progress has been made in this area, including the establishment of the BSO Steering Group and BSO Board,¹ and initiating increased contact between departments in-country.

The National Audit Office (NAO) in a report on the Conflict Pool published in March 2012 criticised what it saw as inefficiency whereby “the tri-departmental structure duplicates roles with each department having representatives at all levels.”² However, while it may seem time-consuming to include representatives from DFID, FCO, and MOD in meetings and processes at all times, participation of all three departments at all stages of planning, implementing, and evaluating activities is crucial to ensuring continued buy-in. It is therefore very welcome that the Independent Commission on Aid Impact (ICAI) in its own review of the Conflict Pool recognised that “the high transaction costs associated with consensual processes are arguably a necessary part of inter-departmental working.”³

The role of the Stabilisation Unit

Given its status as a cross-departmental body with considerable expertise on conflict issues, the

¹ The BSO Steering Group was established shortly after the publication of the BSOS, bringing together the Directors General of the Cabinet Office, DFID, FCO, and MOD to provide senior level oversight of BSOS implementation. The BSO Steering Group is complemented by the BSO Board, comprised of senior officials from DFID's Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department, FCO's Multilateral Policy Directorate, MOD's Security Policy and Operations division, and the Cabinet Office, bringing in other departments when necessary.

² National Audit Office, *Review of the Conflict Pool* (2012), <http://www.nao.org.uk/idoc.ashx?docid=10be92b2-20a5-4c36-938acfb00e7d843&version=-1>, p 10.

³ Independent Commission on Aid Impact, *Evaluation of the inter-departmental conflict pool* (2012), p 11.

Stabilisation Unit clearly has potential to be a key driver of BSOS implementation. However, at present the Stabilisation Unit is only able to undertake tasks as requested by its parent departments, and is not able to proactively initiate projects of its own volition. Saferworld understands that a 2012 review of the Stabilisation Unit considered whether it ought to have the ability to proactively initiate work, but the idea was not taken up.

Historically, the Stabilisation Unit has primarily focused on taking immediate action to stabilise countries which are already in the midst of violent conflict, suggesting a role in implementing the second pillar of BSOS on 'rapid crisis prevention and response'. While it is important that the UK has this capability, the BSOS aims to encourage a shift of emphasis away from this type of short-term stabilisation toward efforts to prevent conflict in the long term by addressing its root causes. It will be necessary for the government to articulate what role the Stabilisation Unit, as a body which has the potential to take a truly cross-departmental view, may play in this work.

Saferworld notes that only the headline results of the 2012 review of the Stabilisation Unit have been made public.⁴ These made mention of the leadership of the unit, strategic direction, value for money, and efficiency changes, but aside from the establishment of the Stabilisation Unit Management Board and the appointment of a new director at a more senior level than the previous one, no detail has been given on what these changes mean for the Stabilisation Unit and how it operates. Saferworld suggests that, in the interests of transparency and accountability to Parliament and civil society, as much detail should be made public as is possible without revealing highly sensitive information.

The Stabilisation Unit Management Board is intended to offer oversight of the Stabilisation Unit by senior officials. However, it is not yet clear how this new board fits into the existing structure for BSOS implementation – for example, its relationship with the BSO Board, BSO Steering Group, and Conflict Pool Secretariat. Greater clarity on this issue would be welcome. Indeed, a published organogram and elaboration of roles and responsibilities for BSOS implementation would be helpful in increasing understanding both within and outside government.

The next section takes each of the three pillars of BSOS in turn, highlighting the progress that has been made so far and the challenges still to be met.

Pillar 1: Early warning

Saferworld understands that the new early warning mechanism announced in the BSOS has been developed and is being managed by the Cabinet Office, reporting regularly to the BSO Board.

Predicting where violence may break out or escalate is not an easy task, and much has been made of the fact that Western governments did not anticipate the Arab Spring. However, the definition of stability contained in the BSOS may be instructive in this regard.

Box 1: BSOS definition of 'stability'

"The stability we are seeking to support can be characterised in terms of political systems which are representative and legitimate, capable of managing conflict and change peacefully, and societies in which human rights and rule of law are respected, basic needs are met, security established and opportunities for social and economic development are open to all. This type of 'structural stability', which is built on the consent of the population, is resilient and flexible in the face of shocks, and can evolve over time as the context changes."⁵

The progressive vision of stability outlined in Box 1 is perhaps the most important element contained in the BSOS. While many of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region which have experienced uprisings over the past two years were widely believed to be stable prior to the Arab Spring, it is clear that they met few if any of the criteria set out in the BSOS definition of structural stability. This definition, then, is helpful in drawing attention to the underlying structural causes of conflict which may be present in countries which are not currently experiencing widespread violence, which is vital to any effective early warning system.

One example of where the BSOS vision of stability could facilitate an improved assessment of conflict risk is in the UK's arms transfer controls system. Presently, the UK and EU export licensing criteria require the government to refuse a licence for any arms transfer if there is a clear risk that it will, among other things, provoke or prolong armed conflict, be used for internal repression or external aggression, or be used in contravention of international human rights law or international humanitarian law.⁶ Prior to the Arab Spring, the UK and other EU governments frequently transferred large quantities of defence and security equipment

⁵ *Op cit* UK Government (2011), p 5.

⁶ UK Government, *Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria* (2000),

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/3849543/eu-arms-export>.

⁴ *House of Commons Hansard*, 25 October 2012, column 1024W.

to authoritarian regimes in the MENA region, many of which subsequently conducted campaigns of brutal oppression against peaceful protesters in their countries. The UK Government has argued that those countries were “not unstable”⁷ at the time when export licences were granted – apparently defining stability in this context as the absence of widespread armed violence – although they were clearly not stable in the most meaningful sense. Saferworld therefore recommends that when assessing applications for licences, they should be judged in light of – among other things – how far recipient governments can be said to meet the BSOS definition of stability.

Of course, while having systems for assessing the risk of violent conflict is helpful, its true value will lie in how well it is connected with strategies for responding to that risk. It is therefore vital that early warning is linked to the second and third pillars of BSOS: rapid crisis prevention and response, and upstream conflict prevention.

Pillar 2: Rapid crisis prevention and response

The government has now established a £20m Early Action Facility, designed to fund rapid responses to emerging crises as directed by the National Security Council. Saferworld understands that responding to the conflict in Syria has been a top priority for the Early Action Facility since its establishment. While it is in the nature of a facility designed for rapid disbursement of funds that it focuses on crises which are imminent or already underway, it will be important to ensure that the Early Action Facility does not only focus on responding to the most high profile crisis of the day, but that funds are also available for and attention given to responding to other potential crises which may be more slowly developing or less widely reported.

While having the capacity to respond to immediate crises is important, Saferworld believes the long-term value of the BSOS lies in its third pillar: upstream conflict prevention.

Pillar 3: Upstream conflict prevention

Saferworld has strongly welcomed the emphasis given in the BSOS to preventing conflict upstream, and believes this has the potential to be one of its most significant contributions to increasing the positive impacts of UK overseas engagements.

Saferworld believes that the commitment to upstream conflict prevention and the progressive definition of stability, when combined with the cross-departmental nature of the strategy, represent the core policy innovations contained in the BSOS. While the government has made progress in establishing the institutional structures needed to implement BSOS, it is vital that the government now invests as much effort in implementing the policy elements of BSOS as it has in the structural elements.

Box 2: What is upstream conflict prevention?

While preventing violent conflict might at times take the form of last-minute diplomatic interventions to stop disputes from turning violent or military action to prevent escalation, ‘upstream’ conflict prevention takes a different approach.

Moments of crisis are usually symptoms of long-standing tensions within or between societies. These tensions may be a result of, for example, political exclusion, lack of jobs, or inadequate or unequal access to basic services such as security and justice, health, or education. Upstream conflict prevention aims to identify and address the root causes of conflict, in order that societies have the greatest chance of becoming more cohesive, resilient, and able to manage tensions without resorting to violence.

While a common misconception of upstream conflict prevention is that it is suitable only in contexts that are ‘pre-conflict’, the defining feature of this approach is not when in the conflict cycle it takes place, but that it seeks to address the underlying drivers of conflict. In theory, interventions to prevent conflict upstream can be undertaken at any point during the conflict cycle, even at the same time as measures to address the symptoms of conflict are also being carried out.

Saferworld has found from research and ongoing discussions that, while the term ‘upstream conflict prevention’ has gained increasing currency within government, levels of understanding of the meaning of the term vary widely within and between government departments. While for some government officials upstream conflict prevention is a familiar concept which describes the approach they have been taking to fragile states for many years, for others there is a lack of clarity over what it is and how it differs from other approaches to conflict prevention. Some believe it is a good idea in theory but question what it might look like in practice, while for others it is an appealing concept but not a high priority or they simply don’t see it as being part of their job. For this reason, Saferworld

⁷ Vince Cable MP, oral evidence given to the Committees on Arms Export Controls, 7 February 2012, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmquad/419/120207.htm>.

has produced a short guide to upstream conflict prevention which can be seen as an accompaniment to this briefing. *Upstream conflict prevention: addressing the root causes of conflict* outlines Saferworld's suggestion of what is meant by the term and gives real examples of how it can be implemented in practice based on Saferworld's own experience.⁸

In order for BSOS implementation to be effective, it will be necessary to ensure that officials across DFID, FCO, and MOD at a minimum understand and buy into the idea of upstream conflict prevention and treat it as a priority in their work. If some actors were to be committed to taking an upstream approach to conflict prevention while others still adhered to the top-down vision of stability which has led to, for example, the UK providing support for authoritarian regimes in the MENA region, these competing approaches would likely undermine each other. Incentives will need to be found for officials to adhere to the BSOS approach, for example through its inclusion in job descriptions and performance objectives.

The challenge of uniting three departments, each of which have their own policy objectives, organisational cultures, and ways of working, behind the single vision set out in the BSOS should not be underestimated. The ICAI review of the Conflict Pool notes that strategic coherence is currently limited because "each department brings its own mandate and interests to the table" and that reaching consensus is so challenging that "those charged with its management have tended to shy away from harder strategic issues."⁹ However, the value of the integrated approach lies precisely in the possibility of facilitating consensus on those difficult strategic issues on which the approaches of different departments are furthest apart. The government must resist focusing only on the 'low-hanging fruit' of issues on which departments are already largely in agreement. Strong political leadership will be needed, and clear incentives must be provided for officials to prioritise shared BSOS objectives over individual departments' competing objectives. Slower progress in this area may explain why ICAI found "few examples of activities that were genuinely multidisciplinary in nature" and that "tri-departmental working was focussed on basic management tasks, to the neglect of strategy setting".¹⁰

Having discussed the three pillars of BSOS, the following sections take a more detailed look at some of the commitments made in the BSOS on specific processes and issue areas.

⁸ Saferworld, *Upstream conflict prevention: addressing the root causes of conflict* (2012), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/688>.

⁹ *Op cit* ICAI (2012), p 5, 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid* p 9.

Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability

The government has now developed the JACS methodology – a guide to producing conflict analysis which is jointly owned by DFID, FCO, and MOD. While the previous conflict analysis methodology, the Strategic Conflict Assessment, served as a useful tool, it was owned and used primarily by DFID and therefore did not provide a means of producing conflict analysis which was shared across departments. Saferworld has long called for a mechanism for ensuring the UK Government's conflict analysis is jointly owned by DFID, FCO, and MOD, which is an essential starting point for developing shared strategies which enjoy genuine buy-in across departments.

Saferworld welcomes the government's thorough consultation with civil society organisations during the development of the JACS.¹¹ We understand that the methodology is due to be published shortly and is already being used by country offices. While the draft methodology published for consultation was fairly detailed, Saferworld understands that the final version has been cut down considerably such that it is flexible enough to be used in a variety of contexts where different levels of analysis are needed. While the reasons for this are understandable, it is vital that the stripped down methodology does not exclude key elements of a thorough conflict analysis. For example, the government has committed to ensuring that the methodology includes women, peace, and security issues in its analytical approach,¹² and given the valuable insights which can be drawn from applying a gender lens to conflict analysis, this detail must not be lost through efforts to ensure the analysis process is 'light touch'.

In particular, Saferworld would highlight the benefits of taking a participatory approach to conflict analysis. Conflict analysis processes which involve marginalised groups and those directly affected by conflict and which reflect their views and perceptions can help to fill gaps in the understanding of conflict and instability and improve the conflict sensitivity of policies and programmes. It also highlights issues which may be neglected or hidden from expert level and donor-driven analyses. Furthermore, as Saferworld has learned from experience, taking a participatory approach to conflict analysis can be a peacebuilding activity in itself, building local

¹¹ For Saferworld's submission to this consultation, see Saferworld, *JACS – a new approach or SCA repackaged?* (2012), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/626>.

¹² UK Government, *UK Government National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security* (2012), <http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/global-issues/womenpeacesecurity-nap>, p 17.

ownership and trust, creating opportunities and capacities for reflection, action, and interaction.¹³

Saferworld recognises that there are challenges to undertaking this kind of participatory process, including cost, time, and security, and that it is not always appropriate, particularly when quick analysis is needed. Indeed, it carries risks – if done in a way that is not sensitive to the context and needs of the participants, it could actually do harm. However, where it is possible and appropriate, conflict analysis should not only be funded when it meets institutional needs for greater information and analysis but also as part of donor support for peacebuilding. Such an approach, which emphasises the process alongside the product, should aim not to be purely extractive, but to benefit local participants, as well as providing information for the UK Government.

Country strategies

The BSOS provides an overarching vision for the UK's ambitions in preventing conflict overseas; however, it provides little detail on how this approach will work in practice. In this respect, it is a vision rather than a strategy per se, which is perhaps what ICAI was referring to in asserting that the government "has not articulated how it will integrate defence, diplomacy and development into a multidisciplinary approach to conflict prevention".¹⁴ However, Saferworld would argue that the activities which the UK undertakes as part of its conflict prevention efforts should be tailored to individual conflict contexts, and it is therefore right that the government has chosen to set priorities at the country level and not impose them centrally.

Saferworld understands that as part of the roll out of BSOS, cross-departmental conflict strategies for individual countries or regions are being produced. While the strategies themselves are classified, it would be beneficial for the government to find a way to ensure external challenge, including parliamentary scrutiny, of its strategic approach in-country without divulging classified information.

Perhaps most importantly, it is vital that the communities most affected by conflict and fragility are able to participate in the design and implementation of conflict prevention activities in their localities. In the past, development, diplomatic, and defence interventions have been designed based on the perspectives of those

within policy communities in donor countries; however, there is increasing recognition that this approach has been ineffective. In order to have real impact, it is essential to understand and prioritise the needs and concerns of stakeholders including local communities in conflict-affected countries in addition to governments, the private sector, and other powerful vested interests. In particular, it is important to include the often neglected perspectives of the most marginalised groups, such as women and young people. Involving affected communities in designing and delivering responses can not only improve understanding of conflict dynamics but also ensure the local ownership of conflict prevention activities, which is vital in order for them to be effective. Saferworld therefore recommends that the government find ways for local communities and civil society organisations in conflict-affected countries to participate in the development and implementation of joint country strategies.

Conflict Pool

The Conflict Pool is now overseen by the BSO Board and provides one of the key sources of funding for BSOS implementation. In 2012 the Conflict Pool has been subject to reviews by both the NAO and ICAI, whose conclusions have largely been accepted by the government. Here we highlight one key finding which merits further attention.

The ICAI review found that "the Conflict Pool functions well as a responsive, grant-making instrument for supporting small-scale peacebuilding activities by local partners in conflict-affected countries" and that "in many ways, the Conflict Pool is at its best when it acts as a venture capital fund for peacebuilding activities. Its strengths are its willingness to act quickly and flexibly in complex and dynamic environments and its ability to identify and nurture promising conflict prevention initiatives."¹⁵ Saferworld concurs with these points, however, ICAI also rightly points out that the small scale of the activities funded by the Conflict Pool are not commensurate with the large scale of the conflicts they seek to address, finding that "Conflict Pool staff were often unclear as to what level or type of results they should aim for i.e. small-scale, localised impact on particular communities, strategic impact on larger conflict dynamics, or a combination."¹⁶ Saferworld would argue that there is considerable value in pursuing small scale initiatives for the reasons cited above, but ICAI is also right to point out that once an intervention has been proven to be effective on a small scale it is important to then identify ways to reproduce the same effects on a scale which is

¹³ Between October 2010 and March 2012, Saferworld and Conciliation Resources conducted the joint 18 different participatory conflict analyses around the world as part of the EU-funded People's Peacemaking Perspectives project. Lessons learned are summarised in Saferworld and Conciliation Resources, *From conflict analysis to peacebuilding impact* (2012), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/629>.

¹⁴ *Op cit* ICAI (2012), p 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid* p 1, 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid* p 7.

more likely to have significant impacts on the conflict more widely.

ICAI recognises that one of the major challenges of working to scale is identifying partners who have the capacity to work on a larger scale.¹⁷ Saferworld would argue that this is not a failing of the Conflict Pool, but rather a problem facing all actors who would wish to see conflict prevention activities carried out on a scale commensurate with the conflicts they seek to address.

A case in point is security and justice programming. Currently, the majority of development money directed towards security and justice work is spent through private sector consortia. While the private sector has a valuable role to play in delivering UK aid and such consortia are often good at delivering certain aspects of security and justice reforms (such as providing police training or building courthouses), this is not the whole picture. Skills and expertise in community engagement, participatory approaches, and civil society capacity-building are crucial for ensuring that security and justice reforms are also effective in empowering and supporting vulnerable populations to effectively demand the services they really want, and this type of expertise is more commonly found within the development community. While non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Saferworld are currently doing this work at a local level, major development NGOs have very limited engagement in this type of work, meaning that there are few partners able to deliver participatory, people-focused security and justice programming on a large scale.

In order to address this implementation gap, Saferworld recommends that the government explore how it could incentivise potential implementing partners who have the capacity to work at scale but do not see conflict prevention as part of their core mandate to begin engaging in conflict prevention activities.

Gender, peace, and security

It is welcome that the BSOS makes reference to implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security and the importance of supporting women's participation in peacebuilding.¹⁸ However, while the BSOS mentions commitments made in the *UK National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security* (NAP), Saferworld believes that gender, peace, and security considerations¹⁹ should not be

¹⁷ *Ibid* p 8.

¹⁸ UK Government, *Building Stability Overseas Strategy* (2011), p 26.

¹⁹ While the UK Government frames this agenda as 'women, peace and security', reflecting the language of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Saferworld advocates for taking a 'gender, peace and security' approach. For more on this, see Saferworld, *Leading*

siload in the NAP, but mainstreamed throughout the UK's conflict prevention activities.

In this regard, it is welcome that the government has committed to consulting with civil society on ways in which women, peace, and security can be integrated into BSOS implementation.²⁰ It will be a significant challenge to make sure that all government officials working on conflict issues – not just those with a gender focus in their brief – receive adequate training on gender as a matter of course, and to put in place appropriate incentives to ensure that a gender perspective is included in the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of all activities. Including gender analysis in the JACS process will be key to this, as well as ensuring that this translates into the inclusion of gender, peace, and security considerations in all joint country strategies and not just those for which bilateral action plans are included in the NAP (Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, and the MENA region).

Saferworld has welcomed the UK Government's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative and recommended that it should be seen in the light of the BSOS commitment to conflict prevention.²¹ Not only is sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) a direct threat to people's security, particularly that of women, girls, and other marginalised groups, it can also be a trigger for violent conflict. Preventing SGBV, therefore, can help to prevent further violence from breaking out. However, while addressing short-term triggers of conflict and protecting civilians from its worst effects are worthy goals, a new emphasis on this issue must not come at the expense of increased efforts to prevent conflict upstream by addressing its long-term structural causes. Nor must this detract resources from other important aspects of the UK's work on gender, peace, and security, such as women's participation in peacebuilding, on which significant progress has been made in recent years.

Defence engagement

Saferworld understands that the government will shortly be finalising its Defence Engagement Strategy, which will set out its strategy for all non-combat elements of defence engagement. In addition, the MOD is reviewing its stabilisation doctrine, currently contained in the JDP 340 document. Saferworld welcomes the government's willingness to consult with civil society organisations as part of this review. Saferworld understands that the review marks an intention to

the way on gender, peace and security (2011), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/588>, p 2-3.

²⁰ *Op cit* UK Government (2012), p 16.

²¹ Saferworld, *Taking international action to tackle sexual and gender-based violence* (2012), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/686>.

move away from the stabilisation approach taken in Iraq and Afghanistan, which was focused on managing conflict after it has broken out, toward an increased emphasis on upstream conflict prevention. This shift is very welcome, and Saferworld looks forward to working with the MOD on defining more clearly the role of the defence community in upstream conflict prevention.

Partnerships with others

The BSOS rightly points out that working in partnership with others is critical to the UK's success in promoting an effective, integrated approach to building stability and preventing conflict. The following sections consider how some of these key partnerships can be developed.

EU

The UK Government regards the EU as a key partner when it comes to conflict prevention. All three pillars of the BSOS address areas which are also priorities for the EU. However, more could be done to ensure that the EU is pursuing a vision for conflict prevention which is aligned with that envisaged by the UK in the BSOS. The commitment made in the Lisbon Treaty to achieving a more consistent approach to external action provides a real opportunity for the UK to influence and support relevant EU processes and initiatives, particularly as planning for the next programming cycle (2014-20) is underway. The UK has a great deal to contribute to the EU in terms of experience and expertise on conflict issues and should see influencing the EU as an important means of increasing the impact of the BSOS.

Throughout the last decade, the EU has made ambitious commitments to ensure its external engagements are driven by conflict prevention objectives. While early warning was enshrined as one of the building blocks of this agenda, Saferworld research has found that it does not currently have an early warning 'system' as such.²² Undertaking conflict analysis has not been standard practice, has not been done in a systematic way, and is often disconnected from decision-making processes. While the EU also has a wide range of response options at its disposal, their potential to address structural and proximate causes and triggers of conflicts and to support peacebuilding and statebuilding has not been well explored. In this regard, the EU could benefit from the UK's experience in conducting conflict analysis and mainstreaming conflict-sensitive approaches. The UK could also support the process of building shared conflict analysis among EU Delegations

and Member States' representatives in conflict-affected countries, which is fundamental to fostering more effective joint European engagement.

Momentum around upstream conflict prevention has been revived at the EU level, particularly through the work of some dedicated structures in the External Action Service and the European Commission. However, support will be needed from key Member States such as the UK to maintain this momentum and ensure that policy commitments are translated into practice.

USA

There is positive progress in Washington on conflict prevention activities, including the 2011 publication of the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Defence Review (QDDR) and early signs of its implementation, such as the establishment and ongoing consolidation of the Bureau for Conflict and Stabilisation Operations (CSO). Saferworld has shared its experiences and lessons learned on working with local stakeholders through participatory approaches to conflict analysis with the CSO Bureau, and there are many more areas on which UK-US collaboration may be beneficial. For example, Saferworld would urge the UK Government to encourage the US administration to adopt a similar vision of structural stability as that outlined in the BSOS and to prioritise upstream conflict prevention in its approach to conflict-affected and fragile contexts. It could also work to ensure that a progressive vision of security and justice sector development is adopted which prioritises the establishment of transparent, accountable, and responsive security and justice systems and puts the security needs of communities at the heart of the approach. The UK should also encourage the US Government to ensure that the efforts of the CSO Bureau are supported by consistent action across the US Government such that policies around development assistance, arms transfer controls, and other related issues are coherent with the integrated approach to conflict-affected and fragile countries outlined in the QDDR.

Emerging powers

The BSOS commits the government to developing 'prevention partnerships' with emerging powers such as Brazil, China, India, South Africa, and the Gulf countries. Given the increasingly important role that these and other emerging countries are already playing in conflict-affected countries, this is a vital part of the UK's conflict prevention work.

Saferworld understands that progress has been made in identifying areas for potential co-operation with Brazil, South Africa, and China. While the

²² See, for instance, Sébastien Babaud, *Towards an effective EU early warning system*, 20 August 2012, <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/news-and-views/comment/51>.

UK's relationship with China on peace and security issues in the past has tended to revolve around peacekeeping, Saferworld has identified further opportunities and challenges for engaging with China in its 2012 report *China and conflict-affected states: between principle and pragmatism*.²³

In particular, Saferworld recommends that UK commitments to conflict prevention, good governance, and human rights should not be sidelined in favour of geopolitical interests and competition with China. Avoiding polarisation between China and the West, the UK and China should seek to build on their shared concern for stability in conflict-affected states, engaging in dialogue on what is meant by 'stability' and how this is applied. China is undergoing a period of policy development as it engages more on issues of peace and security, and the UK and others should take advantage of this opportunity to help shape China's approach in conflict-affected states.

Multilateral partnerships: the post-2015 UN global development framework

The BSOS states that the government will "work more closely in partnership with international and multilateral organisations encouraging them to take an integrated approach to building stability and preventing conflict."²⁴ This commitment is very welcome, and Saferworld suggests that discussions on the global development framework to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after 2015, which are quickly gaining momentum, present a crucially important opportunity to do this.

It is vital that attention is drawn to the fact that no conflict-affected or fragile state has achieved, or is set to achieve, a single MDG. The UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda has argued that "violence and fragility have become the largest obstacle to the MDGs".²⁵ The BSOS makes clear that preventing and reducing violent conflict is vital to achieving sustainable development. It is therefore incumbent on the UK Government to advocate for the post-2015 framework to include commitments to help prevent conflict and fragility by addressing their root causes.

With this in mind, Saferworld compared six well-known and credible peacebuilding frameworks and found that there is a considerable degree of

agreement among them on what are the most important building blocks for peace.²⁶ While they are framed in different ways, the following seven issue areas appear repeatedly across the six frameworks:

- All social groups have access to decent livelihoods.
- All social groups can participate in the decisions that affect society.
- All social groups have equal access to justice.
- All social groups have access to fair, accountable social service delivery.
- All social groups feel secure.
- All states are able to manage revenues and perform core functions effectively and accountably.
- The international community is effectively addressing the external stresses that lead to conflict.

It is notable that the BSOS also identifies most of these as crucial to building peaceful, stable societies. Saferworld would strongly encourage the UK Government to advocate for the inclusion of these issue areas in the post-2015 development framework as part of the international outreach which was identified as a priority in the BSOS.

Monitoring and evaluation

In the BSOS, the government expressed its intention to "make a step change in measuring our impact" and to "implement a systematic cross-government reporting framework that is consistent across Posts conducting activity supported by the Conflict Pool so that we can measure our impact across regions."²⁷ In July 2012, the government stated that it was in the process of putting in place programme-level monitoring/reporting templates against which progress towards delivering results can be assessed.²⁸

As the government designs this template, it should be mindful of the risks of imposing an inappropriate or overly simplistic results framework on conflict prevention activities. As ICAI recognises, "a poorly designed results management system might have a number of unintended consequences, such as stifling risk-taking, imposing unrealistic time frames

²³ Saferworld, *China and conflict-affected states: between principle and pragmatism* (2012), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/612>.

²⁴ *Op cit* UK Government (2011), p 30.

²⁵ UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, *Peace and security thematic think piece* (2012), p 3. Signatories include 60 UN agencies.

²⁶ Saferworld, *Approaching post-2015 from a peace perspective* (2012), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/680>.

²⁷ *Op cit* UK Government (2011), p 33.

²⁸ UK Government, *Joint FCO, DFID and MOD Management Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations on: Evaluation of the Inter-Departmental Conflict Pool* (2012), <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2011/12/July-2012-Joint-Management-Response-to-ICAI-Conflict-Pool-Report.pdf>

or pushing programme teams to focus on results that are measurable rather than meaningful.”²⁹

ICAI’s finding that the Conflict Pool has no formal mechanism for collecting and sharing lessons and experiences is of concern, particularly as the BSOS outlines the government’s objective of strengthening the evidence base for what works in addressing conflict and fragility.³⁰ The UK Government has the potential to be a leader internationally in promoting good policy and practice on conflict prevention, but to do this it must have clear mechanisms for collating the lessons learned from its own experience and that of others.

Scrutiny and accountability

Parliamentarians and civil society have played an important role in calling for and developing the BSOS in partnership with government. Increased dialogue on implementation and scrutiny of the BSOS will be important in building on progress already made.

The government has engaged frequently with civil society organisations on BSOS implementation, including holding two workshops with development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian organisations belonging to the Bond Conflict Policy Group: the first on engaging with local civil society actors in fragile states and the second on the JACS methodology. Saferworld welcomes the government’s willingness to hold further workshops with the Bond Conflict Policy Group addressing practical challenges to BSOS implementation. Greater engagement with academics, think tanks, and the broader development community could also bring new perspectives to this dialogue. Furthermore, while there has been ongoing engagement with civil society in London on BSOS implementation, this needs to be replicated at the country level where BSOS is being implemented.

The government has also engaged parliamentarians on BSOS implementation, largely through the All Party Parliamentary Group on Conflict Issues, and interest in the BSOS from parliamentarians appears to be gradually increasing. While the government has used written ministerial statements to update Parliament on BSOS implementation, more opportunities for debate on the floor of both Houses of Parliament would enable more effective scrutiny. The inclusion of updates on BSOS in oral statements on the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) are welcome, but in the ensuing debate they are easily lost within the wide range of issues covered

by the SDSR, and so separate opportunities for debate may be more useful.

While external outreach on the BSOS has been extensive, a strategy for communicating internally within government on the BSOS is also needed. The BSOS: The Way Forward event planned for November 2012 is a very welcome step in this regard, but must be followed up with an internal communications strategy to ensure that awareness of and buy-in for BSOS implementation is high among officials from all relevant departments.

Finally, although BSOS is jointly owned by DFID, FCO, and MOD, a truly integrated approach requires all of the government’s interactions with conflict-affected and fragile states to be conflict-sensitive, including the activities of other departments, such as justice sector assistance delivered by the Ministry of Justice, energy co-operation managed by the Department of Energy and Climate Change, or trading relationships managed by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. The departments which own BSOS should develop a plan to ensure that other departments also understand, contribute to, and adhere to the BSOS approach.

Conclusion

Welcome progress has been made on implementing the progressive vision for conflict prevention set out in the BSOS. It is now necessary to carry forward this momentum to ensure that the BSOS approach is mainstreamed across government. This briefing has set out detailed recommendations as to how this could be taken forward.

Ultimately, the conflict prevention approach outlined in the BSOS is about improving the lives of people in communities affected by violence and instability. In addition to the various arms of government, parliamentarians, civil society, business, and development actors all have an important role to play in implementing this vision.

²⁹ *Op cit* ICAI (2012), p 18.

³⁰ *Op cit* UK Government (2011), p 34.

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict. We are a not-for-profit organisation that works in more than 20 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and Europe.

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