

The UK's approaches to peacebuilding

A review

December 2022

The Independent Commission for Aid Impact works to improve the quality of UK development assistance through robust, independent scrutiny. We provide assurance to the UK taxpayer by conducting independent reviews of the effectiveness and value for money of UK aid.

We operate independently of government, reporting to Parliament, and our mandate covers all UK official development assistance.

Overall review scores and what they mean

GREEN

Strong achievement across the board. Stands out as an area of good practice where UK aid is making a significant positive contribution.

**AMBER/
RED**

Unsatisfactory achievement in most areas, with some positive elements. An area where improvements are required for UK aid to make a positive contribution.

**GREEN/
AMBER**

Satisfactory achievement in most areas, but partial achievement in others. An area where UK aid is making a positive contribution, but could do more.

RED

Poor achievement across most areas, with urgent remedial action required in some. An area where UK aid is failing to make a positive contribution.

OGL

© Crown copyright 2022

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3, or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Where we have identified any third party copyright you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Readers are encouraged to reproduce material from ICAI reports, as long as they are not being sold commercially, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. ICAI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication. For online use, we ask readers to link to the original resource on the ICAI website.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at enquiries@icai.independent.gov.uk.

 [@ICAI_UK](https://twitter.com/ICAI_UK)

icai.independent.gov.uk



The UK government's peacebuilding efforts are largely relevant and coherent, and achieve results at local and national levels, but these results would be even more significant if its funding were more reliable and patient.

The UK government's peacebuilding work combines peacebuilding programmes with diplomatic efforts, and sometimes with military support. ICAI only assessed work that was financed from the aid budget. After the significant reductions in the UK's aid spending, this combination of approaches remained important but the emphasis shifted towards diplomacy, and the programmes became less predictable. The UK government's peacebuilding work is relevant and built on a foundation of expertise, context assessments and central guidance. Monitoring and evaluation of programming relevant to peacebuilding improved during the review period. The government applied some of the learning generated by monitoring and evaluation and research activities, and shared some of this learning with other stakeholders and the wider public.

The work was gender- and conflict-sensitive and aligned with the UK's Women, Peace and Security commitments. It often focused on particularly vulnerable communities, but did not actively pursue accountability to these communities, or to conflict-affected communities more broadly. The UK government did not achieve its over-ambitious peacebuilding targets but did achieve positive results at national and community levels, although not all results were sustained. Reductions in the aid budget led to hasty project terminations that caused harm.

In-country, the UK government had a leading role among international partners, and worked closely with host governments. It was respected by both like-minded international partners and host governments for its knowledge and coherence – even though many UK-funded projects were of inappropriately short duration, and some had taken a long time to develop. The government also worked through the wider multilateral peacebuilding architecture, where it achieved positive results.

Individual question scores

Question 1

Relevance: How well has the UK government responded to different contexts in its peacebuilding approaches?

GREEN/
AMBER

Question 2

Coherence: How internally and externally coherent are the UK's peacebuilding approaches?

GREEN/
AMBER

Question 3

Effectiveness: How well has the UK contributed to peacebuilding objectives in areas in which it operates?

GREEN/
AMBER

Executive summary

Conflict forcibly displaces and kills people, and has immediate and longer-term effects on poverty and economic development. Political, social, economic, military and increasingly environmental drivers of conflict are interlinked, and often have a regional dimension. The number of conflicts is on the rise and a quarter of the global population now lives in conflict-affected countries. Countries emerging from violent conflict have a high likelihood of relapsing into new conflict. When they do, it is almost always over the same or related issues.

The UK government has long invested in addressing drivers of conflict and helping to build peace in fragile and conflict-affected countries and regions. The May 2022 *UK government's strategy for international development* reconfirms that “we must help countries escape cycles of conflict and violence”.¹ This review assesses how relevant, coherent and effective the UK government's peacebuilding efforts have been in the period from 2010 until 2022. In addition, we assess the extent to which the UK government pursued gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, as these are UK government priorities. We also consider how well the UK government engaged with those expected to benefit from the UK's work, and how it incorporated the needs and priorities of vulnerable groups into the design.

We selected case studies from countries in which the UK government believes it has achieved at least some positive results through its peacebuilding activities. We did this because the international community often fails in its peacebuilding attempts, so there is much to learn from efforts that have had some success. Three of our case studies cover the UK's peacebuilding work in a conflict-affected state (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia and Nigeria), and the fourth covers contributions to the UN Peacebuilding Fund and the Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention (the 'Joint Programme').

Relevance: How well has the UK government responded to different contexts in its peacebuilding approaches?

Access to regions that are in active conflict is often highly constrained and has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Nigeria, we found that the UK government's travel rules for its staff were risk-averse compared to the rules of almost all other international partners, and that this further reduced access of UK government representatives. Travel restrictions can have an impact on the ability of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to maintain local knowledge and engage directly with conflict-affected people.

Where access is possible, the UK government conducts or commissions contextual assessments of conflict settings. Backed by strategic guidance, these assessments include significant engagement with women, youth and a range of vulnerable groups. The identity of these vulnerable groups is context-dependent. They include unemployed, former combatants and other people who have surrendered, forcibly displaced people, indigenous communities, marginalised ethnic groups, families of 'disappeared persons', and victims and survivors of sexual violence in conflict settings. People living with a disability receive less attention than is required by the UK government's strategy on disability inclusion.² Assessments are generally gender-sensitive and often cover options to empower women. They also prominently feature the UK's WPS commitments. Collectively, these assessments provide an evidence base that is large, contextually relevant and credible.

The UK government uses this evidence base to inform programme and project design, the operationalisation of its WPS commitments, and its diplomatic work. The UK government also uses real-time situation analysis to ensure the ongoing relevance of its work in conflict contexts that are often volatile. It responded swiftly and appropriately to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on conflict dynamics and peacebuilding efforts.

The links between evidence and analysis on the one hand, and the design of interventions on the other hand, are stronger for direct investments than for UK government contributions to multilateral efforts. In the latter case, the UK government is one of several stakeholders. It often contributes to group decisions but is not in a position to make decisions independently. In recent years, the UK government's theories of change at

1 *The UK government's strategy for international development*, UK government and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, May 2022, p. 16, [link](#).
2 *DFID's strategy for disability inclusive development 2018–23*, Department for International Development, December 2018, [link](#).

programme and portfolio level grew stronger and more evidence-based, albeit from a low base and with exceptions. An important blind spot, for example, is that the original theory of change for the Lake Chad Basin did not explicitly cover environmental degradation. Theories of change continue to be over-optimistic about the extent of likely progress and to underestimate the many obstacles that peace processes typically encounter.

The UK funds and encourages engagement with conflict-affected communities and with vulnerable groups among them. However, it does not systematically require or actively encourage its implementing partners to have systems and mechanisms in place to ensure that conflict-affected communities are meaningfully and continuously involved in project decisions that directly affect their lives, and does not monitor the extent to which this is the case. Some UK government officials did not show awareness of the importance of such ongoing accountability towards conflict-affected communities. Several implementing partners do ensure accountability, with positive effects. However, in other cases the meaningful involvement of affected communities dwindles after the initial phase, and fully functioning accountability mechanisms remain uncommon.

We award a **green-amber** score for the relevance of the UK's peacebuilding approach in our four case studies, and note the importance of strengthening accountability to conflict-affected communities.

Coherence: How internally and externally coherent are the UK's peacebuilding approaches?

Over the course of the review period, the UK government increased its emphasis on the need for a joined-up approach where the UK's diplomatic, programme and military efforts reinforce each other, and official development assistance (ODA) and non-ODA activities are aligned. The merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, and the UK aid budget reductions of 2020 and 2021, have not changed the preference for joined-up action, although they have led to a stronger emphasis on diplomatic influencing.

At headquarters level in the UK, close cross-governmental cooperation in the field of peacebuilding is not yet standard practice. The redirecting of staff to Brexit preparations and the COVID-19 response, the ongoing restructuring within the merged FCDO together with considerable turnover in key positions, and two rounds of aid budget reductions have reduced FCDO's capacity to lead cooperation efforts. The newly established FCDO-based Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation could potentially guide the UK's efforts in the broad field of peacebuilding, but it does not have strong senior backing across relevant UK government departments and its counterparts outside FCDO appear to have little incentive to cooperate.

The UK government's joined-up approach has long been applied to its work in relation to the UN peacebuilding architecture. First, the UK government combines financial contributions, staff secondments and diplomatic influencing work in relation to the UN Peacebuilding Fund and the Joint Programme. This has helped ensure that the Peacebuilding Fund and Joint Programme took shape in a manner that aligned with UK priorities. Second, the UK government's in-country programmes and diplomatic efforts inform the UK's country-specific and wider work in the UN Security Council.

UK government staff in our case study countries Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia and Nigeria also applied the joined-up approach. The cooperation between different UK funding mechanisms is generally good. Moreover, the cross-fertilisation of the UK government's programmatic, diplomatic and military efforts strengthened in the second half of the review period.

Within our case study countries, the UK maintained its position as a respected donor, partner and influencer. In its work with host governments, the UK uses its joined-up approach to help strengthen the host governments' focus on and capacity for peacebuilding. In doing so, the UK government utilises its strong and long-standing relations with host governments. The UK values these relations and is therefore reluctant to criticise host government actions in public. In Nigeria and Colombia, the host governments' patchy peacebuilding and human rights records mean that the close links to them bring significant reputational risk for the UK government, and support to security forces incurs the risk of contributing to harm. The UK government accepts these risks because the potential results are significant and because its long-term role as a trusted critical friend to the host government is a key component of the international peacebuilding effort as a whole. Within the wider international community in Colombia and Nigeria in particular, the UK helps coordinate the wider international peacebuilding efforts. The UK does this in-country and through the UN Security Council, where the UK serves

as the penholder for the Colombian peace process and for the conflict in the Lake Chad Basin. The UK also does this as part of its wider efforts to optimise the multilateral peacebuilding system.

We award a **green-amber** score for the coherence of the UK's peacebuilding approach. The UK's joined-up approach has helped it maintain its position as an influential peacebuilding partner despite some deficiencies in cross-government coherence.

Effectiveness: How well has the UK contributed to peacebuilding objectives in areas in which it operates?

The UK government has a high level of expertise and has continued to learn, and to encourage its staff to learn, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of its peacebuilding activities. However, mechanisms to absorb this learning are insufficiently institutionalised and only part of the learning has been absorbed in guidance and applied to aid programmes. Where insights were not sensitive, learning has often been shared with other stakeholders and the public.

In the years after 2017, the UK government improved its peacebuilding-related monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Datasets were more systematically disaggregated by gender and age, and tools and methods became more varied and fit for purpose. M&E still serves the purposes of learning and accountability, but some of the more recent monitoring efforts also facilitate mid-way course correction of projects and support the host government's real-time decision-making. M&E increasingly helps the UK government to compare the overall results of programmes and regional and global portfolios. Such comparisons can potentially be used to strengthen decision-making on budget allocations across interventions, but they were not fully utilised to inform the aid reprioritisation decisions made to accommodate aid budget reductions in 2020 and 2021. Moreover, some M&E investments were wasted when programmes were cut short. Lastly, in some cases stringent M&E requirements incentivised short-term results at the expense of longer-term and more uncertain transformational results.

Because of the nature of peacebuilding work, the attribution of results to UK support has a margin of uncertainty. The following findings on the effectiveness of the UK's peacebuilding work should be read with this caveat in mind.

The UK government played a key role in the establishment and development of the UN peacebuilding architecture. The UK's funding to the Peacebuilding Fund and Joint Programme is generally unrestricted. This is appropriate because a series of external evaluations confirm that both are performing well.

Working with host governments in conflict-affected countries incurs high risks and potentially achieves important results. The appropriate criterion for effectiveness is not whether there were interventions that failed but whether some of them succeeded in making meaningful contributions to peacebuilding. The UK government did achieve results with its work with these governments, although it failed to achieve many of its targets as these were often unrealistic and assumed a level of influence that an outside government would not ordinarily have. The UK government achieved its most notable results in Colombia, where its peacebuilding effort has a ten-year horizon (2015–25). This long-term commitment allowed it to take a patient approach and to adapt its efforts to an evolving context. It contributed to the design and funding of key mechanisms that helped move the implementation of the peace agreement forward. Examples are a system of UN-mandated monitoring, the Trust Fund for Sustainable Peace in Colombia and the establishment of 'liaison officers' who served as the interface between central authorities and a multiplicity of local stakeholders. During the presidency of Iván Duque (2018–22), whose campaign pledge had been to modify the peace agreement, the UK helped avoid a government withdrawal from the original agreement.

In addition to its support for national peacebuilding processes, the UK government made significant contributions to local peacebuilding. As is the case with country-level targets, local targets were frequently overly ambitious. There was insufficient attention to the localisation of the peacebuilding effort. Some projects that over-promised or that were terminated hastily caused harm because unfulfilled promises aggravated grievances. In the north of Nigeria, where gender inequalities are high, hasty project termination left women who had risked exposure by participating unprotected. However, UK efforts did achieve positive results.

In Nigeria, for example, UK-funded peacebuilding activities helped build trust within and among communities, and between them and security forces and government authorities. The UK also helped raise levels of women's public participation in peacebuilding efforts, and awareness about women's safety and rights. However, in a wider Nigerian context of increasing conflict and fragility, these results are fragile. Moreover, the results were more modest than they could have been, because of the short duration of projects and the unpredictability of the UK's funding decisions.

We award a **green-amber** score for effectiveness, based on some significant results achieved, particularly in Colombia where the UK's patient and long-term approach has helped keep the peace agreement alive. However, the impact and sustainability of UK efforts would be strengthened if shortcomings such as overly ambitious targets, short and sometimes abruptly terminated programme cycles, and the limited institutionalisation of learning related to peacebuilding were addressed.

Recommendations

We offer the following recommendations to strengthen the long-term effectiveness of the UK government's peacebuilding efforts.

Recommendation 1

The UK government should preserve its 'thought leadership' capabilities in the field of peacebuilding.

Recommendation 2

The UK government's patient, strategic and risk-taking approach to peacebuilding at country and regional levels should extend to its partnerships at programme level.

Recommendation 3

The UK government should strengthen accountability to affected people in its peacebuilding work.

Recommendation 4

In its peacebuilding work, the UK government should maintain its focus on countries and regions in which it maintains strong, long-standing and multifaceted relations with host governments.

Recommendation 5

The UK government should learn from and, if possible, build on initiatives in which it seeks to pursue peacebuilding and environmental goals simultaneously.

Recommendation 6

The UK government should consider what can be learned from other countries when balancing travel risks in conflict-affected settings with the aim that UK government representatives have more access to regions for which they design and manage programmes.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The number of violent conflicts in the world has risen dramatically in recent years. Conflict does not only cause death, destruction and suffering, but also reinforces poverty and exacerbates inequalities. Conflict causes mass displacement, with more than 100 million people forcibly displaced in 2022.³ Environmental degradation and climate change can both heighten the risk and worsen the effect of conflict. The multiple and mutually reinforcing drivers of conflict, often with strong cross-border and regional dimensions, combined with conflict's adverse effect on poverty and inequality, make peace difficult to achieve and the risk of relapse into conflict high.⁴ Peacebuilding activities aim to support communities in conflict-affected and fragile states to break out of the conflict cycle and establish the conditions for lasting peace and sustainable development.
- 1.2 This review is relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 16, which is to “promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies”. It is impossible to achieve many of the other Sustainable Development Goals without progress towards Goal 16 (see **Box 1**).

Box 1: How this report relates to the Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

Related to this review



Goal 16 is dedicated to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels. Its targets include the following:

- Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.
- Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.
- Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.⁵

There are close links between conflict, stability and security and the other SDGs. The SDGs are all part of the *2030 agenda for sustainable development* which states, in its preamble, that “there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development”.⁶

- 1.3 The UK government has long invested in addressing drivers of conflict and helping build peace in fragile and conflict-affected countries and regions. Using a case study approach, the purpose of this review is to examine how relevant, coherent and effective this cross-government investment has been. In addition, for each case study, we assess the extent to which the UK government pursued gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security agenda, as these are key UK government priorities.⁷ We also consider how well the UK engaged with those expected to benefit from its programmes, and how the UK incorporated the needs and priorities of vulnerable groups into its programme designs.
- 1.4 We have selected four case studies. Three of them cover the UK's peacebuilding efforts in a conflict-affected state. A range of UK government departments contribute to peacebuilding efforts in the three countries, with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Ministry of Defence chief

3 *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2021*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, p. 7, [link](#).

4 *Poverty and conflict*, GSDRC Professional development reading pack, 2016, [link](#).

5 *Sustainable development goals*, United Nations, September 2015, [link](#).

6 *Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*, United Nations, October 2015, p. 2, [link](#).

7 The most recent of the UK's four national action plans is the *UK national action plan on women, peace and security 2018–2022*, UK government, January 2018, p. 1, [link](#). These national action plans follow up on Resolution 1325, United Nations Security Council, October 2000, [link](#).

among them. The fourth case study covers the UK government’s contributions to the UN Peacebuilding Fund and the Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention (the ‘Joint Programme’). Together, the four case studies encompass a wide and diverse range of programmes and mechanisms. From these case studies, we seek to identify lessons that can be applied more broadly.

- 1.5 The review’s use of the term ‘peacebuilding’ covers the UK government’s aid and diplomatic efforts to address drivers of conflict, with the aim of helping to prevent and resolve conflict and consolidate post-conflict peace. While the UK government does not use ‘peacebuilding’ as an operational concept, it declared its intention to continue its efforts in this field in the *May 2022 UK government’s strategy for international development*, which reconfirms that the UK government “must help countries escape cycles of conflict and violence”.⁸
- 1.6 In the absence of a pre-defined peacebuilding portfolio, the scope of this review has been determined by what UK government staff identified as the government’s most relevant peacebuilding work in the period from 2010 until 2022. Counterterrorism and other security-related operations and strategies are out of scope, and so is the broader development impact of the peacebuilding efforts we assess, unless we felt such impact enhanced or diminished the prospects of long-term peace. This review does not focus on safeguarding, so as not to overlap with ICAI’s 2022 review on the UK’s approach to safeguarding in the humanitarian sector,⁹ and ICAI’s 2020 review on sexual exploitation and abuse by international peacekeepers.¹⁰

Table 1: Our review questions

Review criteria and questions	Sub-questions
1. Relevance: How well has the UK government responded to different contexts in its peacebuilding approaches?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well does the UK assess the drivers of conflict and opportunities for peacebuilding in particular contexts and develop plausible theories of change for its interventions? • To what extent do the UK’s approaches to peacebuilding reflect the needs and priorities of vulnerable communities? • How well does the UK meet its commitments on Women, Peace and Security?
2. Coherence: How internally and externally coherent are the UK’s peacebuilding approaches?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well have UK departments, funds and agencies worked together to deliver peacebuilding outcomes? • How well does the UK align its programming and diplomatic efforts towards peacebuilding? • Are the UK’s approaches to peacebuilding coherent with the efforts of the host government, and of other funders and agencies?
3. Effectiveness: How well has the UK contributed to peacebuilding objectives in areas in which it operates?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent is the UK contributing to a resilient peace in the areas in which it operates? • How well does the UK measure and evaluate its contribution to peacebuilding? • How well is UK aid contributing to and learning from evidence, and adapting its approaches to peacebuilding on the basis of such learning?

8 *The UK government’s strategy for international development*, UK government and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, May 2022, p. 16, [link](#).

9 *The UK’s approach to safeguarding in the humanitarian sector*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, February 2022, [link](#).

10 *Sexual exploitation and abuse by international peacekeepers: An accompanying report to the ICAI review of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, September 2020, [link](#).

2. Methodology

- 2.1 Our methodology was designed to assess how relevant, coherent and effective the UK government's investments in peacebuilding can be, and what the UK government could learn from its successes. We selected our case studies from a government-provided list of 18 countries and two regions in which the government believed it had achieved at least some positive results. We did this on the premise that, in the field of peacebuilding, where failures are common and successes relatively rare, there is more to learn from approaches that worked out well than from those that did not. Our Afghanistan country portfolio review covers an example of the latter.¹¹
- 2.2 We conducted our assessment on the basis of four case studies. Three of them are country portfolios (see **Box 2** and **Annex 1**) and one is a series of multilateral contributions (see **Box 3**). The four case studies are:
1. Nigeria, where there is ongoing and worsening conflict and fragility.
 2. Colombia, where the implementation of a 2016 peace agreement is ongoing.
 3. Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Dayton peace agreement was signed in 1995 but which is yet to overcome the legacy of conflict.
 4. The UK's long-standing contributions to the multilateral peacebuilding effort through the UN.

Box 2: Background to the case studies of Colombia, Nigeria, and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the 'Dayton peace agreement' in 1995 but has yet to overcome the legacy of conflict. The peace agreement put an end to the Bosnian war and established Bosnia and Herzegovina as a single state comprising the 'Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina' (principally made up of Bosnian Muslim- and Croat-majority areas) and 'Republika Srpska' (covering Serb-majority areas). The agreement did not address ethnic division and exclusion, and instead created a complex state structure with layers of government and ethnicity-based governance arrangements. The legacies of the violent conflict that have yet to be overcome include the lack of a full accounting for missing persons, the existence of parallel ethnicity-based structures, the denial of war crimes, and the neglect of the needs of victims and survivors of sexual violence committed during the war.

UK efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina: In the early years of our review period, the UK government focused on state-building. In more recent years, its peacebuilding work has focused on the legacy of conflict, reconciliation and community cohesion. The UK's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) funds projects that aim to help account for missing persons, work towards a sustainable and inclusive peace in Mostar (to set an example for the wider region), support wartime sexual violence victims and survivors, and build the institutional capacities of the Srebrenica Memorial in order to establish a globally relevant centre for genocide research and prevention, as well as a regional hub for reconciliation and inter-ethnic dialogue.

Colombia signed a peace agreement in 2016 and faces multiple challenges in the implementation of this agreement. For over 50 years, Colombia faced armed conflict between the government, paramilitary groups, crime syndicates and guerrilla groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army. The conflict led to widespread loss of life and human rights abuses, and it undermined the development of large parts of the country. A peace agreement between the government of Colombia and FARC was signed in 2016. While progress has been made, implementation of many parts of the peace agreement has been slow. Moreover, after an initial reduction, violence has increased again in recent years. The government continues to lack a meaningful presence in conflict-affected areas, and crime syndicates have assumed control over some of the areas previously held by FARC. Deforestation has accelerated.

UK efforts in Colombia: The UK government is supporting the government of Colombia's efforts to implement the peace agreement, tackle the underlying causes of conflict and reduce the speed of deforestation.

¹¹ *Review of UK Aid to Afghanistan*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, November 2022, [link](#).

In parallel, the UK government plays a coordinating role for the wider international peacebuilding effort. It does so in-country and as the UN Security Council's penholder for the implementation of the peace agreement. The UK government also supports community-based programmes in conflict-affected rural regions. These are implemented by UN agencies and civil society organisations (CSOs). The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) works with other UK departments, such as the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the National Crime Agency (NCA) on serious and organised crime, and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on tackling the criminal drivers of deforestation. Most work is funded by the CSSF. Part of a recent programme that aims to strengthen the environmental rule of law in regions affected by the conflict is co-funded by the International Climate Fund.

Nigeria is facing worsening conflict and fragility. Conflict in Nigeria has multiple compounding drivers. In the Niger Delta, the main drivers are the oil industry's environmental damage and the unequal distribution of oil revenues. In the Lake Chad Basin, key drivers of conflict are the insurgencies of Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa, as well as government violence and human rights violations. Violent groups are exploiting grievances about government failure to facilitate development and deliver basic services. In the North West and Middle Belt zones, conflicts between farmers and pastoralists and bandit group activity have become increasingly violent. In all cases, climate change and environmental degradation drive or exacerbate conflict, and COVID-19 further undermined peacebuilding efforts.

UK efforts in Nigeria: The UK government supports the government of Nigeria at federal and state levels, in recent years with a focus on the Lake Chad Basin. Support focuses on the authorities' commitment to peaceful settlements, and their capacity to stabilise and tackle threats, respect human rights, address the underlying causes of conflict and work towards Women, Peace and Security goals. In parallel, the UK government plays a coordinating role for the wider international peacebuilding effort. It does so in-country and as the UN Security Council's penholder for the Lake Chad Basin. At community level, the UK government supports programmes, implemented by UN agencies and CSOs, that aim to enhance social cohesion, security and justice, improve the delivery of services, reduce the vulnerability of youth to recruitment by violent extremists, amplify the voice of citizens, and help create conditions for the reintegration of people who were formerly in the sphere of influence of violent groups. Work is implemented through FCDO, MOD and NCA, and is partially CSSF-funded.

Annex 1 provides an overview of the UK government's programmes in these three countries.

Collectively, these four case studies include a diversity of programme investments, as well as diplomatic efforts and support to security forces. We only assessed parts that were financed by official development assistance (ODA). The case studies also include guidance and support from the UK government's headquarters.

Box 3: The UK's investment in multilateral peacebuilding through the UN

The fourth case study for this review covers the UK government's contributions to the multilateral peacebuilding effort. This effort is long-standing. The UK's Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Programme that started in March 2021 is the most recent contribution. This programme continues three types of contributions:

- UK secondments to the UN peacebuilding system.
- Contributions to the UN Peacebuilding Fund, which is the financial instrument of first resort for the UN to help sustain peace in countries or situations at risk of or affected by violent conflict. In our review period, the UK government was the third-largest contributor to the Peacebuilding Fund, after Germany and Sweden. It provided £133 million of unearmarked funding between 2010 and 2022. In recent years,

the UK's contribution was less prominent: it was the sixth-largest donor from 2020 until mid-2022.¹²

- Contributions to the Joint Programme, which is a joint programme of the United Nations Development Programme and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs that aims to enhance UN support to national stakeholders on conflict prevention and sustaining peace. Between 2018 and 2020, the UK government provided £3.6 million of unearmarked funding to the Joint Programme.

2.3 We assessed the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of ODA-financed work done within each of the case studies against the UK government's strategies and objectives, and against the context in each country or region. We also considered the gender sensitivity of the UK government's work, the way this work fulfilled its Women, Peace and Security commitments, and how UK efforts ensured a focus on and the active involvement of vulnerable communities. Where relevant, we assessed how the UK government considered environmental dimensions to conflict. We compared our findings with the perceptions of people affected by conflict, and ensured their voices were incorporated in our analysis and reflected in this report. Lastly, we assessed the way work in these case studies was monitored and evaluated, and the extent to which it had been informed by and had contributed to global and internal learning. To do this:

- We interviewed 161 people who worked for the UK government centrally and in the case study countries, like-minded governments, host government officials, implementing partners and academics. We also visited project sites in Colombia and Nigeria (but not in Bosnia and Herzegovina) and reviewed 663 documents that cover relevant assessments, strategies, policies, plans and programmes.
- We conducted interviews and focus group discussions with 231 conflict-affected people in two regions in Colombia (83 women and 57 men in Cauca and Meta) and Nigeria (37 women and 54 men in Maiduguri, Jere and Damboa, all in Borno State). The researchers were women. They visited the communities in which the respondents lived. The people they spoke with included indigenous people, Afro-Colombians and reincorporated former guerrillas in Colombia, and internally displaced people, former combatants, people from vigilante groups and people from the Christian minority in northeast Nigeria.
- We compared the UK's peacebuilding approaches against evidence, as presented in literature, about what drives and perpetuates conflicts, what does and does not help to further peace, and what trade-offs typically have to be considered.

2.4 The five components of our methodology are summarised in **Figure 1**, and explained in full in our approach paper, which is available on the ICAI website. Methodological limitations are listed in **Box 4**.

Box 4: Limitations to the methodology

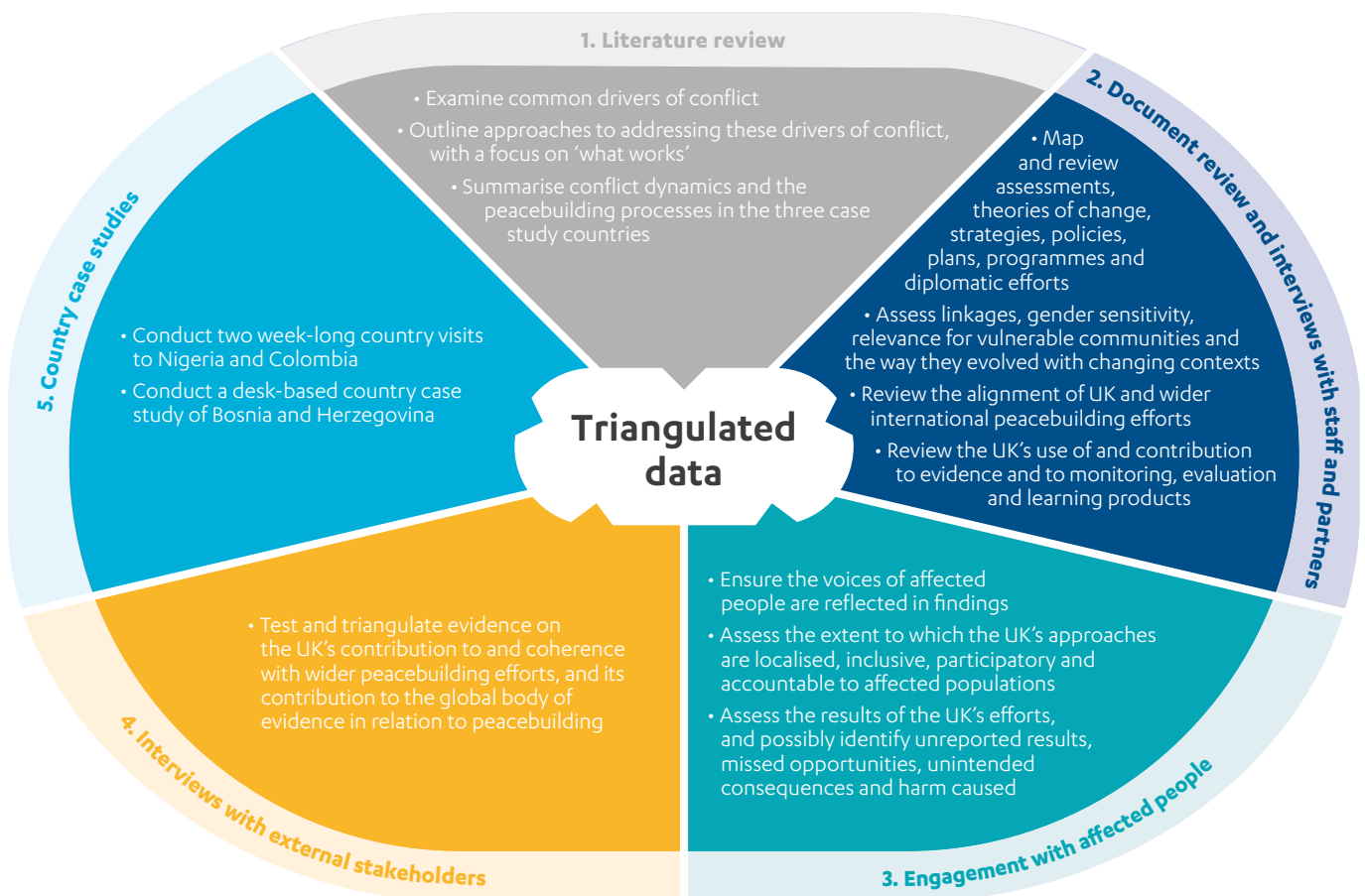
- Unless specified otherwise, our findings cover ODA spending from 2010 until mid-2022. However, the evidence base for the earlier years is weaker than for more recent years. We saw relatively little documentation produced before 2018, and relatively few respondents could help us understand the UK's peacebuilding work that took place before then.
- Because the UK government does not use peacebuilding as an operational concept, the borders of what does and does not amount to peacebuilding work are unclear, and it is not possible to determine the proportion of the UK's peacebuilding that we assessed. We only provide estimates for the UK's overall spending on peacebuilding activities and focus our assessment on a detailed analysis of the four case studies.
- Because of the deliberate positive bias in our sample, our findings provide useful insights into 'what works' but cannot be assumed to be representative of the UK's overall peacebuilding work.
- Our citizen engagement was not comprehensive. It was limited to people who had had exposure to projects that were funded or co-funded by the UK government, and does not give an indication of the

¹² Overview contributions Peacebuilding Fund, Peacebuilding Fund, [link](#), using the HM Revenue and Customs conversion rates of December of each year, except for 2022, for which we used the August rate, [link](#).

proportion of conflict-affected people such projects reached. We did not engage with citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- Due to the nature of peacebuilding work, the causality between efforts and results is often uncertain. The review does not allocate successes or failures in peacebuilding efforts to a single actor or intervention but assesses, through triangulated evidence, plausible contributions to results.
- Because access to regions in active conflict is often highly constrained, we did not engage with people in some of the regions for which peacebuilding has been most important.
- We engaged with host government representatives, and to a limited extent with former combatants in Colombia, but not with other conflict parties in our case study countries. We only talked with representatives of countries that the UK sees as broadly sharing its peacebuilding objectives. Our data for Bosnia and Herzegovina rely on UK government documents, and insights gained through virtual interviews with representatives of the UK government and their implementing partners.

Figure 1: Our methodology



3. Background

- 3.1 The world is enduring the highest number of conflicts since the creation of the UN, with one quarter of the global population now living in conflict-affected countries.¹³ Within our review period, the number of active state-based conflicts increased from 31 in 2010 to 56 in 2020.¹⁴ According to the Global Peace Index, the level of global peacefulness deteriorated in this same period, and the situation in the 25 least peaceful countries deteriorated even more.¹⁵ Countries emerging from violent conflict have a high likelihood of relapsing into new conflict, and when they do it is almost always over the same or related issues.¹⁶ A formal end to a conflict does not mean that people are safe.

“ The compañeros and compañeras who decided to leave [the conflict behind them] wanted [...] to have a life, and what have they been? Assassinated, so each person who decided to believe in peace, what did they receive? Well, death. ”

Mixed focus group discussion of rights defenders in Cauca, Colombia

“ The problem we are facing is a youth problem. They fight a lot. [...] They fight even during burial or funeral ceremonies, then also invite youths from the neighbouring community to assist them. ”

Focus group discussion of young women (Woman, 18–25 years), Borno State, Nigeria

- 3.2 The nature of conflict is shifting. Environmental degradation and climate change are increasingly important drivers and amplifiers of conflict.¹⁷ Interlinked political, social, economic and military drivers of conflict have increasingly strong regional dimensions, and this makes them harder to resolve.¹⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic has placed critical limitations on peacebuilding efforts¹⁹ and governments have added to conflict risks by using the pandemic as a justification for strengthening surveillance²⁰ and further restricting movements and liberties.²¹
- 3.3 Conflict causes many types of harm. Conflict kills people. Between 2010 and 2017 the conflict death rate as a proportion of the world population nearly tripled.²² Conflict also forces people to move. The number of forcibly displaced people increased year on year throughout our review period, except for one year, and reached 100 million people in 2022.²³ Conflict has immediate effects on economic activity and poverty: insecurity and infrastructure damage disrupt supply chains, violence and looting force people to flee and lose livelihoods, and the distortions of war economies facilitate corruption and the criminal exploitation of natural resources. In the longer term, these effects are compounded by disruptions in education, stunting, injuries and mental disorders.²⁴

13 *The sustainable development goals report 2022*, United Nations, 2022, pp. 2–3, [link](#).

14 *War and peace*, chart titled Number of active state-based conflicts, World, 1946 to 2020, Our World in Data, 2022, [link](#). State-based conflicts are conflicts in which at least one of the conflict parties is a state.

15 *The global peace index 2022: Measuring peace in a complex world*, Institute for Economics and Peace, p. 28, [link](#). Global peacefulness improved between 2011 and 2014, but deteriorated overall and in all other years in our review period.

16 *How should we understand patterns of recurring conflict?*, Conflict trends 03/2020, Jarland, J. et al., Peace Research Institute, 2020, [link](#).

17 *Climate action holds key to tackling global conflict*, United Nations Environment Programme, November 2021, [link](#).

18 *A new era of conflict and violence*, United Nations, 2020, [link](#).

19 *Outlining 2022 priorities, Peacebuilding Commission chair cites focus on women, youth, support for pandemic recovery, sustainable peace in conflict-affected countries*, United Nations, February 2022, [link](#).

20 "Introduction: Surveillance and the COVID-19 pandemic: Views from around the world", Newell, B., *Surveillance & Society*, volume 19, number 1, 2021, pp. 81–84, [link](#).

21 "Amplified vulnerabilities and reconfigured relations: Covid-19, torture prevention and human rights in the Global South", Jefferson, A. M. et al., *State Crime Journal*, volume 10, number 1, 2021, pp. 147–169, [link](#).

22 From 0.43 to 1.19 per 100,000 people. *War and peace*, chart titled Conflict death rate, 1989–2017, Our World in Data, 2022, [link](#).

23 For 2012–22: *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2021*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, p. 7, [link](#); for 2010–12: *Global trends 2013: War's human cost*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, p. 6, [link](#). The exception is 2011.

24 "According to the most conservative estimates, these countries and regions would have 5–10 percentage points lower poverty rates without their conflict debt." *Conflict and poverty*, Policy Research Working Paper number 9455, World Bank, Mueller, H. and Techasunthornwat, C., 2020, [link](#).

3.4 The importance of building and maintaining peace is clear from the UN Charter, the opening line of which is: “We the peoples of the United Nations are determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”.²⁵ The UN’s understanding of what this means and requires has evolved over time.²⁶ In 2016, the UN Security Council described peacebuilding as “an inherently political process aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, recurrence or continuation of conflict [that] encompasses a wide range of political, developmental, and human rights programmes and mechanisms”.²⁷ The literature review that accompanies this report presents and categorises a range of other peacebuilding definitions and paradigms.²⁸

The UK government’s evolving approach to peacebuilding

3.5 The UK government’s interpretation of peacebuilding has also evolved. At the start of our review period (2010), the then Department for International Development (DFID) had landed on an approach to peacebuilding that “aims to establish positive peace”²⁹ in which there is no structural violence and there are no structural impediments preventing people from reaching their full potential. This is more ambitious than achieving a ‘negative peace’ in the form of the mere absence of violent conflict.³⁰ DFID’s approach consisted of three interrelated elements:

1. Supporting supportive peace processes and agreements.
2. Addressing causes and effects of conflicts.
3. Building mechanisms to resolve conflict peacefully.³¹

3.6 Soon thereafter, the UK government ceased to use peacebuilding as an operational term. However, its commitment to addressing the root causes of conflict and to consolidating peace remains. One of the priority actions of the 2021 *Integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy* is “to establish a more integrated approach to government work on conflict and instability, placing greater emphasis on addressing the drivers of conflict”.³² The May 2022 *UK government’s strategy for international development* reconfirms that “we must help countries escape cycles of conflict and violence”.³³

3.7 Ascertaining the level of UK investment in peacebuilding activities is not straightforward. A rough but low estimate provided by the UK government in 2022 declared spending on “civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution” to range from a low of £92 million in 2007 to a high of £382 million in 2016, with a decline to £159 million in 2020.³⁴ The UK’s peacebuilding work spans a range of areas. The programmes in our sample (see **Annex 1** for an overview) cover a variety of objectives, including addressing environmental and other drivers of conflict, supporting peace negotiations, strengthening government and security institutions, promoting peaceful relations within and among communities, and working with like-minded donors to consolidate peacebuilding gains. Throughout the review period, key criteria for support were the UK’s perceived national interests and the UK’s perceived potential to contribute to peace. Other key criteria were the contributions the UK could make to gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security agenda and to ensuring that no one was left behind in the trajectory towards peace.

25 *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, United Nations, 1945, [link](#).

26 For an overview, see Annex I, “The evolution of peacebuilding”, in *UN peacebuilding: an orientation*, United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, September 2010, pp. 44–49, [link](#).

27 *Resolution 2282*, United Nations Security Council, April 2016, pp. 1 and 2 respectively, [link](#).

28 The literature review is available on the ICAI website, pp. 2–3, [link](#).

29 *Building peaceful states and societies: a DFID practice paper*, Department for International Development, 2010, p. 14, [link](#).

30 For the distinction between positive and negative peace, see “Violence, peace and peace research”, Galtung, J., *Journal of Peace Research*, volume 6, issue 3, 1969, pp. 167–191, [link](#).

31 *Building peaceful states and societies: a DFID practice paper*, Department for International Development, 2010, p. 14, [link](#).

32 *Global Britain in a competitive age: The integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy*, UK government, March 2021, p. 79, [link](#).

33 *The UK government’s strategy for international development*, UK government and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, May 2022, p. 16, [link](#).

34 *OECD creditor reporting system, 2022*, [link](#). Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reporting uses US dollars, which we converted to GBP using the HM Revenue and Customs exchange rate of December 2021, [link](#). When the UK government mentioned its OECD reporting in its business case for C3P, it added that it is “low ... largely due to the fact that the majority of direct interventions sit within the CSSF portfolio, or other government departments’ budgets, and not on DFID’s direct baseline; and partly due to the fact that we do not have a ‘peace/stability marker’ for our programmes, making such spend difficult to identify and aggregate.” Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding (C3P) business case, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, September 2020, footnote 7 on p. 5, [link](#).

- 3.8 A portion of the UK's peacebuilding work was channelled through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), and implemented by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and its predecessors DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and the Ministry of Defence. There were also programmes that were implemented directly by DFID, and in Colombia our sample included a programme that is implemented by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.
- 3.9 **Annex 2** lists documents that were published in our review period and that outline the UK government's approach to peacebuilding. This approach evolved, and **Box 5** lists the key shifts made in our review period. Some of these shifts were driven by changes in the nature of conflicts and the analysis of the wider international community. The UK incorporated a stronger regional focus into its work, for example, at the time when the landmark World Bank and UN publication *Pathways for peace* identified a trend towards the regionalisation of conflict.³⁵ Another key shift is the acknowledgement of the role of (mis)information in conflict, and the understanding that the distinctions between peace and war, state and non-state violence, and the roles of the virtual and reality in conflict are increasingly blurred. A key internal shift was that the UK government gradually placed more importance on the need for its various parts to work as one, including official development assistance (ODA) and non-ODA spending. The CSSF served as a key vehicle for this.

Box 5: Shifts in the UK government's approach to cross-government cooperation

Until the start of our review period, the guidance on the nature of cross-government cooperation followed a 'comprehensive approach' that focused on security and had its roots in military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Around the start of our review period, the UK government moved to an 'integrated approach' rooted in DFID and the FCO. This approach seeks to bring different perspectives together (such as through the 'Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability'), and to ground collaborative work in conflict sensitivity and outcome-based thinking. This approach has continued to evolve. It has, for instance, moved from country-level to more regional thinking. It has also come to acknowledge that there are trade-offs between the immediate reduction of violence and the building of longer-term stability.

In 2018, the Cabinet Office introduced the 'fusion doctrine'. This doctrine emphasises the need for resources to be commensurate with ambitions, and for strategic choices to be made on the basis of the UK's national interest as well as on the basis of where the UK government could potentially make a catalytic contribution. The 'fusion doctrine' requires different parts of the UK to contribute to efforts that are not their core business if this maximises the UK government's capabilities to achieve its overall goals.

The reductions from 2020 onwards in the UK aid budget meant that the diplomatic part of the UK's effort gained in relative importance, but this has not changed the government's emphasis on the need to work in a 'whole-of-government' manner.

35 "Violent conflicts have also become more complex and protracted, involving more nonstate groups and regional and international actors." *Pathways for peace: Inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflict*, World Bank and United Nations, 2018, p. xi, [link](#).

4. Findings

- 4.1 Unless specified otherwise, findings apply to all three of our case study countries and country-specific examples illustrate wider points.

Relevance: How well has the UK government responded to different contexts in its peacebuilding approaches?

The UK government's understanding of the conflicts it engages in is good, although limited by access constraints

- 4.2 Access to regions that are in active conflict is often highly constrained, and UK security risk appetite is low, which means that UK government staff often manage programmes they are unable to visit. The COVID-19 pandemic added to the constraints. In Nigeria, we found that the UK government's travel rules for staff were risk-averse compared to the rules of almost all other international partners. Because of these constraints, it was not always possible to monitor conflict situations in real time, to engage directly with conflict-affected people, or to verify the quality of assessments.
- 4.3 As far as is possible under these circumstances, the UK government has a sound understanding of drivers of conflict and opportunities for peacebuilding. In part, this is a result of high levels of staff expertise and proactive learning. We come back to this in the section on effectiveness, see **paragraphs 4.51 to 4.52** below. UK government staff deepen this understanding, and keep it current, through their active engagement with the UK's sizeable in-country networks and an awareness of external research. Where this adds value, the UK conducts and commissions assessments, and contributes to the monitoring efforts of other stakeholders. In Colombia, the UK co-funds the missions of the UN and the Organisation of American States, both of which monitor elements of the implementation of the peace agreement. In Nigeria, the UK government works with national human rights institutions to establish local human rights monitoring committees. Some of the UK-funded assessments are sensitive and are not publicly available. Collectively, they form an evidence base that is large, contextually relevant and credible. In only a few cases did we see evidence of blind spots, and of somewhat duplicative assessments.
- 4.4 Many of the assessments focused on drivers and amplifiers of conflict, increasingly including climate change and environmental deterioration, and on impediments to peacebuilding, such as COVID-19 and disproportionate security force responses. Assessments often considered the multiplicity of mutually reinforcing drivers and amplifiers of conflict. The UK government also invests in conflict prediction capabilities that make use of quantitative data and machine learning (a form of artificial intelligence). Part of this work was paused when Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to a reprioritisation of UK government activities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there has been a fragile peace since late 1995, assessments focus on conflict risks and cover gender and inclusivity analysis, and the role of media and (dis)information in peacebuilding. Larger in-house studies, and specifically the UK's Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS) studies,³⁶ evolved over the course of the review period. On the one hand, recent JACS assessments consider atrocity prevention options and are better designed to help make programme choices. On the other hand, recent JACS assessments engaged less extensively with the UK government's civil society organisation (CSO) partners, which often have deeper insights into local realities than the UK government itself.
- 4.5 The nature of assessments evolved with shifting realities. Some such shifts are global. The regional dimensions of conflicts are gaining importance, as is the relationship between conflict and climate change and environmental degradation. Other shifts are specific to particular contexts. When the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) gave up their territorial control in Colombia, some forested regions were opened for legal and illegal commercial exploitation and deforestation accelerated. The UK

³⁶ According to the *Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability guidance note*, Stabilisation Unit, June 2017, p. 20, [link](#), UK government contributors to JACS may be "FCO research analysts; MOD intelligence analysts; DFID conflict advisers; DFID humanitarian advisers; Regional Conflict Advisers; Cabinet Office analysts; Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre analysts; SU [Stabilisation Unit] advisers; Joint Secretariat; and National Crime Agency officers".

government conducted research on criminal drivers of this acceleration and of links with peacebuilding efforts, and then designed a programme to respond to this new reality. The nature of assessments evolved with internal shifts as well. When reductions in the UK aid budget put the focus more on the diplomatic part of the UK's peacebuilding efforts, assessments increasingly focused on the incentives that fuel and perpetuate conflict, and on opportunities for negotiation and mediation.

The UK government invests in understanding the needs and priorities of affected communities, but does not encourage accountability towards affected communities

- 4.6 In addition to national-level studies, the UK commissioned assessments on specific regions and specific groups within these regions. These assessments were generally conflict- and gender-sensitive, and intended to feed into projects that aimed to support 'local peacebuilding'. Local peacebuilding is an increasingly influential approach to peacebuilding, meaning that the involvement of religious, community and women's groups is a key factor in the design and implementation of projects.³⁷ The assessments often related to the needs and priorities of particularly vulnerable groups, reflecting DFID's emphasis on the principle of leaving no one behind. Such assessments worked well in contexts where vulnerable groups were somewhat organised, but less so in contexts where this was not the case.

“ We [indigenous leaders] always [...] go to the base and we consult with the community on what type of project is going to be managed, what type of project is viable in the indigenous territories because I cannot say let's bring [for example] gold extraction, that we cannot allow. [Nobody can] say I have this project, you accept it, no, they first make the consultation, if it is possible, if it is viable or not, what kind of risks it will cause, if it will improve or worsen, then [...] the authorities take the decision to convene an assembly and look at the line of needs of the tree of needs [...] and then the assembly will determine if this project seems good to us. ”

Mixed focus group discussion of people who were involved in projects of the Trust Fund for Sustainable Peace, Popayán, Colombia

“ When they were building the shopping complex at the market area, they called us and asked our opinion on the project and I think our advice was considered. ”

Men-only focus group discussion (25+ years), Borno State, Nigeria

“ If we had been consulted at the beginning of the project they might not have used that kind of machine to pump water because the foot pump doesn't produce water effectively and efficiently. ”

Men-only focus group discussion (25+ years), Borno State, Nigeria

- 4.7 For more general assessments, including ones that took place for the immediate purpose of programme design, the UK and its implementing partners actively sought to include the voices of women and vulnerable groups. The identity of these vulnerable groups was context-dependent. They included unemployed people, former combatants and other people who have surrendered, forcibly displaced people, indigenous communities, marginalised ethnic groups, families of 'disappeared persons', and victims and survivors of sexual violence in conflict settings. The UK sometimes considered the specific needs of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex (LGBTQI+), where this did not conflict with local laws. In Colombia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, more than in Nigeria, some of the programming considered and aimed to address how different types of marginalisation

37 The literature review is available on the ICAI website, p.8, [link](#).

intersected and compounded an individual's vulnerability (such as, for instance, being a woman and a member of an ethnic minority). Notwithstanding the adoption in 2018, by the Department for International Development (DFID), of a strategy for disability-inclusive development,³⁸ people living with a disability received relatively little attention.

- 4.8 The UK funded and encouraged engagement with vulnerable groups. However, it did not systematically require or monitor the use of mechanisms through which implementing partners ensure that conflict-affected communities are meaningfully involved in project decisions that directly impact their lives. Some UK government officials did not show awareness of the need for this accountability to conflict-affected communities. We saw several implementing partners that did ensure such accountability, and in our citizen engagement we learned about its positive effects. A man in Damboa, Nigeria, for example, told us: "There was a project by the UNDP at the market. The community discovered that the contractor was using substandard material. We reported [this] to [the local implementing partner] and they have stopped the work [of this contractor]." However, in many other cases meaningful involvement with affected communities dwindled after the assessment phase. Through our conversations with conflict-affected people, we learned that fully functioning accountability mechanisms were uncommon.

“ They left without our knowledge. [...] They are supposed to gather us and tell us that they are leaving. [...] it just finished. ”

Mixed focus group discussion of youth from the Christian minority in Borno State, Nigeria

“ Once we were called to the District Head's palace. We spent the entire day answering questions just like the way you are asking us questions, but apart from that, we have not seen anything. ”

Women-only focus group discussion of farmers (25+ years), Borno State, Nigeria

“ They impose projects [...] like a project [...] of 50 hens with their shed [...]. This project is [...] going to last until the [feed] concentrate runs out and after that the hens are going to get their necks turned and go to the sancocho [a Colombian stew] and that's it. [Those who implement peacebuilding projects] spend millions on things that we don't need. ”

Mixed focus group discussion of former combatants, Miranda, Colombia

The UK government and its implementers use their contextualised understanding of conflicts as they develop and adapt theories of change, strategies and interventions

- 4.9 In the first half of this review period, theories of change were generally developed at programme level only, though not all programmes had them. They were often artificial constructs which retrofitted pre-existing projects that were not necessarily joined up, and they were not revisited once they had been finalised. In the second half of the review period, programme-level theories of change grew stronger.³⁹ In addition, the UK government started to capture its approaches to conflict in credible theories of change at regional level (such as the one for the Western Balkans, which covers Bosnia and Herzegovina), national level (such as the one for Colombia), and sub-regional level (such as the one for the Lake Chad Basin). These theories of change are periodically revisited in light of evolving contexts. They outline change trajectories that cover official development assistance (ODA) and non-ODA work, and that demonstrate how political, developmental and sometimes military interventions could jointly

38 DFID's strategy for disability inclusive development 2018–23, Department for International Development, December 2018, [link](#).

39 The most notable exception is the theory of change that underpins the UK's Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding (C3P) programme, which is not much more than a logframe in the guise of a theory of change. It exists in parallel with the programme's actual logframe and assumes links between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts that are implausible and beyond the UK's control.

contribute to peace and stability. These trajectories are generally plausible, although there are a few exceptions and blind spots. The expected speed of change is over-optimistic and underestimates the many obstacles that peace processes typically encounter – such as the prevalence of weapons in many post-conflict situations, and the power imbalance between indigenous people and the extractive and agro-industry sectors. We found an important example of a blind spot in the original theory of change for the Lake Chad Basin, which did not explicitly cover environmental degradation, even though this is a key driver of conflict in the region.

“ The weapons, the weapons break everything, so this has stalled all the projects... ”

Mixed focus group discussion of people who were involved in peace projects, Colombia

“ They moved us here, [...] they changed our territory, we live there by the river but we have to change [because the original land is valuable for commercial agriculture]. ”

Focus group discussion of displaced indigenous people, Colombia

- 4.10 Diplomatic efforts and programme choices generally align with the theories of change of which they are meant to be part. They also generally reflected the findings of assessments, where it was possible to translate these findings into useful action. This is most clearly the case where the UK government provides direct funding. Some of the work with host governments and multi-donor initiatives was less strongly rooted in assessments and therefore less likely to deliver good results. The UK was aware of this but was not always in the position to address the issue since it was only one of several stakeholders involved. In such cases, the UK government did not withdraw its support. Instead, it tried to influence decision-making, because the benefits of joint work with like-minded countries outweighed the drawback of co-funding some interventions that lack a strong evidence base. This is a reasonable assumption.

The UK government's conflict endeavours are generally gender-sensitive and pay attention to its Women, Peace and Security commitments

- 4.11 Following the UN Security Council's adoption of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in 2000, the UK was among the first to adopt a national action plan on WPS (see **Box 6**).⁴⁰ The links between this and subsequent UK national action plans and actual practice are strong. For example, the 2018 national action plan argues that, in many post-conflict contexts, transitional justice mechanisms do not adequately include women and girls, and the UK funds work that is meant to ensure this will not happen in Colombia. Internally, UK government staff and documents are critical of shortcomings in the UK government's global practice in this field, and point to the need to establish internal accountability mechanisms to ensure gender commitments are upheld. This internal criticism is in contrast to the views of the like-minded country partners we talked with, who all respect the UK's WPS work and often see the UK government as a frontrunner in this field. The UK's implementing partners see limitations in the form of short project timelines and lack of UK government attention to transformational change, but also say that the UK government actively supports WPS, and gender mainstreaming and inclusive approaches more widely, in all its peacebuilding programmes.
- 4.12 Nigeria is one of the UK's WPS focus countries. The UK supported two iterations of Nigeria's national action plan at federal level and in a few states. The UK's work in Nigeria has focused on protection and prevention. Some of this was trailblazing: the UK government was among the first to support community reintegration of women and girls who had survived captivity, for example. Within these protection and prevention pillars, the issue of sexual violence received most of the attention.

40 This first happened in 2006. The other early adopters were Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

- 4.13 Colombia never adopted a national action plan on WPS, but the situation is otherwise more enabling than it is in Nigeria. The gender gap is less wide⁴¹ and the 2016 peace agreement is widely seen as the most gender-sensitive peace agreement negotiated in recent times. The government of Colombia is supportive of women’s empowerment, and the wider donor community has a strong focus on gender equality in its various policies and programme efforts. Some of the citizens we engaged with confirmed that “women have become visible leading projects [and] many have participated in political spaces [...] such as the [territorial] council. [Such participation] is no longer so stigmatised”.⁴² Colombia is data-rich in the field of gender equality and WPS, and instead of duplicating efforts the UK government uses external sources of information as it designs its contributions and monitors progress. Significant obstacles remain but, in this relatively enabling context, the UK’s WPS and wider gender equality work is able to consider how gender inequality intersects with LGBTQI+, indigenous and ethnic minority communities.
- 4.14 Starting in 2017, the UK government invested in its gender expertise in the Western Balkans. We saw evidence of gender sensitivity across the Bosnia and Herzegovina portfolio. The most important WPS assessments are appropriately related to the priorities set by the country’s current (2018–22) national action plan, which prioritises the increased participation of women in military forces, the police and peace missions, including in decision-making positions.
- 4.15 Overall, the UK government was relatively gender-sensitive at the start of the review period, and then invested in gender and WPS expertise. This further improved its gender sensitivity, and its capacity for gender-responsive and gender-transformative programming. The Ministry of Defence started at a lower base than other parts of the government, but also became more gender sensitive over the course of the review period. It prominently covered WPS commitments in strategic documents, and played a leading role in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The UK government generally ensured that assessments included or specifically focused on WPS and gender equality, and actively followed up on its WPS commitments. The UK also monitored, and was content with, the gender sensitivity of the UN Peacebuilding Fund it contributed to, and the proportion of projects that had gender equality as a principal objective (38% in 2018).

The government responded swiftly to challenges posed by COVID-19

- 4.16 The COVID-19 pandemic affected both conflict dynamics and peacebuilding activities. In all case study countries and around the world, access to goods and services in regions in conflict was further impeded, gender-based violence spiked, and WPS and wider peacebuilding programmes slowed down or were put on hold. Where peacebuilding efforts moved to virtual platforms, those who could not get online lost agency. This ‘digital divide’ between those who could and those who could not easily access and use modern information technology disproportionately disadvantages women and girls, elderly people, and rural and conflict-affected regions.⁴³ In Colombia, site visits from the government and international organisations were no longer possible, and this widened the space for armed groups to take control of some rural regions. In Nigeria, it added to distrust in the Nigerian government, and people feared the virus itself less than the impact of the security forces’ inhumane containment measures and extortion of traders supplying essential goods.

Box 6: The global WPS agenda and the UK’s commitments

The global **Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda** aims to promote and fulfil women’s human rights and achieve gender equality as part of efforts to build more peaceful and stable societies. It has been driven by the UN Security Council’s **Resolution 1325**, a resolution adopted in 2000, which calls for increased representation of women at all decision-making levels for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. The global WPS agenda has four pillars:

41 Colombia and Nigeria score 59th and 139th respectively, out of 156 countries, in the 2021 global gender gap report. *Global gender gap report 2021: Insight report*, World Economic Forum, March 2021, p. 10, [link](#).

42 This quotation is from a focus group discussion with men and women who are active in projects funded by the Trust Fund for Sustainable Peace in Popayán.

43 For more on the concept and practice of the ‘digital divide’, see *Measuring the information society report 2017*, volume 1, International Telecommunication Union, Section 1.5, [link](#).

- **Prevention** of conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations.
- **Participation.** Women participate equally with men and gender equality is promoted in peace and security decision-making processes at all levels.
- **Protection.** Women's and girls' rights are protected and promoted.
- **Relief and recovery.** Women's and girls' specific relief needs are met and women's capacities to act as agents in relief and recovery are reinforced in conflict and post-conflict situations.

The UK's commitment to the WPS agenda, and its approach to implementation, are outlined in a **national action plan (NAP)**. The current NAP (2018–22), the UK's fourth, is jointly owned by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Ministry of Defence and is the UK's highest-level strategy on gender and conflict. It has seven 'strategic outcomes', which are linked to the four pillars of the global WPS agenda. While UK commitments apply to all relevant contexts, **the NAP has nine focus countries:** Afghanistan, Burma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria.

UK NAP strategic outcomes



1. Decision-making processes:

An increase in women's meaningful and representative participation in decision making processes, including conflict prevention and peacebuilding at community and national levels.



2. Peacekeeping:

A gender perspective is consistently applied in the setting and implementation of international standards and mandates for peace operations.



3. Gender-based violence:

An increase in the number and scale of interventions that integrate effective measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV), particularly violence against women and girls, which is the most prevalent form of GBV.



4. Humanitarian response:

Women's and girls' needs are more effectively met by humanitarian actors and interventions through needs-based responses that promote meaningful participation and leadership.



5. Security and justice:

Security and justice actors are increasingly accountable to women and girls, and responsive to their rights and needs.



6. Preventing and countering violent extremism:

Ensure the participation and leadership of women in developing strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism.



7. UK capabilities:

The UK government continues to strengthen its capability, processes and leadership to deliver against WPS commitments.

- 4.18 In the field of peacebuilding in our case study countries, the UK government's response to the COVID-19 crisis was swift. When the pandemic restricted movement in Colombia, the UK embassy immediately contacted its implementing partners to reassure them that the previously agreed funding could be repurposed to remain useful in this suddenly changed context. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ongoing WPS work with the military quickly turned virtual, and the search for missing persons resumed after a break of only a few months. In Nigeria, some activities were put on hold, but the UK government was quick to commission research on the potential impact of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on livelihoods and to help reduce the risks of such measures exacerbating conflict and instability. The UK government embraced the UN Peacebuilding Fund's ambition to expand its work in response to the challenges to peace and stability caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, seeing this expansion as "a core part of helping [...] to Build Back Better" after COVID-19.⁴⁴

Conclusions on relevance

- 4.19 Where access is possible, the UK government combines its considerable expertise with contextual assessments to develop theories of change, approaches and programmes, and to modify them to ensure continued relevance in shifting contexts and during pandemic restrictions. Backed by strategic guidance, these assessments include significant engagement with women, youth and, depending on context, a range of vulnerable communities. Assessments and designs are generally gender-sensitive and intended to empower, and they prominently feature the UK's WPS commitments.
- 4.20 The UK government does not require or systematically encourage implementing partners to ensure that conflict-affected communities are meaningfully and continuously involved in project decisions that directly impact their lives. We saw implementing partners that have appropriate systems and mechanisms in place, and we saw their benefits; but in some projects meaningful community involvement dwindled after initial consultations. We award a **green-amber** score for the relevance of the UK's peacebuilding approach in our four case studies, and note the importance of strengthening accountability to conflict-affected communities.

Coherence: How internally and externally coherent are the UK's peacebuilding approaches?

Government officials understand the UK government's approach to peacebuilding work and adjust to shifts in policy direction

- 4.21 **Section 3** of this review outlines the UK commitments that remained firm throughout the review period, and the ways in which the UK government's approaches to peacebuilding evolved. While the UK government's peacebuilding work has always had programmatic, diplomatic and military dimensions, government guidance has increasingly emphasised the importance of approaches that, where beneficial, *combine* these efforts, and combine ODA and non-ODA contributions. The 2020 merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and DFID and the significant reductions of the UK aid budget in 2020 and 2021 have not changed the preference for joined-up action but have led to stronger emphasis on diplomatic influencing. This stronger emphasis is aligned with the conclusion of an internal review on the UK government's role in international peace-making since 1989, which is that "the UK has a broad range of capabilities it can bring to bear on a conflict-resolution process, [and] the consistently most important have been traditional diplomatic skills and tradecraft including long-term relationships, political-economy analysis, deep background knowledge, and coalition-building".⁴⁵
- 4.22 The various shifts in the UK's approaches were explained in successive strategy and policy documents, and during staff meetings and through presentations. When we asked longer-serving officials to list the long-standing fields of commitments and to explain the differences between approaches such as the comprehensive approach, the integrated approach and the 'fusion doctrine' (see **Box 5**), they could generally do so. Their explanations aligned with what we learned from documentation. Cooperation between

44 Speaking notes, UK government, undated, p. 1, [link](#).

45 FCDO research analysts paper, August 2021, not publicly available. The paper stresses that its reference to "traditional diplomatic skills" was not to suggest these skills only existed in the FCO.

programmatic and diplomatic efforts have long been standard in the UK's contributions to UN peacebuilding work.

- 4.23 The UK's contributions to UN peacebuilding work consist of diplomatic efforts, funding and the provision of technical support. This technical support is partly in the form of secondments. This aligns with the shifts towards an integrated approach taking place at the beginning of our review period, which emphasised putting "the right people in the right places".⁴⁶ However, unlike some other like-minded governments, such as Germany, the UK does not have a mechanism in place to create synergies among the staff it secondments to UN posts.
- 4.24 The funding, diplomatic efforts and technical support reinforce each other, and had already done so before the start of our review period. In our case studies, we saw two types of integrated ways of working.
- The UK government combined financial contributions, secondments and influence in relation to the UN Peacebuilding Fund and the Joint Programme between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. Without its position as a significant donor to the fund and the programme, the UK would not have been able to play the influencing role described below in the Effectiveness section (see **paragraphs 4.88 to 4.90** below) of this review. This influencing role helped ensure that the Peacebuilding Fund and Joint Programme took shape in a manner aligned with UK priorities.
 - The UK government's in-country programmes and diplomatic efforts influenced the UK's work in the UN Security Council. This includes the UK's penholder role for the peace process in Colombia and for the Lake Chad Basin, but also transcends country-specific work. For example, the UK government's in-country experience strengthened its contributions to Security Council statements on demobilised child soldiers and WPS.

Close cross-government cooperation in the field of peacebuilding was operationalised in each of our case study countries

- 4.25 Within the UK's programming efforts, we saw evidence of good cooperation between, and complementarity of, different UK funding mechanisms. In Colombia, the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy applied their respective fields of expertise and funding modalities in a joint conflict-sensitive endeavour that aims to reduce the risk of conflict while also reducing deforestation levels. In Nigeria, various programme efforts came together in an integrated delivery plan that was issue-based rather than sectoral, and projects that did not fit within this plan were not renewed. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, all funding is channelled through the CSSF, which is a cross-departmental fund, and the country's portfolio fits well within the Western Balkans strategy. We did not see initiatives working towards contradictory aims in any of our case study countries. We did, however, see some evidence of a disconnect between in-country programmes and some of the centrally managed peacebuilding efforts, and coordination across implementing partners working in the same regions was not always adequate.
- 4.26 In each of our country case studies, the relevant parts of the UK embassy or high commission had at least broad knowledge of one another's portfolio of work. We saw examples of interrelated programmatic and diplomatic efforts. Groups regularly provide technical support to one another. The benefits flowed both ways: we saw evidence of programmes capitalising on diplomatic milestones, and of diplomatic access being facilitated by programme work. We saw examples of cross-fertilisation in the early years of our review period, even though implementing partners were not yet encouraged to 'think politically'. Cross-fertilisation gained momentum in the second half of the review period. In Nigeria, this joined-up approach was facilitated by the co-location of the former DFID and FCO. In all country case studies, it was also facilitated by the centralisation of decision-making in the hands of the ambassador or high commissioner who led the in-country efforts. We saw some evidence suggesting that the merger between DFID and FCO has helped facilitate the interplay between programming and diplomatic efforts in Nigeria.

46 Outlined in *Building stability framework*, Department for International Development, 2016, pp. 1 and 18, [link](#).

- 4.27 In Colombia, the UK's CSSF programme work is situated within the embassy's Political Section. There are many links between programmatic and diplomatic contributions. The UK's contribution to the Trust Fund for Sustainable Peace in Colombia, for example, requires both funding and diplomatic influencing to ensure the fund maintains its focus on conflict-affected regions. In Nigeria, diplomats and programme implementors both engage with authorities in northeast Nigeria's Borno State, and they ensure their efforts are complementary rather than duplicative.⁴⁷ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, initial diplomatic contacts between the chiefs of staff of the Bosnia and Herzegovina and UK armed forces led to a CSSF-funded WPS programme. This programme aims to reduce gender inequality in the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which serves the overall WPS purpose of increasing representation of women at all decision-making levels for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. More generally, the UK government recently combined a series of high-level visits to Bosnia and Herzegovina with a doubling of the aid budget (which was largely cancelled later as part of the aid budget reductions), to counter the perception that the UK had disengaged from the country.
- 4.28 These and the many other examples of good cooperation we saw may not be representative of the UK's overall peacebuilding effort, because our sample was biased towards countries where the UK government believed its work had yielded positive results. Moreover, we also saw a few examples where the UK government's non-programmatic activity could hinder programming. In one example, peacebuilding efforts existed in parallel to an arms sales target.⁴⁸ In another, diplomatic discussions with a host government official created space for manipulation that forced a UK-funded programme to change its plans to align to a local political agenda.
- 4.29 At the UK government's headquarters, close cooperation in the field of peacebuilding is not yet standard practice.
- 4.30 In the integrated approach, the expectation was that the UK government's various component parts should work closely together and produce joint analyses of conflict contexts. A number of JACS illustrate that this sometimes worked well, but a recent internal assessment of the operationalisation of the 'integrated approach' identified a range of shortcomings.
- 4.31 The capacity pressures caused by redirecting staff to Brexit preparations and the COVID-19 response, combined with the demands posed by the FCO-DFID merger, the repeated rounds of restructuring within the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and considerable turnover in key positions, have reduced the government's capacity to coordinate cooperation in the field of peacebuilding.
- 4.32 After the merger of FCO and DFID, the UK government created the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM). Among other things, it was set up to coordinate the UK's work on preventing, managing and resolving conflict. OCSM's success was meant to enhance the coherence of the UK government's peacebuilding efforts, but success depends on the extent to which other parts of the UK government are willing to contribute and to be guided by it. At the time of writing, OCSM does not have strong senior backing across relevant departments and its counterparts outside FCDO appear to have little incentive to cooperate. Without this, the cross-government peacebuilding effort at headquarters in the UK is less strong than it is among country-based staff in our case study countries and in UN peacebuilding work.

Where relations are strong the UK adopts the niche role of close cooperation with the host government – even when the latter's commitment to peace is limited

- 4.33 In countries where its relations with host governments are strong and long-standing, the UK government takes the position that its contributions to peacebuilding are better made 'from within' than as a critical outsider. This is the case in Colombia and Nigeria, and in part of Bosnia and Herzegovina (see the Effectiveness section for more on the latter, **paragraph 4.83**). In cases where relations are strong, the UK has access to the highest level of government. The interplay of diplomacy and programme work is a key facet of the UK government's work, and the borders between them are not

47 A small military contingent tried to do the same, for a brief period, but was withdrawn because of the costs and lack of traction. It was replaced by military consultants who had not yet started their work at the time of our visit.

48 We came across this target but did not review it as this would be outside of our remit.

clear-cut.⁴⁹ In all three countries, the UK government's involvement covered several host government institutions, including security forces.

- 4.34 Working with and through host government authorities is normally good practice in the field of peacebuilding, and one that the Peacebuilding Fund also adheres to wherever this is possible. It may strengthen government institutions, influence government policies and priorities, help limit the existence of parallel structures and help ensure coherence in peacebuilding approaches.
- 4.35 On paper, such cooperation seems unproblematic as there is broad alignment of the UK and host government aims and objectives. In practice, the aims and objectives may be wide apart.
- 4.36 In 2016, the government of Colombia signed the peace agreement. Since then, the international support for the peace process in Colombia has been aligned with the government's *Plan marco de implementación*,⁵⁰ an overall framework plan for the agreement, tied with a national budget for its implementation. The CSSF-funded Colombia Peace Programme says that "to ensure maximum impact UK support is closely aligned to Colombian government strategy for implementing peace"⁵¹ and the CSSF "will only deliver work that has been approved by [the Colombian] government, whether local or national".⁵² However, the 2018–22 rule of President Duque stalled the implementation of the Colombian peace process. The government budget for the implementation of the peace agreement was insufficient to fulfil promises made, and there were proposals to reduce it further. The country's Congress passed only one of dozens of laws required for the implementation of the peace agreement in the four years of Duque's presidency.⁵³ Land redistribution barely progressed and included controversial allocations. The conflict-affected people we spoke with had little faith in government institutions, did not feel a local government presence and believed that the peace process had stalled under President Duque (though some felt hopeful about the incoming President Petro, in August 2022).

“ Duque arrived and it was all over, everything was suspended. [...] The government did not collaborate with anything. ”

Mixed focus group discussion of people who were involved in projects of the Trust Fund for Sustainable Peace, Popayán, Colombia

“ We have nothing but a public prosecutor's office that does not work, a police station that does not work, an inspectorate that does not work. ”

Mixed focus group discussion in Miranda, Colombia

- 4.37 In Nigeria, the UK's peacebuilding efforts are aligned to Nigeria's *National security strategy* and to the *National action plan for preventing and countering violent extremism*. The UK and Nigeria also have a shared commitment to the regional stabilisation strategy for the Lake Chad Region.⁵⁴ However, the Nigerian government's actual commitment to peacebuilding appears to be limited. According to the Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index, the government of Nigeria's commitment to reducing inequality is among the very lowest in the world,⁵⁵ and large inequalities across groups and regions are a core driver of conflict. Nigeria has elements of gender equality enshrined in law and has national action

49 In parallel with investments that focus on host governments, the UK made programme contributions through UN agencies and civil society organisations.

50 *Plan marco de implementación: Acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una Paz estable y duradera* (Framework plan for the implementation of the final agreement for the termination of the conflict and the construction of a stable and lasting peace), Government of Colombia, 2018, [link](#).

51 CSSF programme summary: Colombia Peace and Stabilisation Programme, Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, 2015, p. 3, [link](#).

52 *Colombia CSSF Programme: Colombia Peace and Stabilisation Programme: Multi-year programme document*, Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, December 2020, p. 9, not publicly available. This document includes the qualifier that "support to civil society should not be precluded to generate demand and accountability as the process evolves, so long as this is consulted with Colombian authorities".

53 The law that was passed ensures 16 seats in Congress for representatives from conflict-affected regions. It was ratified on 25 August 2021, [link](#).

54 *Regional strategy for the stabilization, recovery and resilience of the Boko Haram affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region*, Lake Chad Basin Commission, August 2018, [link](#).

55 After South Sudan, Nigeria's score on the Commitment to Reducing Inequality (CRI) Index is the worst in the world. See CRI 2022 Index database: summary, [link](#).

plans on WPS, but compliance is uneven and the Ministry for Women Affairs is not staffed and funded to oversee implementation of these plans. Ending conflict in a region that is not of much economic significance to the Nigerian government competes with many issues that are higher on the Nigerian government's agenda. Moreover, the Nigerian government has repeatedly claimed victory over Boko Haram, and a strong focus on peacebuilding would amount to an admission that these claims had been misplaced.

Close cooperation with host governments is rooted in a deliberate long-term choice to take high risks in order to achieve important results

4.38 The objective of the UK's close cooperation with host governments is twofold: to push peacebuilding higher up the host government's political agenda, and to enhance the host government's capacity to work towards a positive, inclusive peace. Where this cooperation is successful, the long-term rewards are likely to be high, because active and competent government support to a positive, inclusive peace greatly enhances its chances of durable success. Such support would enable the international community to align its peacebuilding contributions fully with government plans, and this would further enhance the chances of a positive peace. The results of previous contributions would get a boost if, for example, work to build trust between affected communities and government authorities were to be consolidated once government authorities proved to be trustworthy.

“ Let them fulfil [their promises]. Let the government fulfil them, because they talk very nicely and everything but they never fulfil anything. ”

Mixed focus group discussion of rights defenders in Vistahermosa, Colombia

“ They [the government] only come during election time, for campaigning, and once they win the elections, they are gone. ”

Women-only focus group discussion (18–25 years), Borno State, Nigeria

“ When the fight starts and you are looking for them [security forces] they are nowhere to be found, until the fight is over. ”

Men-only focus group discussion (25+ years), Borno State, Nigeria

4.39 While the potential rewards are high, the risk of failure to influence an independent government's priorities and attitude is also high. Governments broadly represent the interests of their constituents. The UK government is not one of these constituents, and overt lobbying could be perceived as interference. The UK cannot use donor pressure either, as none of the case study countries are sensitive to such pressure: Colombia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are upper-middle-income countries, the government of Nigeria has oil wealth, and in each of the three countries the UK's financial contributions are relatively modest, compared to the host governments' budgets.

4.40 The risk of failure to enhance the host government's capacity to work towards a positive peace is high as well. First, the choice of institutions on which the UK's capacity-strengthening work should focus is not clear-cut, because the distribution of government authority is not straightforward in any of the case study countries, and because the UK government does not have access to all key institutions. In the case of Nigeria, there are only elements of peacebuilding architecture and there is a disconnect between federal and state authorities. In Colombia, the division of responsibilities across government institutions is unclear, and in some fields – such as land registration, which is key to the implementation of the peace agreement – the institutional set-up is cumbersome and duplicative. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, responsibilities across government institutions are even more fragmented than they are in Colombia. Moreover, the UK government has poor relations with some key political figures. This hinders the UK's peacebuilding efforts in Republika Srpska, which is the part of Bosnia and Herzegovina where most of the failure to deal with the legacy of the conflict is rooted (we return to this in the Effectiveness section, see **paragraphs 4.51 to 4.102** below).

- 4.41 Second, if a failure to deliver peacebuilding outcomes is the consequence of a lack of interest from government authorities, rather than of a capacity deficit, then capacity-strengthening work will not deliver results. Third, strong peacebuilding-focused relations with host governments depend on the host government's perception that the UK's peacebuilding contributions are relevant and useful. This requires the UK to cater to some of the host government requests that will not, in the opinion of the UK government, effectively further the goal of peacebuilding. We saw examples of this in each of the three countries.
- 4.42 In addition to the risk of failure to achieve the desired results, close cooperation with host governments incurs reputational risks. The UK government's close ties with the government of Colombia's security forces, for example, can easily be seen to be at odds with its desire to be seen as "a champion of a more open, democratic and peaceful society".⁵⁶ Both the Colombian and Nigerian security forces have track records of grave human rights violations and a history of responding to conflict with brute force.⁵⁷ The UK government may express concern behind closed doors when new violations occur or when authorities take decisions that, for example, force displaced people to return to areas that are not yet safe. However, unlike some other governments in like-minded countries, the UK government is reluctant to condemn the host authorities publicly, as this could strain relations.
- 4.43 The UK government is aware of these risks and rigorously assesses them, though not all risks are recognised as such.⁵⁸ The UK government mitigates these risks by, for example, not providing direct funding, incorporating the need for response proportionality in security training, or funding a CSO that helps police forces to monitor their human rights compliance. When residual risks materialise, the UK's first response will be to pause or terminate support. This course of action prioritises reputational risks over the risk of doing harm, as funding withdrawal delinks harm from UK action but could potentially aggravate the harm itself.
- 4.44 Navigating the benefits, risks, dilemmas and trade-offs of the UK's close relationships with host governments requires continual sound judgement. We saw no evidence to suggest that the UK's judgement was systematically flawed.

The UK government's close cooperation with host governments is a key part of the peacebuilding efforts of the wider international community

- 4.45 In international peacebuilding efforts, some countries fill specific niche roles. The Swiss government, for example, maintains lines of communication with Boko Haram in Nigeria.⁵⁹ When we talked with international partners working alongside the UK in the peacebuilding projects in Colombia and Nigeria, we found they all agreed that one of the indispensable niche roles is the one of a trusted critical friend of host governments. They also agreed that, in the cases of Colombia and Nigeria in particular, the UK government is well placed to play this role, as "the UK get more bang for their buck in political influence than other donors".⁶⁰ Reasons they mentioned were the UK's technical knowledge and understanding of the wider political and donor landscape, its large in-country presence, and its long-standing in-country experience. With this wide support from the international community and the host government, the UK was able to face off competition and maintain its role as the Security Council's penholder on the implementation of the Colombian peace agreement, and to play a leadership role as chair of, for example, the North East Ambassadors Group in Nigeria.
- 4.46 The UK government often cooperates with other like-minded governments and international partners and sometimes has in-country engagement with the UN Peacebuilding Fund. It contributes to multi-donor funds, and co-funds UN and non-governmental organisation (NGO) programmes, as well as technical assistance to host governments. In Colombia and Nigeria, relations with other like-minded governments

⁵⁶ *Colombia country plan*, Martin-Reynolds, C., Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, March 2021, p. 2, not publicly available.

⁵⁷ For example, *Colombia chapter*, Human Rights Watch world report 2021, Human Rights Watch, 2021, [link](#); *Nigeria 2021*, Amnesty International, 2021, [link](#).

⁵⁸ The UK government conducts assessments for 'Overseas Security and Justice Assistance', and has conducted many such assessments for its work in the Lake Chad Basin. However, it had not noted the risk of harm done in the Safe Corridor Initiative until after Amnesty International had published a damning report about it. See *Nigeria: Help children ravaged by war or risk a 'lost generation' in the northeast*, Amnesty International press release, 27 May 2020, [link](#). Immediately before the publication of this report, the UK government's risk register for the programme had concluded that robust and accountable safeguarding mechanisms were in place in the lead agency and all of their international partners.

⁵⁹ This is something the UK says it never does, although it recognises that such conflict stakeholders would have to be part of any elite bargain that would reduce violent conflict, and although its central guidance leans towards the need for "appropriate channels of communication with rivals to build understanding, avoid miscalculation and underscore credibility". *Defence doctrine: What is it and why is it important for OCSM?*, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, December 2021, not publicly available.

⁶⁰ A representative quotation from a donor in Nigeria.

supporting the peace process are close enough to avoid a duplication of effort and for the UK to add overall value. In Bosnia and Herzegovina this is not the case, and the UK government therefore conducted a donor mapping exercise to identify where the UK contributions might be particularly useful. In the Effectiveness section (see **paragraphs 4.65 and 4.74** below), we explain that the UK was not merely coherent with other efforts made in our case study countries, but also successfully strengthened the coherence of the wider international community's peacebuilding efforts in Colombia and Nigeria.

- 4.47 As part of a larger effort to strengthen the UN system, the UK government has long pushed for the UN to adopt a more joined-up approach to peacebuilding. The UK government has made significant diplomatic, technical and financial inputs into reforming the UN peacebuilding architecture, and into developing key UN guidance documents such as *Pathways for peace*.⁶¹ To a lesser extent, the UK government invested in capacity strengthening of regional multilateral bodies, such as the African Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and led on *Understand to prevent*, a Multinational Capability Development Campaign (MCDC) project that developed guidance for military contributions to the prevention of violent conflict.⁶²

Conclusions on coherence

- 4.48 UK government officials understand the UK government's approach to peacebuilding work. A key part of this approach is that the UK's programmatic, diplomatic and military efforts (ODA and non-ODA) should reinforce each other. In its ODA-financed work in relation to the UN peacebuilding architecture, the UK government has long applied this joined-up approach. Staff in our case study countries also came to apply it, although we did see a few exceptions. In headquarters, the application is not yet systematic, and is hindered by the lack of senior push across departments for cross-government work on peacebuilding, the absence of clear incentives to work as one government on peacebuilding, and capacity pressures caused by Brexit, COVID-19, the FCO-DFID merger and repeated rounds of FCDO restructuring. In our case study countries, this joined-up approach to peacebuilding is sufficiently coherent and knowledge-based for the UK to maintain its position as a respected donor and influencer in the eyes of host governments and within the wider international community.
- 4.49 Within the wider international community in Colombia and Nigeria in particular, the UK played two niche roles. The first was as a critical friend of host governments, using its joined-up approach to help strengthen the host governments' focus on and capacity for peacebuilding. This requires strong and long-standing relations, which the UK was careful not to compromise. The host governments' patchy peacebuilding and human rights records mean that these relations carry significant risk, which was accepted by the UK government because of the significance of potential results. The second niche role was as coordinator of international peacebuilding efforts. The UK did this in-country, through the UN Security Council and as part of its wider efforts to optimise the multilateral peacebuilding system.
- 4.50 In conclusion, we award a **green-amber** score for the coherence of the UK government's peacebuilding approach. Its joined-up approach has helped maintain its position as a respected and influential peacebuilding partner despite some deficiencies in cross-government coherence.

Effectiveness: How well has the UK contributed to peacebuilding objectives in areas in which it operates?

The UK government strengthens its high levels of expertise by commissioning research and encouraging learning

- 4.51 The UK government has a high level of expertise. This is obvious from interviews and documents, and is widely recognised by peers. It is true for headquarters-based and in-country staff, UK-funded secondees and the UK representatives in the Peacebuilding Fund's 'Group of Friends'. This expertise is reflected in central government guidance on issues such as gender, conflict sensitivity, and prevention and drivers of conflict. In turn, this guidance frames the application of staff expertise (in a helpful and not overly prescriptive manner).

61 *Pathways for peace: inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflict*, World Bank and United Nations, 2018, [link](#).

62 MCDC published multiple papers on this, such as *Understand to prevent: The military contribution to the prevention of violent conflict*, Multinational Capability Development Campaign, November 2014, [link](#).

4.52 The UK government has encouraged further learning. Active learning has been part of the UK government's performance framework, and furthered by internal platforms and learning events, external meetings and conferences. The UK government has a range of in-house specialist research analysts who provide immediate knowledge support, provide a challenge function and produce longer-term learning products that generally remain internal. We were told that the latter two types of support have recently taken a back seat because of internal and external turbulence. The UK government has also commissioned substantial research to learn, among other things, "what needs to be done in conflict-affected states to ensure lasting equality for women and girls"⁶³ and "how development interventions can address the root causes and drivers of fragility".⁶⁴ When programmes wind down, the UK government has regularly ended with a learning exercise, and has sometimes shared the results with other country governments to encourage them to fund follow-up programming.

Some but not all learning is absorbed by policy and practice, and is shared internally, with other stakeholders and the wider public

4.53 Some of the lessons from past peacebuilding and research efforts have not been systematically captured in policy or translated into operational solutions.⁶⁵ Even within programmes, we came across examples where "sharing of lessons between the various components was almost non-existent".⁶⁶ However, in other cases lessons learned are explicitly applied when the UK government develops theories of change, strategies, policies and programmes. Learning is also shared across countries and contexts. The Colombia team advised on the design of a multi-donor trust fund for the Sahel region, on the basis of its experience with the Trust Fund for Sustainable Peace in Colombia. In Ukraine, preparatory work on accounting for missing persons has already started, and is benefiting from learning from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4.54 Learning products that are not confidential are often shared with other donors and made available, in documents and at external learning events, as a public good.⁶⁷ In a few cases, the UK government commissioned research that aggregated lessons learned into global learning products.⁶⁸ The UK's focus on learning extends to the Peacebuilding Fund, where a former UK secondee introduced regular 'thematic reviews' in recognition of the wealth of data and insights that the fund generated but did not routinely capture and use for learning.⁶⁹ Recent reductions in the aid budget have reduced UK-funded learning processes and the dissemination of learning products.

The UK government strengthened the monitoring and evaluation of its peacebuilding work, but weaknesses remain and aid budget reductions meant that some investments were wasted

4.55 Previous ICAI recommendations spurred the UK government to make a concerted effort to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity in the field of peacebuilding work.⁷⁰ Capacity was strengthened both directly and through external contracts. Theories of change and data gathering became more robust. The M&E work maintained a focus on activities and outputs but increasingly also considered outcomes and impact, and built on previous work to develop and test methods to measure the results of influencing efforts. M&E tools and methods became more varied and fit for purpose, and datasets more systematically disaggregated by gender and age. The purposes and value of M&E widened. In addition to serving learning and accountability purposes, some monitoring is designed to facilitate the mid-way course correction of projects, or supports the host government's real-time decision-making.

4.56 M&E efforts still prominently include project-level M&E but are also increasingly considering the overall results of programmes, regional and global portfolios. This facilitates allocative judgments across

63 *National security strategy and strategic defence and security review 2015: A secure and prosperous United Kingdom*, UK government, November 2015, p. 63, [link](#).

64 *Building stability framework*, Department for International Development, 2016, p. 16, [link](#).

65 A 2019 ICAI review on how UK aid learns concluded that, also outside the field of peacebuilding, some of the learning is individual rather than institutional, and that learning does not always transfer from external research bodies to the UK government. See *How UK aid learns*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, 2019, [link](#).

66 This particular quotation is from *CSSF Niger Delta & Maritime Security and Stability Programme: Programme completion review – summary sheet*, Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, 2019, p. 2, [link](#).

67 Such as most of the work done by the Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development (K4D) consortium, [link](#).

68 Examples of global learning products are the UK-funded Cross-border conflict evidence, policy and trends programme, [link](#), and the What works to prevent violence against women and girls global programme (which includes a focus on conflict contexts), [link](#).

69 The commitment is announced in *Report of the secretary-general on the Peacebuilding Fund*, United Nations General Assembly's seventy-sixth session, agenda item 113, United Nations, 2022, p. 3, [link](#).

70 See recommendations 2, 4 and 5 of *The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's aid spending*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, March 2018, [link](#).

interventions. OCSM originally intended to expand and lead on peacebuilding M&E at the global portfolio level, but no longer plans to do so. At the level of projects and programmes, recent reductions in the aid budget have meant that some M&E investments were wasted, such as when a baseline survey was not followed by an endline survey, or when M&E frameworks were developed but remained unused.

- 4.57 In 2018, the Peacebuilding Fund's M&E made a step change when it launched its *PeaceFIELD impact evaluation project*. As part of its new approach to M&E, the fund took the decision to evaluate every one of its future projects (a commitment that has yet to materialise fully). The UK actively promoted this stronger focus on M&E and continues to suggest improvements such as a better disaggregation of monitoring data. The UK could credibly do so as it had made its own M&E contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund since at least the start of our review period.⁷¹
- 4.58 The stronger M&E focus posed a challenge because it led to new types of reporting requirements on the side of implementing partners. This challenge was compounded by the difficulties they face attracting M&E experts, who are in short supply in many fragile contexts and deterred by the lack of job certainty caused by single-year funding approvals to which many UK-funded peacebuilding projects have been subject. The UK's reporting requirements are heavier than those of many other donor countries, and UK programme managers are more actively engaged than those of other donors. Not all of the UK's current requirements are needed to maintain oversight of the projects' safe delivery and value for money. Some even undermine progress, and we saw evidence of pre-determined output indicators hindering adaptivity.⁷² Lastly, stringent reporting requirements, combined with the short duration of most projects (an issue we will return to later, see **paragraphs 4.92 and 4.95 to 4.96** below), incentivise implementing partners to focus on easily measurable short-term results rather than harder-to-measure but more transformational results.
- 4.59 At project and portfolio levels, the benchmarks of M&E work are generally unrealistic. This is because, notwithstanding warnings against doing so in annual reviews and external evaluations, the UK government and its implementing partners often set over-optimistic targets. To give just one example: technical assistance to a section of the Colombian police force could not possibly resolve a long-standing problem and achieve the goal that the "police adequately deal with cases of gender-based violence internally and externally".⁷³ Such targets may help implementing partners to secure contracts, and may help UK staff gain approval for new programmes. However, they set the UK government up for negative evaluative judgements, as evaluations tend to compare achievements against the targets set.

Notwithstanding the UK government's improved monitoring and evaluation products, the results of the UK's peacebuilding work remain difficult to assess

- 4.60 Not all interventions get evaluated, and the evaluations we have seen varied in quality. Some were strong, but others did not use appropriate methods, did not describe their methods in sufficient detail, or were hindered by access constraints. The lowest-quality evaluations we have seen were of multilateral interventions. Their quality assurance was not in the hands of the UK government. We did not see rigorous external evaluations of the UK's technical assistance.
- 4.61 Even evaluations that used appropriate methods in easily accessible regions struggle to confirm the causal link between peacebuilding efforts and results. This is because the process towards peace depends on a multitude of actors and actions. At outcome and impact levels, a donor's influence can be significant but hard to isolate and attribute. Regression does not necessarily signify failure, just as progress does not necessarily signify success, and the benchmarks of what amounts to 'success' are rarely clear-cut. Assessing the results of work done by diplomats and embedded advisers remains problematic.

71 For example, "In July [2012], donors represented by the United Kingdom undertook a direct monitoring mission". *Report of the secretary-general on the Peacebuilding Fund*, United Nations General Assembly's sixty-seventh session, agenda item 107, United Nations, 2012, p. 13, [link](#).

72 "Adaptive peacebuilding" means that "ineffectual [efforts], or those that have generated negative effects, need to be abandoned. Those that appear to have the desired effects should be continued and expanded, but in a variety of ways, so that there is a continuous process of experimentation with a range of options, coupled with a continuous process of selection and refinement." "Adaptive peacebuilding". Coning, C., *International Affairs*, volume 94, issue 2, 2018, p. 306, [link](#).

73 This is an output target mentioned in the theory of change of the UK government's police programme in Colombia. In this theory of change, the output targets are the lowest level of targets. They feed into even more ambitious outcome targets, which in turn feed into fulfilling the project's objective. An example of an extreme form of gender-based violence that occurred shortly before our country visit to Colombia painfully illustrated the extent and the deep-rootedness of the problem.

- 4.62 Unless specified otherwise, the achievements outlined below are subject to a margin of uncertainty. Moreover, the UK's funding to the Peacebuilding Fund and multi-donor trust funds such as the ones in Colombia and Nigeria is generally unrestricted pooled funding. This means that results of these funds' projects cannot be attributed solely to a single donor.

The various UK government contributions benefited the peace process in Colombia

- 4.63 In Colombia, the UK's point of reference is the peace agreement. The UK adapted its programming to facilitate this agreement's implementation in a volatile context.
- 4.64 The Colombian peace agreement is the most comprehensive and inclusive peace agreement in modern history. The UK made niche contributions to it, and to the design of its implementation. These contributions enhanced the chances of the agreement's successful implementation. The most important contribution was that the UK outlined, upon the request of then President Santos, options for the third-party monitoring of the ceasefire and the implementation of the peace agreement. The end result was UN-mandated monitoring, which has been helpful in moving the implementation of the peace agreement forward.

“ The United Nations has not abandoned its role in the area. It has always been there, especially with the verification mission... who have always been watching the development of the projects. ”

Mixed focus group discussion of people who were involved in projects of the Trust Fund for Sustainable Peace, Popayán, Colombia

- 4.65 Another key contribution was that, even before the peace agreement was signed, the UK supported and contributed to the Trust Fund for Sustainable Peace in Colombia. The UK co-shaped this fund. It helped ensure a substantial role for the Colombian government, and a strong focus on rural conflict-affected regions. This fund has both weaknesses and strengths. Turning to weaknesses first, it did not overcome the perception, among people in conflict-affected regions, that projects have unnecessarily high overhead costs and insufficient local oversight.

“ Everything is done from Bogotá and this generates a rise in cost. They [...] charge a world of money to come. [...] Three times what it is worth. [...] Nothing reaches the territory. [...] The funds for peace have been lost. ”

Mixed focus group discussion of former combatants, Miranda, Colombia

“ The donor countries don't really check whether the resources are arriving or not, they simply give them and it is considered that there is a network that is going to distribute these funds in the territories. ”

Mixed focus group discussion of former combatants, Meta, Colombia

The fund's livelihood support to former combatants rarely generates truly sustainable livelihoods. During interviews, donors and implementers both said that these investments were merely meant to show former combatants that they were not ignored. This is a problematic and short-term perspective because, ultimately, “ex-combatants must benefit from an effective reintegration process driven by relevant training and job opportunities to prevent their returning to violence and crime”.⁷⁴ The fund also contributes to a crop substitution approach that encourages farmers to move away from growing

coca to other crops. This approach runs the risk of causing harm as drug gangs may punish those who participate. It also has not prevented coca production from reaching record levels. However, the trust fund implemented useful projects as well, such as ones that facilitated access to rural health services or some of the projects that built the entrepreneurial skills of women in conflict-affected regions. Moreover, it brought a measure of coherence into the initially rushed and fragmented international support to the implementation of the peace agreement, and it provided a platform for engagement between the government of Colombia, other governments supporting the peace process and UN agencies.

- 4.66 After President Santos signed the peace agreement in November 2016, he remained in power until August 2018. In this period, the UK resolved bottlenecks that were stalling implementation. The UK did this via the trust fund and directly. The most important of the UK's financial and technical contributions may have been its funding the salaries of most of the 'liaison officers'. These officers lived in locations where former combatants lived, and they were "the unseen motor behind all policy implementation", who effectively served as the "interface between the [authorities] in Bogotá and the multiplicity of actors involved [locally]".⁷⁵ The liaison officers brought a semblance of government presence to conflict-affected areas. They were often local people, but they represented the central government, and they managed to "translate between these worlds and make them legible to each other".⁷⁶ Their work strengthened the local support for and faith in the peace agreement and its implementation.
- 4.67 In August 2018, Duque, who campaigned in opposition to the peace agreement, took over the presidency. Under his presidency, the UK continued to support the implementation of the peace process where this was possible. This included support to parts of the government that continued to show interest in the peace agreement, as well as financial contributions to the trust fund and grants to implementing partners. This continued support helped maintain some sense of momentum and some focus on vulnerable groups. The Truth Commission, for example, issued a final report that paid explicit attention to various minority communities that have suffered disproportionately from the conflict. It managed to do so with minimal (and largely COVID-19-related) delays. In a pressured context in which there was no time for the Truth Commission to learn on the basis of its own experience, the commission benefited from timely and largely useful technical support, to which the UK had contributed.
- 4.68 Within many of the conflict-affected areas, life did not improve and sometimes deteriorated in the four years of Duque's presidency, and faith in the peace process suffered. The international presence outside the capital continued to be useful. A range of projects empowered women and, in some contexts, normalised women's leadership. Support to civil rights activists helped prevent a further reduction of civic space. The UK government invested in civil society actors' capacity to stay safe as well. High risks remain for the activists involved in the work that the UK supported, including the risk of death.⁷⁷

“ Lately women have regained a very important participation in the territory. Now women are also part of the boards of directors of the community action boards. [...] The associations also involve women and some of them also have leadership positions. ”

Mixed focus group discussion of people who were involved in projects of the Trust Fund for Sustainable Peace, Popayán, Colombia

“ I am a member of [a women's organisation]. They [international organisations] have opened the doors for us because before we did not exist, so with them we have already seen progress although they have almost no support from the government. [...] What we have had is from other countries. ”

Women-only focus group discussion of former combatants, Miranda, Colombia

75 "Rendering political: the affective labor of liaising with the Farc et al.", Chapter 6 of *The face of peace*, Burnyeat, G., The University of Chicago Press, forthcoming 2022 (page number not yet known).

76 "Rendering political: the affective labor of liaising with the Farc et al.", Chapter 6 of *The face of peace*, Burnyeat, G., The University of Chicago Press, forthcoming 2022 (page number not yet known).

77 CIVICUS assesses civic space in Colombia to be "repressed", and the worst in the Americas after Nicaragua and Venezuela, [link](#), (accessed on 20 August 2022).

- 4.69 The UK also helped avoid a government withdrawal from the peace agreement. To help achieve this, the UK used a combination of programme funding and diplomatic effort, in-country and through its Security Council penholder role. As was the case under the Santos presidency, relatively small amounts of UK aid helped unblock progress. A minor financial contribution enabled the country's three transitional justice mechanisms to cross-fertilise their operations. An even smaller financial contribution helped a CSO to arrange visits of Members of Congress to conflict-affected regions. This helped their support for the peace process. In a context where the ruling party was hostile towards the peace agreement, this counts as a significant success. It means that the new government under President Petro, who is in support of the peace agreement, does not start with a collapsed peace agreement and will instead be able to build on the modest implementation achievements to date.
- 4.70 Three features of the UK's presence in Colombia underpinned its successful contribution to Colombia's peace process. First, the UK's efforts were patient, engaged, and adaptive without losing sight of its 2025 end goal of Colombia becoming "a more prosperous, more peaceful, inclusive and safer country with increased mutual interests, connections, trade and investment".⁷⁸ While individual projects are often of short duration, the overall Colombia Peace and Stabilisation Programme lasts from April 2015 until March 2025, and some of the key people have been involved from before the signing of the peace agreement until the present. Second, the UK's work meaningfully covered a spectrum of key issues, including security, the government's engagement with citizens and rural socio-economic development, with gender equality as a cross-cutting theme. The breadth and depth of the engagement is unusual among Colombia's international partners, and it made the UK an interesting partner at the highest level of government. Third, the UK's relations with the government of Colombia were strong enough to continue cooperation under a presidency that had been elected on the basis of opposition to the peace agreement in its 2016 form.

In Nigeria, the most significant UK contributions were in local peacebuilding, but progress is fragile

- 4.71 In Nigeria, the extent and complexity of fragility and conflict deepened over the course of our review period. Within this context, the UK's programme and portfolio targets were over-ambitious. So was the UK high commission's strategic aim for the Lake Chad Basin, that "a clear roadmap towards an inclusive peace settlement is in place by the end of 2022, supported at local, regional and federal level".⁷⁹ However, the UK did make positive contributions to peacebuilding at all levels, and most significantly at the local level.
- 4.72 At the federal and state levels we saw evidence of plans, legal changes and platforms in fields that the UK government had contributed to, such as piracy, police reform and the rights and protection of adolescent girls, and the national action plans on WPS. The UK's successes in this field were limited by its dependence on only a few interlocutors. For instance, when a key interlocutor died, police reform legislation stalled. Results in terms of peacebuilding were limited because of uneven implementation of plans and legislation. Similarly, the results of support to the Nigerian government's strategic communication around conflict and peace are uncertain but likely to be minimal because of the quality of this communication and the disconnect between communication and actual government behaviour. We also saw no evidence that the UK's large-scale capacity-building work with Nigeria's security forces has resulted in sustained results.⁸⁰ By the end of the review period, the UK had ended a long-standing national police programme and, with that, had discontinued its large-scale provision of training to the Nigerian police.
- 4.73 We saw some evidence of a mindset change on the side of key Nigerian leaders, from a reliance on the military defeat of armed groups to resolve conflict, to a readiness to pursue a comprehensive peace through negotiations with conflict stakeholders. The nature of public statements has already changed, and there is now a 'Champion for Peace in the North East'. We do not know if government action has changed accordingly and some of our respondents were sceptical. If it has changed or will change, and if the UK's efforts in this field contribute to that, then the value for money of the UK's programmatic and diplomatic effort may prove to be high. Similarly, there is uncertain but potentially high value in the UK's contribution to

78 *Colombia country plan*, Martin-Reynolds, C., Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, March 2021, p. 1, not publicly available.

79 *Nigeria country strategy*, UK government, 2021, Annex 1, not publicly available.

80 ICAI raised a similar point about mass training of the Malian security forces in *The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's aid spending*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, March 2018, section 4.49, [link](#).

communication between the federal and Borno State authorities, and among the state governors of the countries covering the Lake Chad Basin, on issues such as collaboration on the management of former members of Boko Haram.

- 4.74 The UK government played a major role in the coherence of the international community's peacebuilding work in the northeast of Nigeria, and a minor one in the northwest of the country. It often shares expertise and knowledge products, and other donors acknowledge its expertise- and evidence-based contributions to donor platforms to be one of the UK's niche roles. In addition, the UK chairs the inter-donor group on the Lake Chad Basin. Since these Abuja-based donor groups tend to rely on the same situation reports and expert analysis, they often display a uniformity of views. While this runs the risk of an echo chamber effect, the groups do strengthen the coherence of the wider international response.⁸¹

“ They start on time, finish on time, get through agendas efficiently and do not seem to prioritise fields of UK interests. ”

Interview with international donor, reflecting on the UK chairing the Lake Chad Basin donor group

- 4.75 Local peacebuilding work, done by a range of implementing partners, achieved more tangible results. In the first part of the review period, these partners worked in a wider range of states than towards its end, when the UK's effort was mostly focused on the Nigerian part of the Lake Chad Basin. For most partners, the UK was one of several funders, and not generally the largest one, or one that funded projects with long-term certainty. The organisations that implement these projects seek continuity of operations, and often embed donor projects into their wider effort to achieve their ambitions. We saw examples of other donors following up on projects that the UK had initially started, and vice versa. The results reported below were at least part-funded by the UK government.
- 4.76 In several conflict-affected areas, programmes helped to enhance the safety and security of host populations, displaced people and those who had surrendered. In part, this was the result of security infrastructure such as trenches. It was also partly the result of softer safety-enhancing work. This included efforts that focused on the return and reintegration of people who had surrendered, trust-building within and among communities and between them and security forces and government authorities, awareness about women's safety, rights and participation, and attitudinal work in which programme implementers worked with local religious leaders and other influential voices to reach at-risk groups with messages of peace. Some of the community groups that the UK's implementing partners worked with survived beyond the end of the project – even in a few cases where UK aid budget reductions caused projects to be terminated prematurely. In some areas, these interventions provide good value for money. The third-party monitoring of a UNDP programme in the northeast of Nigeria found that 60% of Monguno community respondents thought that local government was meeting their security needs. This followed UK-funded work with community liaison committees that resolved tensions between the military and the community. In other places the percentage was much lower, down to only 19% in Damboa.

“ Since Mercy Corps came [...] Before women don't attend meetings but with the orientation programmes they now participate fully in all community activities. ”

Women-only focus group discussion (25+ years), Borno State, Nigeria

81 Such groups, in Nigeria and elsewhere, do not always include the US, which is the world's largest bilateral donor in the broad field of peacebuilding, but one that does not systematically engage with the other donors.

“ We are living peacefully with the repentant Boko Haram. [...] We have suffered a lot before [...] but thank God everything is fine now. ”

Women-only focus group discussion (18–25 years), Borno State, Nigeria

“ It is because of Mercy Corps that we are able to talk to the government and that is how we were able to get drainage in our community. ”

Men-only focus group discussion (25+ years), Borno State, Nigeria

“ The relationship with the security force was not cordial before. There was mistrust between us. But now, with the orientation of these projects we have a cordial relationship and we sometimes give them information. ”

Men-only focus group discussion (18–25 years), Borno State, Nigeria

“ They teach us how to live together in peace. They will ask us to go and bring a friend from a different tribe, we will go and find a friend from a different tribe and bring them, so after the programme, even if that person [...] is not your friend you end up being friends and this really helped us a lot. ”

Women-only focus group discussion (18–25 years), Borno State, Nigeria

4.77 In some of these same areas, the UK co-funded short-term cash transfers, provided through cash-for-work projects. Implementing partners also offered livelihood support. Most of the latter took the form of training, agricultural support and support with tools and markets. Some efforts focused on women in particular. Most other efforts reached mostly men. In parallel, the UK co-funded investments that restored a minimum of infrastructure and trade routes, and helped set up a system that allows farmers and fisherfolk to leave town during the day, with a level of protection in the form of the military’s ‘farm and firewood controls’. In all cases, the results of these livelihoods initiatives were minor, compared to the difficulties conflict-affected communities faced in securing their livelihoods, and they did not alter the overall dysfunctionality of local economies.

“ UNDP constructed Wuyaram Bridge. Before the construction of the bridge people suffered in crossing over to their farmland and grazing their animals. The bridge has really helped farmers in the community. ”

Men-only focus group discussion, Borno State, Nigeria

“ Women were taught how to make soap and other things and that helped many girls in the community. ”

Women-only focus group discussion, Borno State, Nigeria

4.78 Progress towards peace is fragile. Trenches protect people against incursions from combatant groups, but could also be used by these same groups if they manage to re-capture an area. Some police posts were built but remained unstaffed. Safety and stability were jeopardised when the Borno State government closed camps and restricted food, thus forcing displaced people to return to places that were not yet safe. Hunger and lack of opportunities rekindle grievances. We have not seen evidence that local successes influenced higher-level peacebuilding processes.

“ The problem is that there is nothing to do. No work, no business, no nothing, and this is one of the biggest problems we are facing. ”

Men-only focus group discussion (25+ years), Borno State, Nigeria

“ Our major problem as former members [of Boko Haram] is the lack of jobs and the lack of food. Nobody is mistreating us, nobody is despising us and we are living peacefully in the community but we are idle, we don't have jobs, we don't have things to eat or to feed our families. ”

Mixed focus group discussion of former combatants, Borno State, Nigeria

4.79 In the background section we mentioned that conflicts often recur shortly after they ended and that, with few exceptions, the recurrence can be traced back to pre-existing issues and grievances.⁸² This suggests a failure of peacebuilding efforts to address the drivers of these conflicts. To help address the basis of conflict in Nigeria, the UK government works at the local level, as well as with Nigeria's authorities at state and federal levels, as a positive peace requires progress at each of these levels. So far the local part of the UK's peacebuilding work has been the most successful of the three. It is nonetheless appropriate for the UK to work at the other levels as well. Without this, the local peacebuilding work in northeast Nigeria would at best strengthen trust in a government that is untrustworthy and disengaged, represents an exclusive and unfair political settlement, and co-opts the international community into this settlement by pushing it towards a response that is based on vested interests rather than levels of need.

“ These programmes usually contact the community leaders to access women and in most cases they present their own family and friends, not the actual members of the community, because of their interests. ”

Men-only focus group discussion (18–25 years), Borno State, Nigeria

“ We are rebuilding Ngaranam, which has only 3–4,000 people, when Monguno has 300,000 people... but Ngaranam is where the governor is from. ”

International donor representative, Nigeria

“ There is no way. There is no way we take our problems to the local government and get attention. ”

Men-only focus group discussion (25+ years), Borno State, Nigeria

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, some of the UK government's work took high risks, which led to failures as well as significant successes

4.80 The 1995 peace agreement marked the start of a negative peace. The agreement did not address the drivers of conflict, did not include women in the peace negotiations, and introduced an awkward government structure that divided the country into two entities – the Federation, itself divided into ten cantons, and Republika Srpska – and the self-governing district of Brčko.

4.81 In the early years of our review period, the UK government invested in state-building. This was a defensible high-risk/high-rewards investment. It failed, as political elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina had no appetite for changing the structure that the 1995 peace agreement had prescribed. This structure is inefficient at best and dysfunctional in times of heightened tension.

82 *How should we understand patterns of recurring conflict?*, Conflict trends 03/2020, Jarland, J. et al., Peace Research Institute, 2020, [link](#).

- 4.82 In more recent years, the UK government's peacebuilding work in Bosnia and Herzegovina has focused on the country's failure to deal with the legacy of conflict and reconciliation, and on community cohesion.
- 4.83 The country's failure to deal with the legacy of conflict includes the lack of progress in state reconciliation. In this context, the UK government reiterated its support for the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina in April 2022, when it sanctioned senior politicians because of statements and actions supporting the secession of Republika Srpska. This led to anti-UK statements from the sanctioned politicians and some of their constituents, and limited the channels through which the UK government could contribute to results in state reconciliation.
- 4.84 Another aspect of the country's failure to deal with the legacy of conflict is the denial of war crimes. The UK government is less well positioned to achieve results on this than it has been in the past, as the UK's sanctioning of senior politicians is likely to have affected its reach in Republika Srpska, where the denial of war crimes remains pervasive.⁸³ However, the UK was the first donor contributing to the Srebrenica Memorial Centre, which is meant to develop into a globally relevant centre for genocide research and prevention, as well as a regional hub for reconciliation and inter-ethnic dialogue. Other international partners followed. This is the only case for which we saw evidence that the UK government fulfilled its ambition of being 'a leading donor' in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- 4.85 A third legacy of conflict is the legacy of sexual violence. Here, the UK has achieved significant results, which we examined in our review of the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative.⁸⁴ The last part of the UK government's legacy work is a long-standing contribution to the search for missing persons. Bosnia and Herzegovina has been more successful than any other country in its search for missing persons, and 70% of 31,500 missing persons have been accounted for.⁸⁵ In recent years, the work increasingly involved the families of missing persons, which did help restore some sense of agency. However, an independent evaluation of three UK-funded projects in this field, implemented by UNDP and the International Commission on Missing Persons, concluded that the projects had not sufficiently focused on domestic organisations, and that they had "little demonstrable impact to date" with "limited benefits [that] are unlikely to be sustained".⁸⁶
- 4.86 We did not see assessments of the UK government's work in the field of community cohesion. The most important part of this work is a three-year project on 'public spaces' in Mostar. This project started in 2022. It is a promising example of local peacebuilding that seeks to place the citizens of Mostar in the driving seat. This has long been lacking in peacebuilding work in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see our literature review).⁸⁷ We do note that community cohesion and local reconciliation are crowded fields of programming, with significant overlap across initiatives. The Peacebuilding Fund, for example, achieved modest and mostly short-term results in its 'Dialogues for Future', while the US-funded 'Pro-Future' programme was similar and implemented at the same time.⁸⁸
- 4.87 Under the NATO banner, the UK government supports the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This support has already helped Bosnia and Herzegovina to become a regional leader in the context of WPS and gender equality in armed forces.

The UN peacebuilding architecture is performing well and the UK government played a key role in its establishment and development

- 4.88 The UK was a vocal proponent of a UN peacebuilding architecture. This architecture was created in 2005 and consists of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund.⁸⁹ Some consider the Joint Programme, which predates the Commission and the Fund and is not rooted in a General Assembly

83 "Ethnopolitist denial and crime relativisation in Bosnian Republika Srpska", Hronešová, J. B., *East European Politics*, volume 38, issue 1, 2022, pp. 21–42, [link](#).

84 *The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, January 2020, [link](#).

85 *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, International Commission on Missing Persons, accessed on 18 August 2022, [link](#).

86 *Outcome assessment and evaluation report on the missing persons CSSF projects in the Western Balkans*, Conflict, Stability and Security Fund Western Balkans Stability Programme, Verjee, A., April 2021, revised June 2021, pp. 1–2, not publicly available.

87 The literature review is available on the ICAI website, p.14, [link](#).

88 For an overview of other comparable reconciliation programmes that were implemented in the same period, see *Dialogue for the future 2: Final evaluation*, Vračić, A., Vežić, A. and Cox, M., 2020, p. 3, [link](#).

89 *Resolution 60/180: The Peacebuilding Commission*, UN General Assembly, 20 December 2005, [link](#).

resolution, to be part of the UN peacebuilding architecture as well. The UK advised on the design of this architecture and accelerated its operationalisation with funding that overcame initial stumbling blocks.

- 4.89 Throughout our review period, the UK government has been actively involved in the operationalisation and development of the architecture. At the start of the review period, the UK government set an example as one of the early donors that moved to multi-year agreements.⁹⁰ The UK is one of the few countries with continuous representation in the Peacebuilding Fund's 'Group of Friends', and the only Peacebuilding Fund donor with an annual review mechanism.⁹¹ The UK government seconded the Fund's deputy director (now a UN member of staff), who co-shaped the Fund's recent strategic direction and operations and played a key role in the Fund's rapid expansion, in size and coverage, after 2018.
- 4.90 The placement of secondees is a form of earmarked funding. The results of the UK's secondments have not been independently evaluated. Feedback provided in the context of annual reviews has been consistently positive. The UK's other contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund and the Joint Programme are unearmarked. This is good donor practice, although it means that the value for money of the specific UK contributions cannot be assessed. Instead, the UK's annual reviews assess the performance of the Peacebuilding Fund and Joint Programme in their entirety, on the basis of project completion reports, interviews with staff, Fund-organised field visits and external evaluations, some of which were funded by the UK government. The findings were positive. The 2014 external review of the Joint Programme concluded that the deployment of peace and development advisors allowed "the UN to more systematically and coherently address conflict prevention operationally".⁹² Two subsequent external evaluations came to similarly positive conclusions, and the 2018 evaluation repeated a 2014 finding that the Joint Programme is "ahead of recent UN system thinking in terms of conflict prevention and [...] able to positively influence how conflicts are handled and responded to at the country level".⁹³ A Swedish government analysis of the evaluations of Peacebuilding Fund projects concluded that "the majority of [the Fund's] projects were rooted in good analysis, engaging the relevant conflict actors and were effectively targeting vulnerable groups. Projects were found to be flexible and to have generally achieved effective levels of co-ordination."⁹⁴ Key weaknesses are that the duration of projects is too short and that the sustainability of results is uncertain.

The UK government's poor donor practice weakened results and increased the risk of doing harm

- 4.91 Peacebuilding efforts take place in difficult circumstances. They have a high failure risk, but potentially bring high rewards. Strategic patience enhances the chances of long-term results. At country level, the UK has this patience. It has supported peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the 1992–95 conflict. In Nigeria, the high commission committed to an integrated approach to peacebuilding in the northeast of the country and has stuck to it even as other international partners are refocusing their efforts onto the northwest. In Colombia, the UK government's overall peacebuilding effort has a ten-year horizon, from 2015 to 2025. We saw evidence of this patience paying off. Some results could only be achieved after years of groundwork, such as legal victories for victims of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and influencing access to federal and state authorities in Nigeria and to the Congress of Colombia.
- 4.92 The UK government has been much less patient at the level of programmes and the projects within these programmes. In our 2018 review of the CSSF, we found that "some of the CSSF's contracting practices – such as short timeframes for projects and disproportionately heavy reporting requirements – may restrict value for money by raising management costs and encouraging a focus on short-term,

90 *Report of the secretary-general on the Peacebuilding Fund*, United Nations General Assembly's sixty-seventh session, agenda item 107, United Nations, 2012, p. 9, [link](#).

91 Their overall findings are sometimes mentioned in the fund's annual reports to the UN General Assembly, and most recently in the *Report of the secretary-general on the Peacebuilding Fund*, United Nations General Assembly's seventy-fourth session, agenda item 111, United Nations, February 2020, p. 17, [link](#).

92 *Independent review of peace and development advisors and the Joint UNDP/DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention*, Batmanglich, S., November 2014, p. ii, [link](#).

93 *Joint UNDP-DPA programme on building national capacities for conflict prevention: Mid-term evaluation report 2015–2017*, Ncube, B. and Fergusson, L., February 2018, p. 7, [link](#).

94 This summary statement is from *Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding (C3P) business case*, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, September 2020, footnote 7 on p. 13, [link](#).

easy-to-measure outputs”.⁹⁵ We also saw these weaknesses in the UK government’s peacebuilding contracts. This does not align well with the UK government’s ambitions. In contexts with deep-rooted gender inequalities, for example, only projects with long-term funding commitments may stand a chance of achieving transformational results. Funding demining operations by former combatants in Colombia benefits reconciliation, livelihoods and safety, but a succession of one-year grants, with gaps in between, increases transaction costs, causes anxiety and reduces the results. In addition to their short overall duration, many peacebuilding projects are planned on the basis of the UK financial year. This complicates natural project progression and often leads to undue time pressure, or to delays until the next financial year has started.

- 4.93 In our 2019 review of DFID’s partnerships with CSOs, ICAI found that “there has on the whole been no clear trend towards the localisation of development and humanitarian efforts”.⁹⁶ This is also the case for peacebuilding efforts. The percentage of funding that is managed by local stakeholders appears to be small, but figures are unavailable as the UK government does not systematically track it. Local stakeholders that do receive UK funding often receive it via multilateral agencies and international NGOs. This channelling approach further reduces the duration of interventions. The arguments the UK government uses to explain the rarity of contracts with local organisations relate to their capacity constraints and concomitant fiduciary risks.⁹⁷ As the literature review accompanying this report notes, there is reason to prioritise localisation in peacebuilding work.⁹⁸ If and when this happens, it is possible to find ways to overcome local capacity constraints and the issue of fiduciary risks.
- 4.94 In this same 2019 review, ICAI identified “weaknesses in process management, management of discontinuity, and communication with CSOs [that] have led to inefficient, unreliable and unpredictable donor behaviour, regular and often lengthy delays, and unnecessary costs for CSOs”.⁹⁹ Until 2019, these problems were limited to the stages before project implementation. In subsequent years, the problems persisted and extended into the project implementation phase. Frequent changes in UK government leadership led to frequent changes in requirements – also mid-way through ongoing projects. When the aid budget was reduced, it was done in haste and the UK government “did not fully consider the impact on outcomes”.¹⁰⁰ ICAI’s review of the ODA spending target found that “the government’s chosen approach to ‘cut once, cut deep’, based on single-point and outdated GNI forecasts, had unintended value for money consequences for bilateral ODA programmes and UK ODA overall that might have been avoided. Moving decision making about portfolio and programme adjustments away from those closest to the details of the programmes also heightened value for money risk”.¹⁰¹ Vague communication around the reductions caused additional uncertainty. Government restructuring meant that implementing partners were often unsure who their counterparts were. This aligns with our December 2020 information note about UK aid spending during COVID-19, which found that “many organisations expressed a view that it was the lack of transparency that hampered their ability to plan effectively. The delay in reaching final decisions made them harder to implement, and made the required cuts deeper and more abrupt.”¹⁰²
- 4.95 These uncertainties led to implementing partners facing delays and staff departure. They also reduced implementing partners’ trust in the UK government. This compromised the network of local experts that the UK government needs to maintain its position as an evidence-based thought leader in the field of peacebuilding. In many cases, funding reductions meant reduced durations for projects, making them disproportionate to the length of the preparatory process (see **Figure 2** for an example). Among the programmes in our sample, the WPS programme in Nigeria fared worst: it had taken nearly three years

95 *The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund’s aid spending*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, March 2018, p. iii, [link](#).

96 *DFID’s partnerships with civil society organisations*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, April 2019, sections 4.12–4.14, [link](#).

97 The UK due diligence procedures are also duplicative. Some other donors have a single due diligence procedure, but in the UK government every department has its own.

98 The literature review is available on the ICAI website, pp. 9-10, [link](#).

99 *DFID’s partnerships with civil society organisations*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, April 2019, p. 39, [link](#).

100 *Managing reductions in official development assistance spending: Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office*, National Audit Office, 31 March 2022, p. 8, [link](#). The chair of the UK Parliament’s International Development Committee said that this report’s “findings reinforce evidence received by [the] Committee on the devastating impact of the cuts to the UK aid budget as well as the confused decision-making that lay beneath them”. *Spending watchdog supports our concerns on aid cuts*, Sarah Champion MP, UK Parliament, 21 March 2022, [link](#).

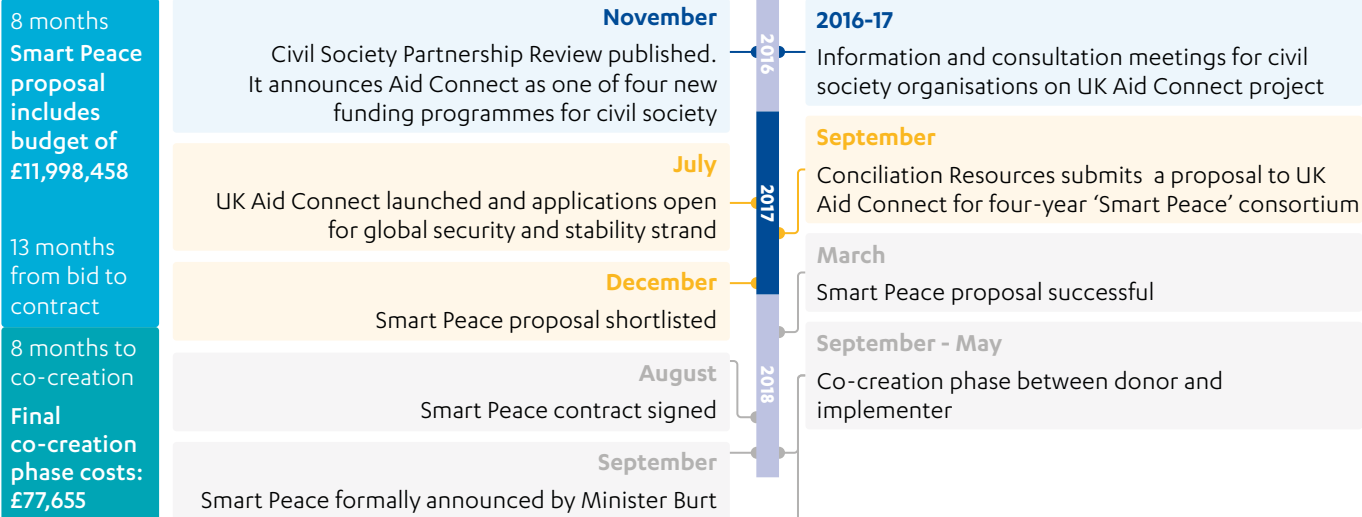
101 *Management of the 0.7% ODA spending target in 2020*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, May 2021, section 3.36, [link](#).

102 *UK aid spending during COVID-19: management of procurement through suppliers*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, December 2020, section 3.4, [link](#).

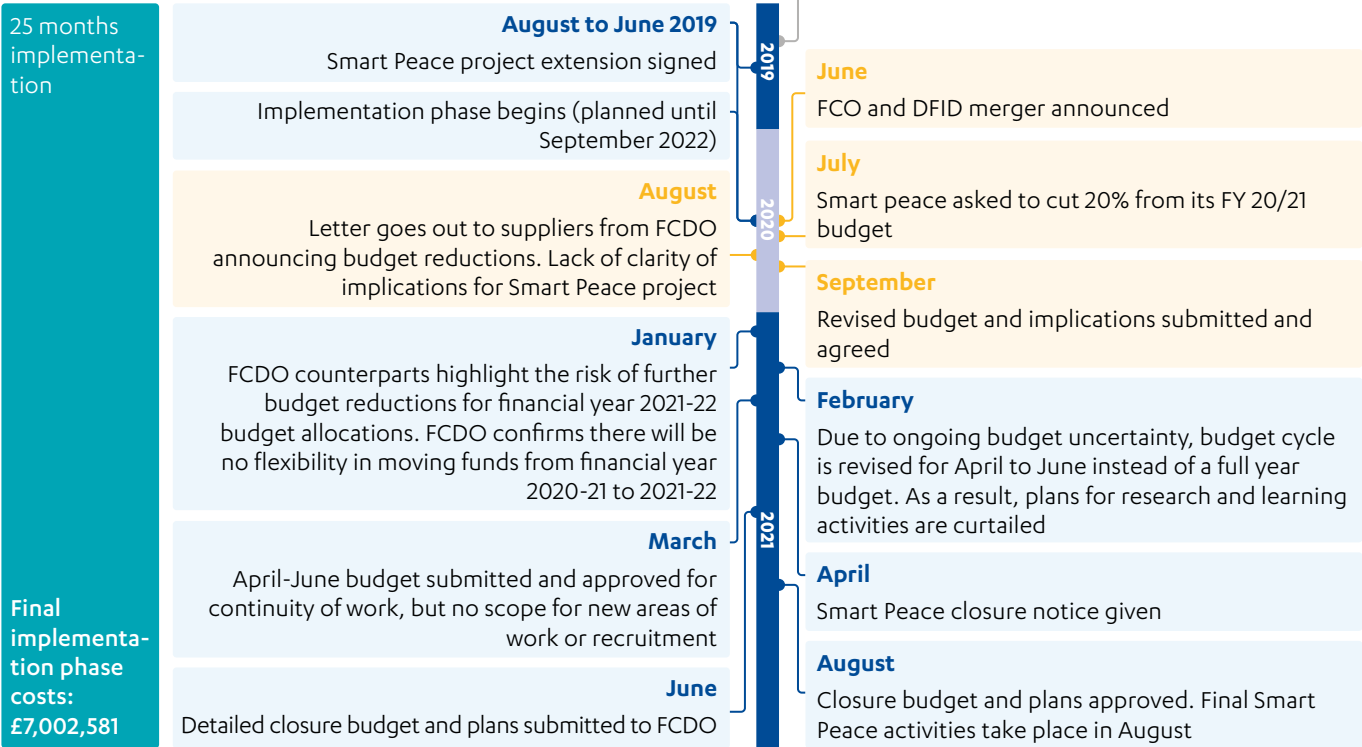
to develop and was closed five months after its launch. SPRING is a climate-focused programme for the north of Nigeria that was originally meant to be a successor programme to the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme, which ended in 2018. Towards the end of our review period, it had been five years in the making.

Figure 2: Example of a delayed project timeline

Smart Peace timeline: conciliation resources



GAP No cost extension to co-creation phase. Uncertainty caused by Brexit delays the sign-off of the implementation plans



4.96 Peacebuilding projects with short timelines, imposing reporting requirements and incentives for short-term results are unlikely to achieve the best possible results. Moreover, projects that are scaled down or terminated before the agreed date may do harm. If unfulfilled promises aggravate pre-existing grievances, peacebuilding projects may jeopardise rather than support peace processes. We saw evidence of this in Colombia and Nigeria, in the form of start-up grants that were never disbursed and infrastructure projects that were never implemented. In deeply unequal societies, WPS work may generate risks for women who are brought into peacebuilding activities by outside actors (see our

literature review). The UK's conflict sensitivity lens helps mitigate that risk, but the risk is amplified if a WPS intervention is suddenly terminated and leaves participating women unsupported. This happened in Nigeria. In many cases, implementing partners were able to limit some of the harm done, by merging programmes or by using their reserves. We also saw evidence of the UK government helping its partners to access other donor funding when the UK funding was cut short. These are useful ways to limit the damage caused by poor donorship.

- 4.97 The effects of aid budget reductions are not limited to projects. If the CSSF doubling its aid budget for the Western Balkans was seen as “the surest answer to the accusation of UK withdrawal”¹⁰³ from the region, then the subsequent budget reductions will have had the opposite effect. The UK government believes it is “renowned for our leadership in security, diplomacy and development, conflict resolution and poverty reduction,”¹⁰⁴ and external respondents often mentioned that the UK government does indeed ‘punch above its weight’, with ‘weight’ being the volume of aid spending. However, the donors we interviewed, in Nigeria in particular, also saw a government distracted by what they perceived to be self-inflicted volatility and this significantly lowered the UK government’s standing.

Conclusions on effectiveness

- 4.98 Over the course of the review period the UK government continued to learn, and part of this learning was applied to aid programmes and shared with other stakeholders and the public. The UK government improved its peacebuilding-related M&E, but some M&E investments were wasted when the UK government reduced its aid budget. Sometimes, stringent M&E requirements incentivised short-term results at the expense of longer-term and more uncertain transformational results. Because of the nature of peacebuilding work, the attribution of results to UK investments still has a margin of uncertainty.
- 4.99 The UN peacebuilding architecture is performing well and the UK government played a key role in its establishment and development.
- 4.100 Working with host governments in conflict-affected countries incurs high risks and potentially achieves important results. The criterion is not that there were interventions that failed but that some of them succeeded in making meaningful contributions to peacebuilding. The UK government did achieve results with its work with these governments, although these did not amount to meeting the optimistic targets it had set.
- 4.101 The UK also made significant contributions to local peacebuilding, albeit with insufficient attention to the localisation of the peacebuilding effort. Here, too, there is evidence of success, although, again, targets were overly ambitious. Not all results will be sustained, and some results were modest because of projects’ short duration. Some projects that over-promised, or that were terminated hastily following reductions in the UK’s aid budget, caused harm.
- 4.102 We award a **green-amber** score to the effectiveness of the UK government’s peacebuilding efforts, based on some significant results achieved, particularly in Colombia where the UK’s patient and long-term approach has helped keep the peace agreement alive. However, the impact and sustainability of UK efforts would be strengthened if shortcomings such as overly ambitious targets, short and sometimes abruptly terminated programme cycles, and the limited institutionalisation of learning related to peacebuilding were addressed.

103 Internal UK government communication.

104 *Global Britain in a competitive age: the integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy*, Cabinet Office, July 2021, p. 7, [link](#).

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusion

- 5.1 The UK government designed and operationalised peacebuilding work in which it combined peacebuilding programmes with partially ODA-financed diplomacy and, sometimes, military support. After the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development and the significant reductions in the UK's ODA spending, the emphasis shifted towards diplomacy. The reprioritisation following the aid reductions led to the UK government's programming efforts losing their reliability. The UK government did its peacebuilding work, and ensured its continued relevance, on the basis of expertise, context assessments and central guidance. It improved its monitoring and evaluation function during the review period, applied some of the learning generated by this and other research, and shared some of this learning with other stakeholders and the wider public.
- 5.2 The work was gender- and conflict-sensitive. It was aligned with the UK's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) commitments, and it often focused on particularly vulnerable communities. It achieved positive results at national and community levels. However, not all results were sustained, the government's targets were over-ambitious and reductions in the aid budget led to hasty project terminations that caused harm.
- 5.3 In-country, the UK government had a leading role among international partners and took considerable risks by working closely with host governments. It was respected by both like-minded international partners and host governments for its knowledge and coherence – even though many UK-funded projects were of inappropriately short duration, and some programmes had taken a long time to develop. The government also worked through the wider multilateral peacebuilding architecture, where it achieved positive results.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The UK government should preserve its 'thought leadership' capabilities in the field of peacebuilding.

Problem statements:

- The UK government's thinking about peacebuilding is somewhat fragmented, and in headquarters there are insufficient incentives and senior support in the relevant departments to ensure cross-government coordination on knowledge production and knowledge sharing.
- Learning about 'what works' in peacebuilding is insufficiently institutionalised.
- The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's analytical depth is at risk due to continuing volatility caused by ongoing departmental restructuring, budget reductions and reprioritisation exercises, which seem to have already diminished the government's internal challenge function.
- Ongoing volatility in UK aid and reduced trust in the UK government as a partner have diminished the contact frequency with the government's network of key informants.
- Shocks such as Brexit, COVID-19 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have exacerbated the UK government's inclination to focus on the short term.

Recommendation 2: The UK government's patient, strategic and risk-taking approach to peacebuilding at country and regional levels should extend to its partnerships at programme level.

Problem statements:

- Programmes are insufficiently focused on transformational results and their projects are framed less by conflict dynamics than by the UK financial year.
- The unpredictability of these programmes' funding further diminishes potential results.

- By exiting peacebuilding projects abruptly, the UK government causes harm by reinforcing pre-existing grievances and by failing to protect women who became more visible through their participation in WPS initiatives.
- These projects often have short project cycles and a risk-averse project management approach, and this hampers the UK's ability to develop strong local-level peacebuilding partnerships.

Recommendation 3: The UK government should strengthen accountability to affected people in its peacebuilding work.

Problem statements:

- Too often the UK government and its implementing partners did not engage with and seek feedback from affected populations throughout the project life cycle.
- Although several of the UK government's implementing partners have systems and processes in place that ensure accountability to affected people, other implementing partners do not.
- The UK government does not systematically encourage or check for accountability to affected people.
- Some relevant UK government staff had limited understanding of the concept of accountability to affected people and were insufficiently aware of its importance.

Recommendation 4: In its peacebuilding work, the UK government should maintain its focus on countries and regions in which it maintains strong, long-standing and multifaceted relations with host governments.

Problem statements:

- Budget reductions pose a risk for the UK government's investment in peacebuilding up to now.
- If budget reductions result in the UK relinquishing its role of trusted critical friend to partner countries, gaps may be created within the collective work of the like-minded international community.
- Without the UK government's long-standing and multifaceted relationship, other international partners are unlikely in the short term to be able to fill the role that the UK government plays.

Recommendation 5: The UK government should learn from and, if possible, build on initiatives in which it seeks to integrate peacebuilding and environmental goals.

Problem statements:

- Climate change and environmental degradation are often drivers and amplifiers of conflict.
- When the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) gave up their territorial control in Colombia, some forested regions were opened for legal and illegal commercial exploitation and deforestation accelerated.
- Not all of the UK government's peacebuilding efforts have fully considered how climate change and environmental degradation relate to conflict, or ways to address the challenges this causes.

Recommendation 6: The UK government should consider what can be learned from other countries when balancing travel risks in conflict-affected settings with the aim that UK government representatives have more access to regions for which they design and manage programmes.

Problem statements:

- The approach to travel in Nigeria, which as seen in other countries where security is an issue such as Afghanistan, is risk-averse compared to the approach of almost all other donors, means that UK staff often manage programmes they are unable to visit.
- Programmes are less likely to succeed in contexts where programme managers are unable to monitor conflict situations in real time, engage directly with conflict-affected people and verify the quality of programme assessments, plans and implementation.

Annex 1: The programmes covered in our country case studies

Colombia	Year/original budget	Key objective																
Colombia Peace and Stabilisation Programme (CPSP)	2015-2022 £68.6 million	<p>CPSP is a key delivery mechanism of the UK government’s Colombia Country Plan on Peace and Security. This plan’s objective is that, by 2025, Colombia and the UK’s investments in peace and stability will have strengthened security, prosperity, governance and the rule of law, and contributed to increased respect for human rights, reduced deforestation and weakened illicit economies.</p> <p>Outputs of CPSP include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to the government of Colombia to effectively implement the peace agreement. • Efforts to enhance the participation of civil society in the implementation of the peace accords. • Building the capacity and capability of the government of Colombia and civil society to tackle threats to peace, particularly human rights abuses and environmental crime. <p>Programme components of CPSP reviewed include:</p>																
		<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Programme Components of CPSP</th> <th>Total UK contribution</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>The United Nations Multi Partner Trust Fund</td> <td>£35 million</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Institutional and community strengthening for peacebuilding and stabilisation in Colombia (implemented by the International Organisation for Migration)</td> <td>2019-2022 £5.2 million</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Enhancing victims’ access to truth, justice and reparation (implemented by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights)</td> <td>2020-2021 £760,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Stabilisation and building state capability for peace programme (implemented by Fundación Ideas para la Paz)</td> <td>2019-2021 £800,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fostering informed media coverage of peace-related issues (implemented by La Silla Vacía)</td> <td>2021-2024 £137,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Organisation of American States monitoring mission</td> <td>2020-2021 £200,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Supporting young offenders in Colombia Pilot and Phase 2 (implemented by the British Council)</td> <td>Pilot: 2017-2018 £420,000 Phase 2: 2018-2021 £770,000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Programme Components of CPSP	Total UK contribution	The United Nations Multi Partner Trust Fund	£35 million	Institutional and community strengthening for peacebuilding and stabilisation in Colombia (implemented by the International Organisation for Migration)	2019-2022 £5.2 million	Enhancing victims’ access to truth, justice and reparation (implemented by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights)	2020-2021 £760,000	Stabilisation and building state capability for peace programme (implemented by Fundación Ideas para la Paz)	2019-2021 £800,000	Fostering informed media coverage of peace-related issues (implemented by La Silla Vacía)	2021-2024 £137,000	Organisation of American States monitoring mission	2020-2021 £200,000	Supporting young offenders in Colombia Pilot and Phase 2 (implemented by the British Council)	Pilot: 2017-2018 £420,000 Phase 2: 2018-2021 £770,000
		Programme Components of CPSP	Total UK contribution															
		The United Nations Multi Partner Trust Fund	£35 million															
		Institutional and community strengthening for peacebuilding and stabilisation in Colombia (implemented by the International Organisation for Migration)	2019-2022 £5.2 million															
		Enhancing victims’ access to truth, justice and reparation (implemented by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights)	2020-2021 £760,000															
		Stabilisation and building state capability for peace programme (implemented by Fundación Ideas para la Paz)	2019-2021 £800,000															
		Fostering informed media coverage of peace-related issues (implemented by La Silla Vacía)	2021-2024 £137,000															
		Organisation of American States monitoring mission	2020-2021 £200,000															
Supporting young offenders in Colombia Pilot and Phase 2 (implemented by the British Council)	Pilot: 2017-2018 £420,000 Phase 2: 2018-2021 £770,000																	

Territorios Forestales Sostenibles (TEFOS, 'sustainable forest territories')	2020-2027 £64 million	<p>We reviewed one component of the programme:</p> <p>TEFOS is a largely International Climate Fund-funded programme, managed by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The programme aims to support the government of Colombia's leadership in reducing deforestation in conflict-affected, high-deforestation areas of rural Colombia. The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund – through the CPSP – jointly funds Pillar 2 of this programme, which focuses on strengthening the environmental rule of law in regions affected by the conflict.</p> <p>Outputs of TEFOS include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver an environmental system of land rights and responsibilities in deforestation hotspots across 2.5 million hectares, providing the foundation for increased land security. • Build expertise for at least 3,000 community members across 12 deforestation hotspots on the protection of forests and increase capacity for at least 180 institutional staff in the investigation and prosecution of environmental crimes. <p>We reviewed one component of the programme:</p>	
		Programme Components of CPSP	Total UK contribution
		Pillar 2 – UN Office for Drugs and Crime	£10 million
Nigeria	Year/original budget	Key objective	
Lake Chad Basin Programme	2021-2024 £12.6 million for 2021-22	To increase commitment towards a peaceful settlement, from sub-national and national actors across the Lake Chad Basin; to improve the effectiveness of national and regional security actors in tackling threats; to enhance social cohesion, security and justice; and to improve the delivery of services, and the voice of and accountability towards citizens.	
Strengthening the Delivery of Peace and Security Project	2021-2022 £0.8 million	To influence public narratives, policy and implementation through an evidence-based approach to strengthening social cohesion by countering the atmosphere of misinformation.	
North East Conflict Management and Stabilisation Programme	2016-2021 £20.2 million	To reduce violence in targeted areas of Borno State, northeast Nigeria, by tackling underlying causes of the conflict and building community resilience to violence, including mobilisation by the insurgency. Particular focus on reducing the vulnerability of youth to recruitment by violent extremists.	
Nigeria Stabilisation and Reconciliation Programme	2012-2017 £30.16 million	To strengthen the peace architecture in eight states in four conflict-affected zones: North East, North West, Middle Belt and Niger Delta. To broaden social participation through issue-based dialogue and exert influence over policy makers. Particular focus on conflict resolution platforms and reducing the vulnerability of youth, particularly girls, to violence and abuse.	

Niger Delta and Maritime Security and Stability Programme	2016-2020 £900,000	To prevent political and community violence, including violence against women, and contribute to the UK's National Security Strategy Objective 2, on a more peaceful Nigeria. Particular focus on preventing a return to conflict in the Delta.
North East Security and Stabilisation Programme	2019-2021 £3.3 million	To help prevent further conflict and promote conciliation through supporting stabilisation efforts by strengthening government and community cooperation to rebuild trust in the Nigerian government's ability to protect. To help prepare communities for reintegration.
Women, Peace and Security Programme	2020-2021 £875,000	To promote and protect women's rights and contribute to conditions for peace and security through ensuring the presence of diverse women's voices and perspectives in decision-making spaces in Nigeria. This programme was terminated after its inception phase.
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Year/original budget	Key objective
Strengthening regional cooperation in the Western Balkans to resolve missing persons cases from conflicts of the 1990s	2019-2024 £1.17 million for 2019-21	To contribute to a sustainable process across the Western Balkans to reduce the number of missing persons and enhance stability in the region. To improve neighbourly relations and contribute to the EU accession process for countries in the Western Balkans.
Ensuring effective, sustainable, multilateral and rule-of-law-based cooperation mechanisms to account for persons missing from armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia	2021-2024 £240,000 for 2020-21	To ensure an effective, sustainable, multilateral, rule-of-law-based cooperation mechanism – Missing Persons Group – to account for persons missing from armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.
Srebrenica Memorial: Truth, Dialogue, Future	2020-2024 £500,000	To build the institutional capacities of the Srebrenica Memorial to establish a globally relevant centre for genocide research and prevention, as well as a regional hub for reconciliation and inter-ethnic dialogue.
Improving public space and public discourse in Mostar	2021-2024 £2.97 million	To contribute towards a sustainable and inclusive peace in Mostar as a microcosm of Bosnia and Herzegovina, providing hope and inspiration to the wider Western Balkan region.

<p>Ensuring that the dignity and rights of wartime sexual violence survivors are respected in legal proceedings in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in accordance with international standards</p>	<p>2020-2023 £160,000</p>	<p>To ensure that the dignity and rights of wartime sexual violence victims and survivors are respected in legal proceedings in accordance with international standards and, additionally, to strengthen the capacity building of prosecutorial and judicial staff and outreach activities.</p>
<p>Seeking care, support and justice for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Phases V and VI</p>	<p>2019-2020 £320,000 2020-2022 £450,000</p>	<p>2019–2020: To enhance survivors’ access to justice, care, empowerment and reparations throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in line with international standards. 2020–2022: To help wartime sexual violence victims and survivors preserve access to services, rights and entitlements in pandemic and post-pandemic settings, and to deconstruct community divisions fuelled by the legacy of war-related pain and trauma.</p>
<p>Safe Together: Establishing non-traditional local-level partnerships between safe houses and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to further the rights of conflict-related sexual violence survivors</p>	<p>2021-2022 £64,000</p>	<p>To join up the engagement of safe houses and faith-based organisations in eight local communities to mobilise community activities as an imperative in reducing stigma and ensuring access to rights and services for wartime sexual violence victims and survivors on local levels.</p>
<p>Abandoned no More: Support to the implementation of the UNCAT Decision in Bosnia and Herzegovina</p>	<p>2021-2022 £29,000</p>	<p>To support the implementation of the landmark Decision of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT) in Bosnia and Herzegovina by raising awareness among wartime sexual violence victims and survivors of the implications of the Decision and eliminating judicial stigma against sexual violence.</p>

Annex 2: Key guidance documents

Table 2: Key documents for peacebuilding work

Document	Contents
<i>UK government national action plan on UNSCR Women, Peace & Security 2010-2013</i> , DFID, FCO and MOD, February 2012 revision, link	Outlines the UK's three-year commitments in the context of the UN Security Council's Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000.
<i>A strong Britain in an age of uncertainty: the national security strategy</i> , UK government, October 2010, link	Outlines a whole-of-government approach, with a focus on identifying risks and threats early. Commits to the UK's development efforts doubling its investment in tackling and preventing conflict. The risk of 'instability and conflict overseas' is not yet a 'Tier One' risk (this changed in 2015).
<i>Building peaceful states and societies: a DFID practice paper</i> , DFID, 2010, link	Outlines an 'integrated approach' that puts state-building and peacebuilding at the centre of the work of the Department for International Development (DFID) in fragile countries.
<i>Building stability overseas strategy</i> , DFID, FCO and MOD, July 2011, link	Outlines the UK's strategic approach to promoting prosperity and stability in regions and countries where UK national interests are at stake.
<i>The UK government's approach to stabilisation: a guide for policy makers and practitioners</i> , 2014, no longer online except for its second chapter, link	Outlines the challenges of curtailing protracted conflict and the UK's stabilisation response to support stability and building peace. Updated following UK engagement in Afghanistan.
<i>UK national action plan on Women, Peace & Security 2014-2017</i> , FCDO, DFID and MOD, 2014, link	Outlines the UK's three-year commitments in the context of UN Resolution 1325.
<i>UK aid: tackling global challenges in the national interest</i> , HM Treasury and DFID, November 2015, link , often referred to as 'the UK aid strategy'	Outlines a new approach to the UK aid budget being directed to threats to British interests. Places international development at the heart of the UK's national security and foreign policy.
<i>National security strategy and strategic defence and security review 2015: a secure and prosperous United Kingdom</i> , UK government, November 2015, link	Outlines a whole-of-government approach, with new targeted investments that promote UK prosperity and security. 'Instability overseas' becomes a 'Tier One' risk.
<i>Building stability framework</i> , Lenzen, M., DFID, 2016, link	Provides a framework for DFID's role in meeting the commitments made in the 2015 <i>Strategic defence and security strategy</i> and the 2015 <i>UK aid strategy</i> . Presents five 'shifts', including to 'put politics first', to 'think and act beyond the state' and to 'put the right people in the right places'.
<i>UK national action plan on Women, Peace & Security 2018-2022</i> , UK government, January 2018, link	Outlines the UK's three-year commitments in the context of UN Resolution 1325.

Document	Contents
<p><i>Synthesis paper: securing and sustaining elite bargains that reduce violent conflict</i>, Cheng, C., Goodhand, J. and Meehan, P., Stabilisation Unit, April 2018, link</p>	<p>Examines the relationship between elite bargaining, the dynamics of armed conflict, and the effects of external interventions on these processes. Provides a framework to guide analysts and policy makers in deciphering patterns of elite authority, trajectories of transition, and the effects of external interventions on these dynamics.</p>
<p><i>National Security Secretariat brief</i>, Cabinet Office, June 2018, not publicly available</p>	<p>Outlines the 'fusion doctrine', which emphasises the need for resources to be commensurate with ambitions and requires different parts of the UK to contribute to efforts that are not their core business if this maximises the UK government's capabilities to achieve its overall goals.</p>
<p><i>The UK government's approach to stabilisation: a guide for policy makers and practitioners</i>, Stabilisation Unit, March 2019 update of 2014 original, link</p>	<p>Consolidates pre-existing Stabilisation Unit guidance to make it accessible to practitioners and policy makers, and fills gaps in the UK approach to stabilisation (for example, more prominence to the regional dimensions of conflict).</p>
<p><i>Global Britain in a competitive age: the integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy</i>, Cabinet Office, July 2021, link, often referred to as 'the integrated review'</p>	<p>Outlines guidance for those responsible for international policy and national security in government.</p>
<p><i>The UK government's strategy for international development</i>, FCDO, May 2022, link</p>	<p>The UK government's most recent strategy on aid delivery and priorities.</p>



This document can be downloaded from www.icaI.independent.gov.uk.

For information about this report or general enquiries about ICAI and its work please contact:

Independent Commission for Aid Impact
Gwydyr House
Whitehall
London SW1A 2NP

enquiries@icaI.independent.gov.uk