

Joint Committee on National Security Strategy inquiry: The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund

Saferworld submission, September 2018

Introduction

1. Saferworld welcomes the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy's inquiry into the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). The CSSF is one mechanism through which the UK can work to deliver on its high-level commitments to bring about more peaceful, just and inclusive societies, which the government actively advocated for in the Sustainable Development Goals.¹
2. Saferworld is a peacebuilding organisation working in around 20 conflict-affected and fragile contexts and is currently a supplier on lots A and B of the CSSF framework. This submission will draw on some of our experience with the CSSF, but will also speak to the wider strategic questions around the CSSF's set-up and ways of working. In particular, it takes stock of ongoing efforts by the CSSF to improve transparency and performance and the importance of the government, particularly the National Security Council (NSC), ensuring policy coherence in the pursuit of peace overseas. This submission addresses the questions which are most relevant to our expertise from a peace perspective. It is based on the information that is available to us and should not be considered exhaustive. The submission is intended to be constructive and is offered with full recognition of the challenges faced by CSSF staff and their ongoing efforts to improve across the fund's complex portfolio.

Key points

- As part of the Capability Review of Cross Government Funds – which occurred under the auspices of the National Security Capability Review (NSCR) – and since ICAI's review, CSSF officials have outlined a number of reforms designed to improve the fund. Officials have also shown a willingness to engage partners to address shortcomings – particularly around transparency, procurement and monitoring, evaluation and learning. It is too early for third parties to assess the full impact of these reforms.
- The CSSF continues to face challenges in ensuring that its programming does not undermine prospects for long-term peace. The fund's concentration on counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism (CT/CVE) can weaken analysis, strategy and coherence of programmes for peacebuilding impact – resulting in missed opportunities to address conflict drivers. Instead it should increase investment in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
- The NSCR reaffirmed a cross-government approach to addressing conflict, but failed to address contradictions in UK policies that could undermine the CSSF's chances of supporting long-term peace. One such contradiction is the supply of arms and ammunition to one of the main conflict parties in Yemen, while simultaneously investing in explosive ordnance clearance. Because solutions to these contradictions are typically beyond the remit of CSSF officials, they need to be considered and addressed by NSC, defence and foreign policy decision-makers and leaders.

The strategic impact of the CSSF

1. The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) seeks to achieve objectives under the National Security Strategy and the UK Aid Strategy. These National Security Strategy objectives are publicly available. The most recent CSSF annual report (for 2017-18) has more details on the UK Aid objectives the CSSF works

towards, including case studies of programmes,¹ than does the previous year's report.² This represents a welcome improvement in the level of information available at the 'overview' level.

2. The annual report outlines how CSSF works towards two national security objectives (protect our people; project our global influence) and three UK Aid objectives (strengthening global peace, security and governance; strengthening resilience and response to crises; tackling extreme poverty and helping the world's most vulnerable). It also offers snapshots of some programmes under these objectives. However, there are gaps in what is covered, and it remains unclear what omitted programmes are delivering. Nor is there any discussion of potential trade-offs between national security and development objectives, and how CSSF seeks to manage these. For example, if contradictions arise between the pursuit of lasting peace and stability, the projection of UK power or the growth of the UK defence sector, which objectives determine strategy? And how are relevant decisions made?
3. Programme summaries have now been published that indicate the results which a particular CSSF programme (often comprising multiple partners and projects) seeks to achieve. We understand that programme summaries or annual reviews have been published covering 68 of the 90 programmes undertaken in 2017-18.³ This too is to be welcomed. However, these documents and the annual report alone do not provide sufficient information to enable a full assessment of the strategic impact of the CSSF. Nor do programme summaries clarify how each programme's results contribute to national security and aid objectives.
4. Programme summaries also only give a small snapshot into the wider political context of complex conflict situations and the diplomatic, security, development and business calculations made by HMG towards the countries covered by the programmes. The National Security Council strategies for priority countries, which inform the CSSF and all UK government spending in any one country, remain classified. Publishing these documents would clarify the UK's aspirations in each context and provide a basis for scrutinising whether CSSF programmes are effectively contributing to peace and security. It would also allow for scrutiny of cross-HMG coherence and potential policy contradictions. HMG publicly committed to releasing public versions of these documents in the Capability Review of Cross Government Funds,⁴ but we understand that it is still thinking through options for how to honour this commitment. Although there are legitimate security concerns about releasing some information, HMG should promptly publish the most comprehensive versions of these strategies possible, and share with the JCNSS inquiry its timetable for doing so.
5. The process for developing NSC country strategies and allocating CSSF resources is top down. It should integrate the perspectives of a wider range of actors, including working with civil society to develop peacebuilding strategies in a much more inclusive way. Broad buy-in within society and across institutions is vital for overcoming 'capability traps' that routinely stymie development and conflict transformation processes. To support partners who work in a way that responds to complex conflict contexts, the CSSF needs to have structures and processes for working more collaboratively if it is to achieve more inclusive, politically smart and effective engagement with conflict contexts.
6. ICAI's recent review found that CSSF was flexible in responding to changing conflict dynamics. Yet this was based on the expertise of CSSF staff rather than institutional policies and written strategies, meaning that this flexibility could be jeopardised by staff turnover and the loss of institutional knowledge. The essential skills and knowledge of CSSF staff should be supported, sustained and captured in an appropriate administrative framework. The most recent CSSF annual report indicated that programme management training was being rolled out across the fund. This is welcome. However, it is too soon to judge whether this will have a positive impact.
7. ICAI also found that gender has been mainstreamed in the CSSF but did not always survive project implementation. It also found that human rights impact assessments were conducted but had relatively little

¹ HM Government (2018a), 'Conflict, Stability and Security Fund: Annual Report 2017/18', July

² HM Government (2017), 'Conflict, Stability and Security Fund: Annual Report 2016/17', July

³ Programme Summaries are published on <https://www.gov.uk> and are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/conflict-stability-and-security-fund-programme-summaries>. Annual Reviews of individual programmes are also available on their website here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/conflict-stability-and-security-fund-programme-summaries>

⁴ HM Government (2018), 'Capability Review of the cross-Government Funds', March, recommendation 2.

bearing on whether, and how, projects were implemented.⁵ Given the risks of empowering security forces that commit human rights violations and the risk of exacerbating conflict,⁶ this is a serious shortcoming. In addition, ICAI suggested that there are challenges in judging CSSF's impact on the conflicts it seeks to address.⁷ We welcome the government's new Conflict Sensitivity Marker and Overseas Security and Justice Assessments⁸ which we hope will address some of these issues. But it is too soon to assess the impact of these initiatives on conflict dynamics, gender equality and human rights.

The balance between crisis response and longer-term conflict prevention

8. The CSSF currently works on both long-term conflict prevention and short-term crisis response. The annual report 2017-18 suggests £242.4 million was spent on conflict prevention, stabilisation and peacebuilding (20 per cent of the overall fund). In addition, it spends £52.3 million on development and basic services, £149.8 million on security and justice, and £209.8 million on governance, security and defence reform. This is a useful indicator of how much is spent on different types of activities, but does not indicate the important balance between long-term initiatives and crisis response.
9. Within the CSSF there are undoubtedly examples of good conflict prevention work which will contribute to long-term peace, support community dialogue and give people the security and institutions they need to live their everyday lives. Challenges arise when in some projects the framework for reporting discourages a focus on long-term impact (see below). Our experience with CSSF suggests that the fund would benefit from extending the timeframes of both strategies and programmes, to enable a shift towards emphasis on programmes that work effectively and flexibly towards long-term change in politically smart ways. Despite investment in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, many other programmes continue to operate with a short-term outlook that may be counter-productive to peace and stability.
10. Kenya offers a useful illustration of these concerns. In East Africa, CSSF has invested nearly £4 million in its CVE programme, including support to the governments of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.⁹ A public summary suggests the programme supports improved community-police relations. Although this is laudable, as Saferworld's research on CVE in Kenya suggests, focusing on narrow CVE objectives to reduce 'radicalisation' in too close a partnership with authorities carries a number of risks. Resolving violence in north eastern and coastal Kenya requires working long-term, hand in hand with communities, to address their biggest concerns such as access to land, economic development, identity cards and respectful treatment by security forces.¹⁰ Backing a narrow, state-centric approach to CVE in Kenya thus risks diluting HMG's focus on wider drivers of conflict and potentially wasting HMG resources. Since 2016, Saferworld has published nine studies on the impact of counter-terror approaches overseas. Our conclusions suggest that the UK must strive for greater coherence between its different tools for responding, such as relying less on hard security options, ensuring greater attention to tackling key conflict drivers (in particular security force behaviour, exclusive governance and corruption), and working to ensure that communities and civil society have a stake in peace processes and political transitions needed to bring conflicts to a lasting end.

⁵ ICAI (2018), 'Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's aid spending final report', March, paragraphs 4.77-78.

⁶ Saferworld (2017), 'We need to talk about Egypt: how brutal 'counter-terrorism' is failing Egypt and its allies', October

⁷ ICAI (2018), 'Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's aid spending final report', March, paragraphs 4.68-70.

⁸ HM Government (2018), 'HM Government Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations in the performance review of the cross government Conflict, Stability and Security Fund: March 2018', p 3

⁹ HM Government (2017), 'Programme Summary East Africa: countering violent extremism'

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/630248/Counterin_g_Violent_Extremism_East_Africa_2017.pdf)

¹⁰ Saferworld (2018), "Inside Kenya's war on terror: breaking the cycle of violence in Garissa", 28 July 2017

(<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/725-inside-kenyaas-war-on-terror-breaking-the-cycle-of-violence-in-garissa>). See in particular chapter 5, titled 'CVE job done – or a peacebuilding moment to grasp?' (<https://saferworld-indepth.squarespace.com/v-cve-job-done-or-a-peacebuilding-moment-to-grasp/>)

11. Similar caveats apply regarding HMG's response to migration. The CSSF is committing £1.15 million for the purpose of the scantily detailed objective to 'reduce irregular migration' in Libya.¹¹ As a House of Lords report made clear, previous UK-backed operations have increased the risks to migrants without affecting the 'business models' of smugglers.¹² ICAI's critique of CSSF's overreliance on training security forces¹³ and insufficient use of human rights impact assessments should prompt significant caution about cooperation with Libyan partners.
12. In response, HMG needs to revisit the known shortcomings of its past efforts to eliminate terror threats, stabilise affected contexts and control migration – through direct military action or security partnerships – and scale up its long-term work on addressing drivers of conflict and forced displacement.

Effectiveness of new structures for oversight and coordination of CSSF

13. The government's Capability Review of Cross Government Funds outlines new structures for managing the CSSF and the Prosperity Fund. The document also specifies Cabinet Office responsibility for direction and delivery against the fund's objectives. Recommendation six states: 'Departments, as holders of financial accountability, should continue to approve the commercial, financial and management aspects of programme documentation'.¹⁴ While clearer oversight of these cross-government funds is needed, the impact of recent changes on the CSSF's efficiency is not yet clear.
14. In an earlier submission to the JCNSS we raised concerns about centralisation of decision making in London, stating: *'From our understanding, it appears that the bulk of CSSF funds are channelled through a CSSF framework to chosen suppliers (as well as a wider market portal open to other applicants), and decision making power rests mainly in London. This marks a shift from the Conflict Pool where embassies held more funds and decision making power towards a more centralised approach. The aim is purportedly to develop more strategic, long-term partnerships with suppliers. However, with greater centralisation comes the risk of being too top-down and not responsive enough to contextual needs and dynamics. This is a challenge to the effectiveness of the CSSF in addressing complex conflict issues, and continuous effort will be needed to ensure that there is a strong connection between local expertise and central decision making.'*¹⁵
15. This challenge was not addressed in the government's Capability Review of Cross Government Funds, so it is unclear whether CSSF is now striking a better balance between centralised and localised decision making.

The relationship between the CSSF and the Fusion Doctrine

16. The NSCR outlines 'a new approach to the orchestration of our national security capabilities'¹⁶. The 'Fusion Doctrine' is a new articulation of strategy which builds on the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security

¹¹ HM Government (2017), 'Programme Summary Libya CSSF Country Programme'

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/630386/Libya_Country_Programme_2017.pdf)

¹² House of Lords (2017), 'Operation Sophia: A failed mission', *House of Lords European Union Committee, 2nd Report of Session 2017–19*, July

¹³ ICAI (2018), 'Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's aid spending final report', March, paragraphs 4.46-50

¹⁴ HM Government (2018), 'Capability Review of the cross-Government Funds', March, recommendation 6

¹⁵ Saferworld (2016), 'Conflict Stability and Security Fund Saferworld submission to the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy inquiry', September

¹⁶ HM Government (2018), 'National Security Capability review', March

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-capability-review-ns-cr>)

Review (SDSR) by integrating security, economic and soft power tools into national security efforts. As Saferworld has long argued,¹⁷ lasting security requires coherent efforts from a range of government actors beyond the traditional intelligence, policing and military fields. In this sense, the existence of the Fusion Doctrine and CSSF are promising developments, reaffirming cross-government working and coherence. However, few details are provided regarding the Fusion Doctrine, and beyond a brief mention of the need to address the root causes of violence, little detail is provided on how this will be done. As UK security depends significantly on stability overseas, the government could make greater use of DFID's Building Stability Framework¹⁸ to underpin more effective cross-government efforts to address conflict overseas.

17. The vision set out in the NSCR is focused on the UK – protecting its people, projecting its influence and promoting its prosperity. Fundamentally, it defines the UK as a 'trading nation', determined to exert power and influence over others. Human rights, democracy, equality and the promotion of a rules-based international order, which the UK government committed to in the Strategic Defence Security Review, are mentioned as values of a 'global Britain'. But despite substantial evidence detailing the importance of governance and human rights for stability,¹⁹ promoting them – to benefit from common goods in an interdependent world²⁰ – now appears a lesser priority than achieving security through bolstering Britain's power and wealth. The CSSF can make up for this shortcoming by strengthening and expanding its work to support good governance.
18. The NSCR also offers little on how and why the UK should stop violations of international law and promote better governance and respect for human rights. Nor does it acknowledge how incoherent UK strategy can worsen conflict and violence. This could undermine the CSSF's contribution to peace and stability.
19. For example, the CSSF rightly supports the work of the UN Special Envoy in trying to mediate a peace process in Yemen. This includes helping 'the UN address complex issues and broaden political dialogue beyond the focus of an initial cessation of hostilities, in order to lay the foundations for a more inclusive and sustainable long-term political settlement', and supporting the inclusion of women in the peace process²¹. However, these efforts are grossly undermined by UK weapons sales to conflict parties: the UK simultaneously sells planes and bombs used in Yemen²² to Saudi Arabia, while funding demining and clearance of unexploded ordnance in Yemen.²³ Leaders and security decision-makers need to iron out such inconsistencies, with a greater primacy placed on peacebuilding objectives within UK foreign policy to provide the CSSF with a more conducive policy environment for pursuing peace and conflict prevention objectives.

¹⁷ Saferworld (2016), 'Conflict Stability and Security Fund Saferworld submission to the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy inquiry', September

¹⁸ DFID (2016), 'Building Stability Framework'

(<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5968990ded915d0baf00019e/UK-Aid-Connect-Stability-Framework.pdf>)

¹⁹ See for example: Attree L (2013), 'The whole shebang? Why achieving development and security means working on governance', Saferworld, September (<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/96-the-whole-shebang-why-achieving-development-and-security-means-working-on-governance>)

²⁰ Foreign Affairs Select Committee (2018), 'Global Britain: Human rights and the rule of law', September (<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmaff/874/87402.htm>)

²¹ HM Government (2018), 'Programme Summary Yemen: CSSF country programme'

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conflict-stability-and-security-fund-programme-summaries-for-middle-east-and-north-africa-2017-to-2018>)

²² Foster P (2015), 'UK "will support Saudi-led assault on Yemeni rebels - but not engaging in combat"', *Daily Telegraph* March

²³ HM Government (2018), 'Programme Summary Yemen: CSSF country programme',

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conflict-stability-and-security-fund-programme-summaries-for-middle-east-and-north-africa-2017-to-2018>)

Consistency of departments in managing, monitoring, evaluating and reporting on CSSF programmes

20. The CSSF's approach to monitoring and reporting on its programmes is overly focused on delivering short-term activities and outcomes, inhibiting a focus on longer-term impact. In our experience, narrative reporting templates vary from country to country, limiting the potential for learning across country teams and creating an additional burden on MEL teams in supporting them. Agencies have also found that these templates often require narrative reporting on the detail of activities matched line by line with financial reporting, but with little space to report on programme impact. ICAI has also highlighted the danger of reporting requirements becoming so onerous that more effort goes into reporting than delivering the work.²⁴
21. ICAI also suggested that where programming did not lend itself to results frameworks, the CSSF should encourage its implementers to use alternative planning and monitoring tools such as outcome harvesting or outcome mapping.²⁵ In complex conflict environments, traditional monitoring and evaluation can mean that 'delivering against the log-frame' and 'checking off the indicators' can assume too much importance. Rigid, complex, jargon-rich templates can make the involvement of local project participants and partners much more challenging. By contrast, outcome harvesting avoids starting with predetermined outcomes and measuring progress towards them – instead, it collects evidence of what has been achieved in the programme or project area and works backwards to determine whether and how the project or intervention has contributed to the change. To gather data, it asks a few core questions about the change in behaviour – for example, who did what, when and where? How significant is this change? And what contribution was made by the programme to this change?²⁶ This means that change and flexibility built into programming can be evaluated in the context of rapidly changing events. Outcome harvesting is thus an important, innovative tool for strengthening the quality of peacebuilding programmes.
22. We understand that the CSSF is undertaking some reviews of monitoring, evaluation and learning within specific programmes. However, despite a willingness to discuss outcome harvesting by some officials we have yet to see them explore this as an approach that can be used in other programmes. The government should explore options for using such approaches to monitoring, evaluation and learning in its programming in complex environments.
23. Learning was another area where ICAI identified both successes and challenges for the CSSF. We have found the CSSF willing to engage on this particular area at the programme level and in Whitehall. A number of initiatives have been suggested at these levels to connect the CSSF to learning points identified by partners within and beyond CSSF programming. Some welcome steps have been taken to connect CSSF partners within a particular country to facilitate learning. A key challenge is to ensure that a learning culture is institutionalised consistently across the CSSF. At this stage this appears to be an ongoing process.

Conclusion

24. The CSSF has made a number of improvements and shown willingness to improve in transparency, MEL and procurement. A number of key issues remain in ensuring that CSSF programming supports long-term peace. A number of challenges also remain for wider HMG to ensure that the CSSF is able to operate in a policy environment that supports efforts to address conflict. It is important that HMG addresses these issues as a matter of urgency if it is to ensure that it has the best chance of having meaningful impact.

²⁴ ICAI (2018), 'Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's aid spending final report', March, paragraphs 4.61-2

²⁵ *Ibid*, paragraph 4.39

²⁶ Saferworld (2016), *Doing things differently: Rethinking monitoring and evaluation to understand change*, January (<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1027-doing-things-differently-rethinking-monitoring-and-evaluation-to-understand-change>)

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. 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 with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

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