



HM Government

# HM Government Response

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10 May 2018

## HM Government Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations in the performance review of the cross-government Conflict, Stability and Security Fund: March 2018

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Her Majesty's Government welcomes the report of the ICAI Performance Review of the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) and its constructive recommendations on areas for improvement. The government is committed to learning and will work actively on the issues identified with partners across government.

The government is pleased that ICAI have recognised that the work of the CSSF closely aligns with National Security Council (NSC) objectives and is responsive to both changing government priorities and rapidly changing conflict situations. ICAI also noted the work done to ensure the Fund has the right governance structure, uses cross-government expertise to best effect, and complements core departmental work.

The review recognised the complexities of working in states affected by instability and the challenges of programming when there is only limited evidence available on how to use aid to promote sustainable peace. They agreed that the high risk appetite of CSSF programmes in working with host governments and institutions was appropriate given that the prospect of successfully addressing conflict without host government involvement is remote.

Over the last three years, the government has focussed on putting the right structures in place for the CSSF to ensure that it uses cross government expertise, is responsive to HMG priorities, and complements core departmental work. The government has trained over 400 CSSF staff in programme management. Work is ongoing to refine and improve the UK's approach to stabilisation and the government recognises that the CSSF can and must continue to improve. The recommendations made in ICAI's report largely reflect work already underway to strengthen results management, including monitoring and evaluation.

**Recommendation 1:** The CSSF should introduce country or regional plans specifying how its portfolios of aid programmes and influencing efforts will contribute to achieving NSC objectives, the intermediate outcomes that the portfolios will achieve, and the assumptions that need to hold for this to happen.

**Partially Accept**

- The government agrees that CSSF programme documentation and communication materials could more clearly set out how programmes deliver against National Security Objectives. Given the existence of HMG country, regional and thematic strategies, the government disagrees that separate CSSF country or regional plans are needed.
- CSSF programmes work to objectives set by the NSC. These are included in HMG strategies which cover the full range of HMG activity in sub-regions and countries and link policy and programme activity providing the strategic basis for the CSSF.
- CSSF programme documents, published annually, clearly link the programme to specific HMG objectives within overall country, regional or thematic strategies, explaining how a programmatic intervention will help to achieve a given strategic objective. Programme results frameworks also set out the outputs which need to be delivered to achieve programme outcomes which contribute towards government objectives.
- Work is in train to publish CSSF factsheets for countries, regions or themes which will outline the thematic areas programmes work to and will demonstrate how programmes fit into overarching government priorities. This will help demonstrate how various CSSF activities come together to advance HMG objectives in a particular country or region.

**Recommendation 2:** Where the CSSF projects are intended to support diplomatic access and influence, the influencing objectives should be explicit and progress reported so that the value for money of the investment can be confirmed.

**Accept.**

- CSSF programme teams are working to improve how influencing objectives and relevant progress are reported so that diplomatic access and influence is more explicit.
- CSSF programme teams have been working with monitoring and evaluation experts over the last year to develop and pilot a new tool that is enabling teams to gather evidence that shows whether projects and programmes are delivering diplomatic access and influence either as part of the programme plan or alongside other outputs and outcomes. This approach enables the capture of evidence in relation to predicted/planned but also unpredictable or unplanned achievements – both of which are important in conflict settings and both of which can be used to demonstrate the value derived from programme budgets. This tool is already being used in training events and seminars across the CSSF network. The Joint Funds Unit will continue to work with programme teams to support the effective use of this tool where access and influence are important elements of a programme’s objectives and/or programme outcomes.

**Recommendation 3:** Programmes should demonstrate more clearly and carefully how they identify, manage and mitigate risks of doing harm.

**Accept**

- The government takes its responsibility to “do no harm” very seriously, and will work to ensure that all processes to assess and mitigate against risk are properly documented and assessed.

- To manage the risks of doing harm, programme teams have access to appropriate guidance and rigorous training. Conflict sensitivity guidance, issued in 2016, is used to help programme teams test and improve the conflict sensitivity of their programmes.
- At programme design phase conflict analysis helps identify interventions that make the biggest positive difference to reducing conflict and fragility and mitigate the risk of causing harm. Risk registers are also developed as part of the programme documentation. These identify and record all programme risks with clear risk mitigation measures. Risks are constantly monitored and registers are updated regularly during programme implementation.
- Having recently developed a new Conflict Sensitivity Marker, the CSSF is currently piloting this across a number of high-risk programmes to assess whether programme teams can go further in managing these issues. Following further refinements to the tool, it is anticipated that this will be rolled out globally which will ensure resources and technical expertise are deployed where they are most needed.
- For all security and justice programmes, Overseas Security and Justice Assessments (OSJAs) are an additional risk management process to mitigate the risk of doing harm and ensure compliance with human rights obligations. Conducting an OSJA ensures that human rights considerations are embedded into programme design from the outset. An assessment of a programme team's appropriate use of OSJAs has already been integrated into the CSSF annual review process. As with all our efforts to ensure that we “do no harm” across our portfolio, we aim to make clearer in relevant documentation how OSJAs are used throughout the programme cycle.

**Recommendation 4:** The CSSF should address gaps in its results management and in its assessment of value for money of existing programmes as soon as possible. Meanwhile, it must ensure that all new programming includes adequate results management and measures to assess value for money.

### **Accept**

- The government is committed to ensuring that gaps in CSSF monitoring and evaluation and results management are addressed, and the Joint Funds Unit has already begun substantial work in this area. CSSF programme teams use expertise from across HMG to design, implement and oversee programmes using DFID’s best practice on the governance, oversight and delivery of the Funds.
- The Joint Funds Unit has improved guidance on Value for Money (VfM) drawing from DFID best practice, and is introducing additional training. VfM is addressed as part of the programme annual review process, which this year will be focussed more on assessing outcomes instead of just outputs.
- The Joint Funds Unit is increasing the number of monitoring and evaluation staff across the CSSF. The advisors will be able to assist programme teams in developing stronger results management processes and to demonstrate greater value for money. The Joint Funds Unit will also look at options to develop and deliver stronger fund level monitoring and learning systems, tools and good practice, building on what’s worked across the CSSF network.

**Recommendation 5:** The CSSF should create conditions that allow for the evaluation of a larger part of its portfolio. Independent reviews and evaluations of the Fund's work should be undertaken where it is possible to do so.

### **Accept**

- The government is committed to evaluating more of the CSSF's programmes. Across the fund a number of external reviews and evaluations are already undertaken each year. The government is increasing the amount of resources it has dedicated to CSSF monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) and is strengthening the focus on MEL where appropriate to do so.
- ICAI have recognised that trying to undertake rigorous evaluation without the necessarily capacity and capability in CSSF's staff network and without strong monitoring systems in place would be inappropriate. ICAI endorse CSSF's three-stage approach which focuses on getting the basics in place immediately, building staff capacity and capability in the medium term, with the final aim of being able to conduct rigorous research and evaluation in the medium to long term. The Joint Funds Unit is working hard to ensure that programme teams have the right capacity and capability as well as the right systems and tools in place in order to be able to conduct evaluations, and will be developing a plan to ensure that at fund level, learning and evidence priorities are targeted for timely, rigorous evaluations in future.

**Recommendation 6:** The CSSF should synthesise the evidence on what works in its most important programme areas, both from its own experience and from the literature, and share this with participating departments and implementing partners in the form of thematic guidance.

### **Partially Accept**

- Programme teams already have access to a wide range of thematic guidance and evidence on security and justice, counter terrorism and extremism, gender equality, conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity, stabilisation, human rights and many more areas produced by the Joint Funds Unit, Stabilisation Unit and Departments. The Stabilisation Unit (SU), which is funded by the CSSF, promotes lesson learning and best practice across HMG. On request, SU advisers provide policy and programme advice to CSSF teams from across government throughout the programme cycle. The SU also produces a number of thematic guidance reports which CSSF teams can access alongside guidance from other departments.
- The Joint Funds Unit will do more to develop and share thematic guidance with relevant stakeholders and plans to undertake an assessment to identify any significant gaps. Arrangements to ensure staff have access to these papers and analyses will be reviewed. Reviews and evaluations of most important programme areas will be included as part of the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) strategy for the Fund.
- Where possible, the government will look to publish guidance externally and share it with implementing partners. The government will also look to build on relationships with academia to broaden engagement and use of CSSF materials and guidance.