
Beyond aid: addressing conflict and building peace

Submission to the International Development Committee inquiry on the future UK approach to development, September 2014

Summary

This submission focuses on the relationship between conflict and development, identified by the Committee as a key area in the UK's future approach to development. While recognising that addressing conflict and fragility is a current UK development priority, this submission expands on what a future development framework with a focus on peace might mean for UK aid and non-aid policy across departments. Saferworld would emphasise the unique and valuable expertise contained within an independent and legally mandated international development agency for addressing these issues, which should be used to inform a progressive vision for the UK's role in the world. There is significant value in continuing to build on the UK's development expertise and influence, while avoiding the risk that this work might be instrumentalised towards other aims that may be counter-productive to a longer-term approach to peace.

Introduction

1. Saferworld welcomes the International Development Committee's inquiry into the future UK approach to development. As a conflict prevention and peacebuilding organisation this submission focuses on the Committee's reference in its terms of reference to peace and stability as part of a future development approach.
2. As discussions continue towards defining the new development framework that will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) post-2015, it is welcome that the Committee is investigating the potential implications for the UK's development work of this framework. The link between development and peaceful societies has long been identified as a significant gap in the MDGs, particularly given that states considered conflict-affected or fragile have made the least amount of progress towards their achievement. The need for a future development framework to address this gap has been recognised in the post-2015 discussions to date.¹
3. This has also been a focus of Saferworld's work on the post-2015 discussions, proposing that, in addition to ensuring the future framework is conflict-sensitive overall, it be used to build peace as part of a broader vision of sustainable development. Development targets should address common drivers of conflict and violence such as by ensuring civil and political freedoms, access to justice and security, reductions in violent deaths, and reductions in illicit and/or irresponsible flows of arms, finance and conflict commodities². These might provide a useful starting point for assessing UK requirements to help deliver sustainable peace as part of a future approach to development.

¹Most notably through the report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, which the Prime Minister co-chaired, (2013), <http://www.post2015hlp.org/the-report/> and the recent final report of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals, (2014), <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

²For an illustration of what these targets might include, see Saferworld, (2013), *Addressing conflict and violence from 2015: a vision of goals, targets and indicators* <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/730-a-vision-of-goals-targets-and-indicators> and the report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, (2013), *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development*, <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>

4. It must be noted that peacebuilding and conflict prevention are not new to the UK's development work and expertise. The Department for International Development (DFID) has for many years focused on trying to address conflict and fragility as part of its development work, including through a dedicated group of experts in the Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department (CHASE) and significant investment in relevant programmes. Indeed, 30% of UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) is dedicated to conflict-affected and fragile states. However, the challenge of programming in conflict-affected contexts has led to the recognition that aid, though impactful when used effectively, requires further support through non-aid policies to see wider outcomes for ordinary people affected by conflict, instability and extreme poverty.
5. Policies such as the 2011 *Building Stability Overseas Strategy* (BSOS) have acknowledged that to prevent conflict and fragility effectively requires the UK to look beyond aid and coordinate across government departments towards the shared objective of promoting 'structural stability'. Achieving coherence in practice is challenging however, and requires strong leadership and a vision informed by the evidence of what works in addressing conflict and instability as part of a progressive approach to development.

Coherence of UK policies that affect development (including aid, diplomacy, prosperity, and security)

6. The violent conflict and insecurity that undermines development in many countries is primarily driven by context-specific factors within the political economy, and the actions, behaviours and attitudes of national level actors. Agency for promoting peaceful societies primarily lies in the hands of local, national and regional political leaders, officials, civil society and citizens. External actors, including the UK, thus need to recognise that their ability to direct events in conflict-affected states is limited. At the same time, their engagement in these countries inevitably affects peace and conflict dynamics, for example through altering the incentives political actors face, and strengthening or weakening the hands of particular actors. Through understanding how interventions impact local, national and regional dynamics, all external engagement can be better shaped to favour actors that can shape and uphold lasting peace – and avoid reinforcing dynamics that create conflict risks.
7. **Aid:** Conflict-affected contexts present acute challenges that can make it hard to achieve policy coherence and ensure conflict sensitivity. Inevitably some groups gain in power and resources from the injection of aid while others do not. In this sense, development is an inherently conflict-producing process. As such, it is important to ground strategies for engagement in conflict analyses that enable aid to at minimum do no harm and to be tailored to addressing drivers of conflict. This can reinforce the resolve of those who are committed to making the difficult and incremental progress towards more inclusive and fair state-society relations³.
8. When and how resources are provided matters greatly, as the provision of more resources does not automatically result in more development. States with greater capacities are needed, but their level of commitment to peace, human rights and development is crucial. The commitment to deliver more aid to conflict-affected contexts must not obscure the need to carefully weigh how the change we wish to foster can best be brought about. Societies need bottom-up support to shape the states they want while avoiding the hazards of propping up actors whose power and dependence on outside assistance becomes an obstacle to peace, progress and public accountability.
9. **Diplomacy:** The UK is well positioned to promote peace and stability through its diplomatic work. The UK's wide network through the Foreign Office and DFID, strong foreign relations, permanent seat in the UN Security Council and influence in key forums like the G20, G8, OECD, and the EU all combine in a form of soft power that is a crucial element of the UK's non-aid contribution to sustainable development. The UK is well positioned to provide leadership on policy and practice in developing contexts, promoting a long-term vision for peace and development with the interests of the poorest at its core.
10. While it can be used to effect, the direct influence the UK can exercise through political pressure may not always be the most beneficial route to changing the behaviours of actors in

³ For more on conflict sensitivity, see APFO, CECORE, CHA, FEWER, International Alert, Saferworld, (2004), *Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: a resource pack* <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/148-conflict-sensitive-approaches-to-development-humanitarian-assistance-and-peacebuilding> or Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, (2012), *How to guide to conflict sensitivity* <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/646-how-to-guide-to-conflict-sensitivity>

any given conflict. Political commitment to working towards lasting peace is much more likely to be driven by demand from below by a grassroots constituency than by the political pressure of outside actors. Diplomatic efforts should therefore be as much about reinforcing agents for change within conflict-affected societies as they are about trying to establish commitments based on traditional government-to-government agreements.

11. The Committee should also consider that a single actor's potential for influence (even in blocs the size of the EU) is often undermined by a lack of coherence across the global community of actors engaging in any given context. In many contexts, a range of demands (fighting terror, combatting organised crime, providing relief, economic engagement, peacekeeping and so on) are competing, and these different initiatives cancel out each other's' efforts, resulting in incoherence. In particular, short term approaches focused on immediate security considerations often undermine the search for lasting and people-focused solutions to conflict. The UK's potential in conflict-affected societies is as small or as great as its ability to coalesce its allies around coherent long-term peacebuilding strategies, and is a useful focus for UK leadership. Mutual understanding needs to be forged with emerging actors whose role is significant in conflict-affected states, such as Brazil, China, India, South Africa, Qatar and Turkey. The UK could reasonably position itself as a broker of policy coherence for development with the major external actors engaging in any given context in coming years.
12. **Economic and commercial engagement:** The concept of conflict sensitivity as discussed above should also be applied to the UK's private sector engagement as an essential principle forming part of the agenda to promote UK prosperity. Indeed, the UK Government acknowledges in its business and human rights action plan that UK businesses have "an important role to play in contributing to stability, growth, development, prosperity and the protection of human rights" within the conflict-affected and fragile environments in which they operate.⁴ Saferworld research has shown that conflict-blind business engagement can have adverse consequences for both local communities and foreign businesses. A conflict-sensitive approach should be extended to the private sector, and in particular to UK arms exports, which should be carefully assessed against the risk of fuelling conflict or undermining development.
13. **External stress factors:** Local, national and regional factors drive violence, but it is also fuelled – and made more intractable - by external factors, reflecting dynamics beyond a country's borders. Prominent examples include the trade in conflict commodities like diamonds, the market for illicit drugs, or flows of illicit finance.⁵ While developing countries need to build national-level resilience to reduce the impacts of external factors, countries like the UK also have a responsibility to show both domestic and global leadership in lowering their impact. Inward-looking domestic leadership is required to address the potential impact that policies (for example banking regulations) and activities (for example drug consumption) within the UK have on conflict-affected states well beyond its borders. Outward-looking global leadership is required to catalyse the collective action by the international community to address what are ultimately transnational issues. Initiatives such as the post-2015 development framework and forums such as the G20 create opportunities for such leadership.
14. **Arms exports:** An external stress factor with significant relevance for the coherence of UK policy beyond aid is the illicit and irresponsible flows of arms into areas that are vulnerable to conflict and violence. As a major arms exporter, the UK has a responsibility to ensure that its policies and practice relating to the arms trade are consistent with its development aims. The UK has demonstrated leadership in raising the global standards on legal arms sales through the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) agreed in 2013, an important step towards stemming the irresponsible flows of arms that fuel conflict and undermine development. In addition to supporting the effective implementation of the ATT, scrutiny of the UK's own arms exports requires strong continued engagement from parliamentarians, including the work of this Committee through the Committees on Arms Export Controls (CAEC).
15. **Security Sector Reform:** The UK has the potential to make an important contribution to long-term peace and stability through its support for Security Sector Reform. This is a programming priority in many contexts for DFID in relation to reform of police or justice

⁴ Good Business: Implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, (2013),

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/236901/BHR_Action_Plan_-_final_online_version_1_.pdf

⁵ <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/802-defining-and-measuring-the-external-stress-factors-that-lead-to-conflict-in-the-context-of-the-post-2015-agenda>

services. Work on reforming the security sector also brings in MoD and FCO actors in terms of non-ODA UK contributions. This work, as a contribution to building stability overseas, will continue to require significant cross-departmental working to ensure that activities like defence transformation or defence diplomacy work jointly in favour of long-term peace and development objectives.

16. While fostering better state-society relations such as through the security or justice sectors are key to improving people's experience of peace and security, international support for this work can be too focused on technical and institutional reforms within central governments.⁶ While seeking to improve state legitimacy and improve stability, these programmes may fail to consider the role of society in maintaining commitment to reforms, and do not account for contexts in which authority is fragmented and contested. Community-based approaches to reforms in security provision offer the potential to support both immediate and long-term solutions to security deficits and do so in a way that seriously engages with the long-term objectives of achieving legitimacy and improving state-society relations. The UK's future aid to the security sector should be oriented towards fostering state-society relations through longer-term processes that promote engagement with society.
17. **Gender, peace and security:** The UK is recognised as a global lead on gender, peace and security – an issue strongly linked to development that requires significant non-aid action. However, the understanding of these issues varies between relevant government departments and even between teams within departments, undermining cohesive action. Policy tools such as the UK National Action Plan on women, peace and security may assist the UK in achieving greater coherence in its work on gender, peace and security across departments. To become a more strategic actor on gender, peace and security, the UK can focus in its conflict analyses and resultant strategies on how gender dynamics drive conflict, and how its strategies can reduce gender-related drivers of conflict.
18. **Concept of UK national security interests:** The UK must avoid the risk that different branches of government interpret UK national security interests in contradictory ways. It is important that prospects of long-term peace – founded on human security and inclusive, fair, responsive and accountable states – are not undermined by short-term approaches to addressing immediate threats. With this in mind, DFID has an important role to play in reinstating lasting and positive peace as the overall objective underpinning all strands of engagement with conflict contexts. It will be important in coming years to move away from defining problems of conflict (with their roots in issues such as corruption and governance) as problems of extremism and terrorism. Reframing and analysing conflict in this way can help us to envisage holistic strategies for building peace that give due emphasis to less violent, more constructive alternatives. This may include changing approaches that fuel grievances, in particular military intervention and support to questionable regimes, in favour of support to more transformative governance efforts, the use of sanctions and legal approaches, and the pursuit of negotiated solutions with a determined focus on achieving inclusive and just political settlements.
19. In addition, it is challenging to maintain the UK's interests in a world where the make-up of international donors is changing and where rising powers such as China are increasingly engaged in conflict-affected states. The UK must ensure that geopolitical and/or commercial competition is not used as an excuse to lower commitments on human rights, democracy and good governance in order to win the favour of host regimes – such an approach would be short sighted, ineffective and unsustainable⁷.

Underlying mechanisms needed to support change

20. UK policy has acknowledged a national interest in promoting peaceful societies overseas⁸. However, one of the challenges of doing this is ensuring that DFID, which largely holds the policy expertise as well as on-the-ground presence and influence in many contexts, has the political clout and buy-in needed to ensure policy coherence in practice with this aim in mind. It is therefore welcome that the Committee is seeking to ensure that the valuable expertise and insight within DFID is adequately represented in decision-making fora like the National Security Council (NSC).

⁶ See e.g. Stabilisation Unit (2014), 'Policing the Context – Principles and guidance to inform international policing assistance'; Stabilisation Unit (2014) 'The UK Government's approach to stabilisation'

⁷ See Africa All Party Parliamentary Group 'Democracy Soup: Democracy and Development in Africa', May 2014 <http://www.royalafricansociety.org/sites/default/files/reports/Democracy%20Soup%20Report.pdf>

⁸ As stated in the National Security Strategy, the Strategic Defence and Security Review and the BSOS

21. One mechanism that the Committee may want to clarify is how the NSC will support the future UK approach to development. There will be an increased role for the NSC in setting whole-of-government objectives for UK engagement in countries on their priority list, including under the new Conflict, Stability and Security Fund which replaces the Conflict Pool in 2015.⁹ It will therefore be important to ensure that DFID's expertise and networks with in-country stakeholders are used to inform analysis and set long-term sustainable objectives for this engagement.

DFID's role in facilitating other UK government departments and UK organisations to assist in developing countries

22. While DFID can play an important facilitating role for other parts of government, it is crucially important not to instrumentalise development work in favour of other aims that might be counter-productive to a longer-term approach to peace. DFID is a rich source of expertise on challenging contexts, making it an important thought leader within Whitehall if used effectively. DFID can provide valuable expertise, and its insights and on-the-ground presence can usefully be employed to inform a progressive long-term approach to UK engagement in developing countries.

Role of DFID in influencing the policies of other Whitehall departments

23. DFID has a core position within Whitehall, sharing several policy areas cross-departmentally such as in the BSOS, as well as a seat on the NSC. It is right for the Committee to seek clarity on DFID's role in influencing other departments across Whitehall and should be made clear how DFID is helping to lead a vision for the UK's engagement in conflict-affected states. As mentioned above, Saferworld would urge the Committee to investigate the role of DFID in setting in the NSC's agenda, as long-term security relies in part on genuine development for those facing poverty, conflict and insecurity overseas.

Stand-alone DFID?

24. On the question of the future of a stand-alone Department for International Development, Saferworld would encourage the Committee to recognise the value in having an independent agency dedicated to global development, with a legally fixed mandate, to address poverty as part of the UK's toolbox for international engagement. This is a significant advantage if the UK is to continue to take a long-term view of its place in the world.
25. It is in the interests of the UK to promote a more stable and peaceful world, and DFID is crucial for implementing this vision in practice. An independent DFID demonstrates the UK's investment in longer-term peace and prosperity, and it should be noted that UK expertise in international development is a considerable form of soft power.¹⁰ Saferworld believes that efforts should be made to ensure DFID is not isolated from other government departments and overseas embassies so that it participates fully in all relevant decision-making mechanisms, but reiterate that its autonomy and impartiality should not be undermined, nor its focus deviated, from its primary priorities, including making the world safer and fairer.¹¹

⁹ *House of Commons Official Report*, HC Deb, 24 June 2014, c9WS

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm140624/wmstext/140624m0001.htm#140624m0001.htm_sprin1 "The CSSF will be governed by the National Security Council, with a more strategic cross-government approach that will draw on the most effective combination of defence, diplomacy, development assistance, security and intelligence capabilities. These are all at the heart of the Prime Minister's "golden thread" theory of development and can play a vital role in tackling the complex causes and impacts of conflict and instability, as set out in the national security strategy."

¹⁰ See the report by the Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence, *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World* (March 2014) pp. 71 – 76 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldselect/ldsoftpower/150/150.pdf>

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74. For DFID's priorities, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development/about>

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

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