



## Chapter 5: Service delivery and stabilisation

- Evidence has shown that the delivery, or non-delivery, of services in a violent conflict context can have both a positive and negative impact on the extent and trajectory of that conflict.
- Successful service delivery interventions must be anchored in a detailed understanding of the context, minimising the potential mismatch between the intervention and beneficiary expectations.
- Stabilisation actors should exercise caution to avoid politicising and/or securitising humanitarian action. Stabilisation activities designed to achieve political effect through service delivery should be deconflicted with critical needs addressed through humanitarian assistance.
- Stabilisation interventions should focus on protecting the means of survival, allowing the population to resume their livelihoods and access to markets and services without fear of predation.
- Service delivery as part of stabilisation interventions should not seek to be transformative or overly ambitious. They need to be sensitive to the fact that how a service is delivered can be as important as what is delivered.

## Introduction

1. This chapter looks at service delivery in support of stabilisation objectives. Services such as healthcare, education, power, communications, water and sanitation (often but not always provided by the state) allow societies and economies to function. Violent conflict damages existing services while creating further demand. It disrupts delivery, as the people that deliver services are displaced or killed and infrastructure is damaged or destroyed. It escalates the needs of populations made vulnerable by trauma, economic shock and displacement. Moreover, high levels of violence make it more difficult to reinstate services, especially when they undermine the ability of a government (or other governing authority) to exert control and provide basic security.
2. The humanitarian consequences of the absence or weakness of critical services are clear and well-documented. However, there are also consequences for conflict dynamics. A population that has lost hope of accessing basic services, especially services they have come to expect, may have little faith in the future, generating anger which can fuel cycles of violence. By contrast, the (re)instatement of basic services allows populations to rebuild their lives, re-establish livelihood activities and restore a degree of normality. Service delivery underwrites the idea of a more peaceful future and is a key element of most stabilisation interventions, even if the relationship between service delivery and government legitimacy is complex.
3. This chapter is divided into three sections, each ending with key questions for policy makers and programme staff as they develop their analysis, policy and plans:<sup>62</sup>

62 As well as building on the extensive background work undertaken by the Stabilisation Unit on Elite Bargains and Political Deals, the chapter draws heavily on substantial research by the World Bank and the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC). See for example L Hammond and H Vaughan-Lee (2012) *Humanitarian space in Somalia: a scarce commodity*. HPG Working Paper, ODI

- The first section considers how service delivery as part of stabilisation interventions sits alongside service delivery within humanitarian and developmental approaches.
- The second section explains the links between meeting a population's needs through service delivery and stabilisation as defined in the UK Approach chapter.
- The third section sets out lessons and key considerations for programming in this area.

## Service delivery in the nexus of stabilisation, humanitarian and developmental responses

4. Stabilisation objectives often sit alongside humanitarian objectives. While humanitarian actors are trying to alleviate immediate harm, **stabilisation actors see service delivery as a means of restoring security for the population**. There are clear tensions between these objectives. The consciously political nature of stabilisation work contrasts with the neutrality, independence and impartiality of humanitarian interventions. These tensions can become especially acute when the local population and conflict actors perceive, rightly or wrongly, that the same external actors are responsible for humanitarian aid, stabilisation and any deployment of force.



### Case study: Tensions between stabilisation and humanitarian objectives in Somalia

The international community's interventions in Somalia testify to a long history of tension between humanitarian and political objectives. The UNITAF intervention following the state's collapse in 1991 succeeded in providing humanitarian access and prevented a more serious famine, but subsequent missions (UNOSOM II) were more politically focused. Aid quickly became part of conflict dynamics, despite humanitarian actors' attempts to steer clear of politics. Rents from aid resources became part of the war economy and international actors tried to use aid flows to influence change.

5. When violence is at a peak and immediately threatens the lives of non-combatants, **humanitarian responses** are essential. Humanitarian responses follow the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. However, it is increasingly recognised that humanitarian interventions can interact with conflict dynamics in both positive and negative ways, and that delivering in accordance with the principle of neutrality requires particular emphasis on conflict sensitivity.<sup>63</sup> We may need to build the evidence on the impact of aid and help strengthen the capacity of humanitarian actors to work in a conflict-sensitive manner. Nonetheless, the primary objectives of humanitarian interventions are to save human lives, provide immediate relief to human suffering, and preserve the dignity of those affected – rather than to support stabilisation.

63 See United States Institute of Peace and Overseas Development Institute (2018) The Unintended Consequences of Humanitarian Action in South Sudan: Headline Findings. Report available on request

6. Managing these tensions is challenging. A first step is for both humanitarian and stabilisation actors to recognise, based on clear evidence from the past 15 to 20 years, that **it is often not possible to separate service delivery from wider politics**. Their approaches must take this into account. It follows that coordination between humanitarian and stabilisation actors (and, as discussed below, development actors) is vital to manage potential risks and tensions. Given the extent of the overlap, both sets of actors must understand the objectives and frameworks which guide each other's activities. This chapter focuses on the objectives and frameworks which shape how stabilisation actors think about service delivery. It does not cover humanitarian guidance, which is available elsewhere.<sup>64</sup>
7. While there is an overlap between stabilisation and humanitarian approaches, there are also some clear distinctions. One such distinction is **target groups**. Humanitarian interventions target those with the most urgent needs and the most vulnerable populations, particularly displaced people. By contrast, the target group for stabilisation planners, who see service delivery as part of a platform for a transition out of conflict, is wider. It encompasses the broader needs of the population, even those who are less immediately threatened by violence but want to see services (re)instated.
8. This chapter focuses on service delivery during stabilisation interventions, as set out in the UK Approach paper. It acknowledges, however, that there can be significant **overlaps with more developmental approaches** to building stability, such as DFID's Building Stability Framework. The distinction between the two is mainly one of differing planning horizons. However, as discussed below, support for stabilisation through service delivery must recognise longer-term development trajectories, even if stabilisation is intended to have a shorter time horizon. Those planning service delivery interventions will ultimately need to consider both stabilisation guidelines, as per this chapter, and the approaches and principles of the Building Stability Framework.



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64 DFID (2017) op. cit.

- Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2015) op. cit.
- DFID (2017) op. cit.

## How service delivery contributes to stabilisation

### Protecting the means of survival

9. The UK Approach to Stabilisation states the need to protect the means of survival and restore basic security, which is relevant to service delivery. In many contexts, **restoring security is a precursor to service delivery** to protect the means of survival. In Iraq in 2003, for example, coalition forces did not provide adequate protection to allow service delivery to resume, ultimately leading to further societal collapse. Assuming, however, that there is a basic level of security, service delivery clearly contributes to protecting the means of survival. This includes housing internally displaced persons (or if possible allowing them to return home), removing rubble and unexploded ordinance, improving food security, children resuming their education, restoring utilities and communications networks. Humanitarian and development actors may be better placed, however, to respond to those challenges, and stabilisation interventions should rather be considered in the context of how they contribute to a political process to reduce violent conflict.
10. Service delivery in such difficult contexts is challenging, but it is a necessary part of stabilisation. It gives people the means to survive and become less dependent on humanitarian assistance and provides a foundation for longer-term development. It can also prevent things from getting even worse, since any further deterioration in services can increase the need for direct humanitarian protection and cause further displacement.
11. **Service delivery also underpins the resumption of pre-conflict patterns** of exchange and commerce. As livelihood activities and broader socio-economic patterns re-emerge, normal life begins to return, uncertainty reduces, and life becomes a bit more predictable. This can allow mechanisms for non-violent resolution of day-to-day conflicts to re-establish themselves, which can also help reduce conflict (although such mechanisms are far from a cure-all).

## Promoting and supporting a political process to reduce violence?

12. It is sometimes suggested that service delivery can help to promote a political process to reduce violence. This centres on two assumptions. The first is that service delivery increases the legitimacy of the delivering authority (i.e. the recognised government, or a body aligned with political power holders). The second is that increasing the legitimacy of a governing authority contributes to stabilisation. As part of their attempts to influence political processes, external actors often seek to boost the legitimacy of national and local partners. They have often assumed that supporting these actors to improve service delivery will boost their legitimacy and strengthen the social contract between state and society. However, the relationship between service delivery and legitimacy is considerably more complicated.
13. The first assumption has been at the core of 'state-building' approaches.<sup>65</sup> However, the evidence to support this assumption is comparatively weak. While there is some evidence that service delivery and legitimacy are linked, there are generally **too many variables to demonstrate a causal link between increased service delivery and increased state legitimacy**.<sup>66</sup> For example, legitimacy is also affected by the extent to which different elements of the population identify with the regime, and by political shifts such as regime or constitutional change.<sup>67</sup> This does not mean that service delivery has never contributed to improved legitimacy, but it warns against launching large-scale, centrally-driven service delivery interventions as a means of strengthening state legitimacy, since these tend to ignore the highly varied pre-existing relationships between citizen and state.
14. The main factor determining the validity of the second assumption, that increasing the legitimacy of a governing authority contributes to stabilisation) is the nature of the 'governing authority' in question and their alignment with broader – peaceful – political deal-making processes. This is explored in the section below on understanding the context and beneficiary expectations.



### Case study: Yemen – when service delivery fails to strengthen the state

Between 2012 and 2014, USAID provided \$100 million through the Yemen Stabilisation Initiative to support the government to implement a range of service delivery interventions. However, this transitional government was not backed by the Yemeni elites and its support base was narrow. As a result, the service delivery projects generally failed to boost either the government's perceived performance or to build security and stability.

65 Concepts such as state-building have encouraged a focus on the need for reciprocity in state-society relations. In search of entry points to support this, donors have focused attention on encouraging service delivery. This is based on assumptions, not necessarily supported by the evidence, that this will improve the state's legitimacy. See for example the DFID Practice Paper (2010) *Building Peaceful States and Societies* for examples of how this was previously conceived. See also GSDRC topic guides on State Legitimacy, including A McCullough (2015) *The Legitimacy of States and Armed Non-State Actors: Topic Guide* (Birmingham: GSDRC and University of Birmingham)

66 Claire McLoughlin (2015), *When Does Service Delivery Improve the Legitimacy of a Fragile or Conflict Affected State?* Governance, Vol. 28, Issue 3, pp. 341-356

67 See for example H Nixon and R Mallett (2017) *Service delivery, public perceptions and state legitimacy: findings from the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium* (London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium).

15. A further challenge is the **compressed timeframes** of many stabilisation interventions. Even where service delivery interventions align in a way that can build legitimacy, the evidence suggests that these are slow and iterative processes which stretch long beyond the desired timeline for stabilisation.
16. The evidence on the **relationship between legitimacy and service delivery** is clearer on the reverse pathway. Where conflict or a change of regime has led to a rapid decline in service delivery, this has often resulted in a correspondingly rapid decline in trust in the authority that is expected to provide it. As the expression goes, 'trust arrives on foot but leaves on horseback.'<sup>68</sup> A clear example is the failure of coalition forces to establish security and provide basic services in Iraq in 2003, which significantly damaged their legitimacy as a governing authority. Furthermore, opponents of those in power sometimes themselves provide services to their core constituencies, which can boost their legitimacy while undermining the legitimacy of the state.

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### Case study: Afghanistan – the challenges of building legitimacy

The National Solidarity Programme in Afghanistan was successful at instigating community-driven development by putting in place mechanisms through which grants totalling over \$900 million over the course of the programme for infrastructure and livelihoods programmes were directed by local communities and local government. It led to some tangible benefits for communities in relation to water and electricity provision. However, it did little to sustainably build the legitimacy of the central government, at least in part because there was little prior history of national government delivery at the community level and therefore little association and connection between central government and communities.<sup>69</sup>

68 Rough translation of a Dutch proverb

69 A Beath, F Christia, R Enikolopov (2013) *Randomized impact evaluation of Afghanistan's national solidarity program* (World Bank)

## Preparing the foundations for longer-term stability

17. Service delivery can also help to promote early economic recovery and the resumption of government and administration at different levels. Getting the basics in place is an important foundation for (and can also work alongside) efforts to build longer-term stability. The Building Stability Framework challenges us to ensure that economic growth is inclusive and that emerging institutions are legitimate and effective.
18. Service delivery that begins as a stabilisation activity is highly likely to continue throughout a **transition from stabilisation to longer-term development**. There are no clear boundaries between short-term stabilisation and longer-term development (including longer-term stability-building), and it is in both sides' interest to ensure that there are no major contradictions between them and to manage the transition from one to the other.
19. However, we must be realistic in the early stages of a stabilisation intervention, both in terms of the absorption capacity of existing structures and the capacity of external actors to support delivery. The focus should be on **avoiding major contradictions with longer-term trajectories**, rather than instantly launching transformative change. Stabilisation contexts are not 'blank slates' where service delivery initiatives can be used to launch new models of delivery, potentially involving the central state for the first time. Moreover, conflicts are non-linear, making it risky to launch large-scale programmes early on, which can easily be swept away by reversals in conflict dynamics. Nonetheless, service delivery interventions may offer opportunities to nudge institutions towards better practice. For example, the Afghanistan National Solidarity Programme, although focused on infrastructure and livelihoods, had a lasting positive impact on women's participation in local governance.<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, it is better to take an iterative and pragmatic approach, looking to make progress but ensuring that interventions do not undermine processes to build political stability.
20. Stabilisation is about providing a breathing space which gives time for a less violent political process to take shape. This breathing space is made possible by re-establishing a degree of security. The need for physical security is of course paramount in many violent contexts, but people's perceptions of security include a wider set of factors such as their ability to feed their families, make a living and educate their children. Populations at large, not just those needing direct humanitarian assistance, need to feel they are able to resume their normal lives and that the services which hold society together are not in a downward spiral. There is therefore a rationale for service delivery interventions to help keep this space open in support of stabilisation. However, unless there is a process to promote a stabilising political deal, service delivery interventions are unlikely to be sustainable and maintain momentum.

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70 A Beath et al., op. cit.



## Factors which determine the success of service delivery interventions in stabilisation contexts

21. The previous section set out how service delivery can support stabilisation objectives. This section turns to the practical question of what makes a good service delivery intervention in stabilisation contexts.
22. In broad terms, successful service delivery interventions are anchored in, and responsive to, a detailed understanding of the context, minimising the potential mismatch between the intervention and beneficiary expectations. In many ways, these success factors apply to service delivery interventions in all country contexts, regardless of whether they have stabilisation, developmental or humanitarian objectives. The analysis below draws out some of the specific challenges of working to more political objectives, dealing with compressed timeframes and operating in contexts where violent conflict has only recently ceased or is ongoing.

### Understanding the context and beneficiary expectations

23. The need for **good contextual analysis** is not unique to stabilisation, but it is equally if not more important than in other contexts. We must understand:
  - the problem we aim to address;
  - the different stakeholders involved (including groups who may face additional barriers to participation, such as women, young people and people with disabilities);
  - how the intervention might interact with wider socio-economic patterns and how it might interact positively or negatively with conflict dynamics.
24. However, doing such **analysis can be particularly challenging in stabilisation contexts**. Pressure to (be seen to) respond immediately can mean that there is very limited time to undertake analysis. Security or access issues might prevent work on the ground in certain areas, leading to a reliance on external reporting or the potentially distorted views of those from capitals or other locations. The dynamic nature of conflict and violence can also quickly render analysis out of date, as control or influence over different areas shifts. There are no comprehensive solutions to these challenges, but useful steps to mitigate them include:
  - engaging trusted local partners to help with the analysis, working to develop their capability, and ensuring a representative diversity of perspectives;
  - implementing adaptive approaches which start small, are monitored carefully and taken to scale as the analysis develops;
  - synthesising analysis in accessible formats and sharing it widely, both within individual donor institutions and between them.
25. There are also specific features of stabilisation contexts which merit analysis ahead of any service delivery intervention, relating to how well we understand: existing forms of service delivery, the political economy around services, the nature of violence and how this affects service delivery, and beneficiary expectations.

- 26. Understanding existing forms of service delivery** is also important. External actors often assume that it is always better to provide more services, and that 'best practice' service delivery will be well received. Both assumptions are risky. In some areas, particularly in the least developed countries and more isolated regions, there may be little history of formal service delivery, with such services as do exist provided by informal, often traditional mechanisms. Attempts to extend the writ of the central state through service delivery can cut across these mechanisms, inadvertently causing damage to functioning, cohesive communities. They may also threaten local elites who depend on traditional mechanisms for rents and status. Moreover, the central state often lacks the capacity to deliver these services properly, particularly if it is just beginning to emerge from violent conflict. In such circumstances, centrally-driven interventions risk disrupting informal systems without adequately replacing or even complementing them. Even where services have previously been delivered by the state, attempts to improve service delivery may come up against internal and public opposition, since expectations that services will be delivered in a certain way are hardwired into society and the institutions themselves.
- 27. Understanding the political economy of service provision.** Chapter 4 on facilitating political deal making emphasises the need to understand the distribution of power and resources among political elites and introduces the concept of elite bargains. By understanding and engaging with elite bargaining processes, external actors can sometimes facilitate deals which help to reduce violence and build support for more formal peace agreements.
- 28. Services are often a source of rents and patronage** for political elites. Conflict disrupts established networks, which can lead to battles for control of such rents. External actors must therefore consider how any service delivery interventions will affect the distribution of power and resources. Will it further entrench the current situation and, if so, is this in line with the overarching political stabilisation objectives? Can the intervention positively influence a critical elite bargain? Or does it inadvertently strengthen actors who do not support or are actively undermining attempts to reduce violence? If so, should the intervention not be delivered? In some cases, such as an intervention which ends up providing rents which fuel a violent insurgency, the answer may be obvious. In many cases, however, it is far less clear cut, and the trade-offs must be understood and considered.

- 29. Trade-offs** around political and financial corruption are particularly challenging for external actors. It may be necessary to accept some degree of rent-seeking or corrupt behaviour so that services can be delivered in a way that meets immediate needs and allows for wider progress. A major World Bank study recommends that interventions need to be realistic about good governance and suggests “a need to rethink how progress happens”:

Informal relationships, rent-sharing, far-from-perfect transparency or accountability, and deep politicization of service delivery—through political parties or ‘unsavoury’ powerful actors—can underpin change and progress ... [This] is not just about, or mainly about, preventing elite capture, but about how and why local elites can actively become part of pro-[service delivery] coalitions, even though some rent appropriation and corruption may occur.<sup>71</sup>

‘Good enough’ governance, implemented flexibly and adapting where necessary, is more likely to be effective than ‘best practice’.

- 30.** A further challenge is that **control of rents and services can be highly localised**. The World Bank study emphasises that the relationship between service delivery and the distribution of power and resources can play out differently at the national, sectoral, sub-national and village levels. Even where the central state is quite powerful, services can still be affected by and be a focus of local contestation. We must not assume that formal structures always have complete control over local service delivery.
- 31. Understanding the nature of violence.** Not all violent conflicts are the same, and not all forms of conflict affect service delivery in the same way. This is true both at the national level and at the local level. There can be a myriad of different conditions and responses in different locations within one overarching conflict. The presence of violence does not automatically preclude the possibility of effective service delivery, although in most cases basic security is a prerequisite, as noted above. Ultimately, what forms of service delivery are possible usually depends on the preferences of those who control the means of violence.
- 32.** The World Bank study suggests three dimensions of violence which affect the opportunities for, and obstacles to, service delivery. These are:
- the extent to which violent actors are organised, disciplined, and homogenous;
  - the ideologies, incentives, and motivations behind violence;
  - the degree of localisation of violence.

How these factors combine affects the likelihood that violent actors (and their political affiliates) will support service delivery. As a rule, groups that are more fragmented, mobile, ideologically extreme or criminally (as opposed to politically) motivated are less likely to allow service delivery interventions. There are more opportunities to bargain and make compromises regarding service delivery with groups who are more organised and disciplined, particularly if there is some alignment between their incentives and those of external actors.

<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Di John, Simon Carl O’Meally, Richard Spencer Hogg (2017) *Social service delivery in violent contexts: achieving results against the odds – a report from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nepal* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group)



### Case study: Service delivery despite ongoing conflict in Nepal

Throughout the Maoist insurgency, Nepal continued to make good progress to meeting health-related targets under the Millennium Development Goals. Progress was not significantly affected during the most violent periods and the areas most affected by the violence fared as well as others. One explanation is that the violent insurgency was organised and disciplined, meaning service providers could engage and bargain with its leaders. Furthermore, the insurgents had local roots and their ideology was supportive of improving the provision of healthcare.<sup>72</sup>

33. **It is important to analyse beneficiary expectations** and disaggregate them according to gender, location, ethnicity, age and other factors, since different groups have different expectations. Expectations and needs are not necessarily the same thing. Extra effort may also be required to assess the expectations and needs of groups who are particularly marginalised or discriminated against.
34. In areas where the state has not recently delivered many services, the public may have limited expectations and may not consider (particular) state-delivered services as part of the social contract. Even so,
 

‘there is an important role for the underlying narratives about and expectations of the state in influencing how people respond to services. ‘Legitimising narratives’ vary by country, and even by sub-national region and social group, essentially meaning that the precise nature of legitimacy looks different from one place to the next (and indeed, can change over time) ... Prior political and historical analysis of the local sources of legitimacy is therefore critical to establishing whether service delivery is likely to carry any real degree of legitimating potential in a given setting.’<sup>73</sup>
35. As well as varying from context to context, expectations also vary over time. Household wellbeing rarely remains on a steady upward trajectory and is often subject to shocks such as economic downturns, criminality or displacement, not all of which relate to conflict.
36. The following questions should assist policy makers and programme staff in understanding and planning for some of the challenges set out above.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> SLRC op. cit. See also Moro, Leben, Martina Santschi, Rachel Gordon, Philip Dau, and Daniel Maxwell (2017) *Statebuilding and Legitimacy Experiences of South Sudan* (London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium)


**Key questions**

Steps	Prompt questions	Tools and further reading
Understanding existing forms of service-delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through which channels (e.g. state, private, customary, religious, NGO) are different types of service delivered? Does this vary by geography and social group?</li> <li>• Have previous service providers been consulted?</li> <li>• How well do we understand pre-conflict financing of services and the degree of decentralisation that existed?</li> <li>• Is the absence of a service actively destabilising?</li> <li>• What actors (development, humanitarian and other) are currently enabling service delivery? How is this distributed geographically and across sectors?</li> <li>• What national plans and strategies underpin service delivery? How are these resourced and implemented?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability Guidance Note</i> Stabilisation Unit, 2017</p> <p><i>Conflict Sensitivity Tools and Guidance</i> Stabilisation Unit, 2016.</p> <p><i>Social Service Delivery in Violent Contexts: Achieving Results Against the Odds</i> World Bank, 2016</p>
Understanding the political economy of service provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is delivery financed? Are those providing services accountable? To whom, via what channels?</li> <li>• How does service delivery interact with the local distribution of power? Will dominant local political elites (armed or unarmed) gain or lose rents, resources and status when the service is delivered? Would the loss of rents risk creating or exacerbating violent conflict?</li> <li>• How might elite interests influence patterns of service delivery?</li> <li>• Where rents from service delivery flow to those supporting violence, does the benefit of the service delivery outweigh the cost of their increased resources and status?</li> <li>• What are the experiences and expectations of different sections of the public with regard to service delivery and why?</li> </ul>	
Understanding the nature of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How well do we understand the motivations of violent actors?</li> <li>• Are violent actors organised and do they have recognised leadership? Are there structures of intermediaries that allow for negotiation about service delivery?</li> </ul>	
Understanding beneficiary expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are mechanisms in place to understand and continually monitor beneficiary expectations?</li> </ul>	

## Responding effectively

### Planning considerations

37. At the outset, we should ask whether service delivery needs to be part of a wider stabilisation intervention at all and how it contributes to a political process to reduce violent conflict. However, the above section makes clear that service delivery interventions in stabilisation contexts have a higher risk of failure and have the potential to exacerbate conflict drivers. This is particularly true when they are misaligned with the political situation or beneficiary expectations, so it should not automatically be assumed that a service delivery intervention will help.
38. Whatever decisions are made, **joint planning and coordination between stabilisation, humanitarian and development actors** is important to manage risks and tensions. It helps to ensure that we respond to both emergency and broader needs, consider longer-term issues and that our overall response is politically sensitive. Coordination and information-sharing mechanisms are important to deconflict activities on the ground. Stabilisation actors should consciously avoid the securitisation or politicisation of humanitarian aid and military delivery of humanitarian aid is particularly contentious. Stabilisation actors should consult guidance developed in country on civil-military cooperation, together with the 2006 guidelines on the use of military assets in complex emergencies.<sup>74</sup>
39. As far as possible, we must **anticipate urgent service delivery needs**, and similarly, we must try to predict levels of public expectations. The situation in Iraq in 2003, highlighted above, is a clear example of where such expectations could have been predicted.
40. The demands can be both urgent and vast. External actors often have little opportunity to pilot approaches and roll services out gradually, as they must **intervene at scale from the outset**. This requires sufficient budgetary and human resources. The UNDP-led Funding Facility for Stabilisation programme in Iraq, which supported areas cleared by the Iraqi army of Daesh forces from 2015 onwards, is an example of a better planned and resourced intervention, although even here the programmes on occasion struggled to meet expectations raised by early successes.<sup>75</sup>



*At the outset, we should ask whether service delivery needs to be part of a wider stabilisation intervention at all and how it contributes to a political process to reduce violent conflict*



74 UN OCHA (2006) Guidelines on the *Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies*

75 UNDP FFS / FFIS reporting sourced from <http://www.iq.undp.org/content/iraq/en/home/library/Stabilization.html>

41. Although it is critical to have enough resources to respond to needs, **it is not automatically the case that increased funding will accelerate progress**. In Afghanistan during the uplift of international military forces between 2009 and 2011, excess funding without the capacity to spend it or monitor progress effectively resulted in significant corruption and ultimately undermined broader stabilisation efforts.<sup>76</sup> In addition, the International Security Assistance Force chose to focus the majority of its stabilisation interventions to the least secure areas in the south and east of the country. These failed to deliver, largely due to an inability to sustain an adequate level of security. This impacted significantly on the credibility of the wider campaign.<sup>77</sup>



### Case study: How perceptions around access to service delivery can fuel conflict

Sri Lanka reformed its university admission criteria in the 1970s. Although this was designed to make the process objectively fairer for most of the population, the minority Tamil population felt it was discriminatory. Although the reform was then scrapped, this controversy was a key catalyst for the increasingly militant behaviour of Tamil youth and the subsequent civil war.<sup>78</sup>

42. When targeting service delivery interventions to different beneficiary groups with varied needs, **relative vulnerability should not be the only guiding factor**, not least as this can change quickly due to the conflict and other shocks. Alongside assessments of actual needs, it is critical to understand perceptions of needs and perceptions of fairness. The perception that some groups have favoured access to government services can exacerbate conflict fault lines and contribute to processes of de-legitimation.<sup>79</sup> Stabilisation planners need to consider the totality of support provided by all actors (including humanitarian aid) and assess how this is perceived in each context.
43. We also need to plan on the basis that we will be working within a much broader set of actors and interventions. In most contexts, **the UK government is unlikely to be working alone**. The challenges are too large for individual bilateral actors and the UK will work with like-minded partner countries and deliver through international organisations, including the UN system. It can be challenging to quickly reach consensus on priorities for and modalities of intervention. Moreover, we need to be realistic about our influence over stabilisation interventions in such circumstances. We will be one voice among many, and multilateral actors may themselves have limited influence over the national government. In turn, the national government may not be able to fully control what happens locally.

76 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) (2018) *Stabilization: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*

77 Ibid.

78 Claire McLoughlin (2018) *When the Virtuous Circle Unravels: Unfair Service Provision and State De-Legitimation in Divided Societies*, Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding, 12:4

79 Clare Cummings and Suman Paudel (2018) *The Legitimacy of the State in Nepal's Terai Region: Do Public Services Matter?* (London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium), upcoming in 2019 and Claire McLoughlin (2018) op. cit.



## Key questions

Steps	Prompt questions	Tools and further reading
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much influence does the UK have in this context and what resources are available? What does this mean for our ability to contribute in a meaningful way?</li> <li>• Do planning scenarios adequately anticipate immediate service delivery needs?</li> <li>• Do we have robust plans to research beneficiary expectations? How can we do this quickly, carefully, locally and dynamically? How can we provide feedback loops to ensure that changes can be tracked over time?</li> <li>• Can plans be adapted to the situation on the ground and change course if necessary, and are proportionate monitoring, evaluation and learning processes in place to support this?</li> <li>• Are resources and capabilities available to meet the likely needs?</li> <li>• Would a stabilisation intervention have a comparative advantage, or are there development and humanitarian responses in place to address those needs?</li> </ul>	



## Who is best placed to provide services

44. There are various considerations relating to who delivers services in support of stabilisation interventions. Firstly, it is often impossible to make a rigid distinction between those implementing services and conflict actors. The UK government has often sought to support a central government or state which was considered sufficiently legitimate and inclusive (or had the potential to be), even if it was a party to the conflict. In Syria, by contrast, stabilisation activities supported local government structures in opposition-held areas. These were obviously not the central state, but still parties to the conflict.
45. Whoever the UK is supporting politically, from a service delivery perspective we need to start by **assessing which body or authority has traditionally governed these services** (as opposed to delivering them). In many contexts, the best option will be to ensure that the planning and delivery of services is undertaken through or in partnership with these governing authorities (e.g. a central or local government). National and/or local government actors are likely to have some pre-existing capacity to deliver, political acceptability among the population at large (albeit with caveats when that authority lacks full control), and the opportunity to ensure sustainability. In such cases, external actors should ask how they can best support this governing authority to resume services or adapt them to the needs generated by the conflict, which may be as simple as providing resources and undertaking joint planning. Longer-term, this relationship can evolve to address questions around the reform and modernisation of such services.
46. In other situations, **the national governing authority may not be able to deliver services** because the situation is too insecure or because it does not enough power and legitimacy at the local level. In the past, external actors have often responded by tasking their own military forces to provide support, given the lack of alternatives. Such interventions, often short-term 'Quick Impact Projects' (QIPs), usually sought to win 'hearts and minds' but have had little evidence of success.<sup>80</sup> The training of military forces to deliver such initiatives in difficult contexts has often been inadequate, leading to interventions being undertaken in a conflict-insensitive manner. Programming in communities where local political dynamics are poorly understood risks exacerbating conflicts, enabling corruption and bolstering support for insurgents.<sup>81</sup>
47. A further problem with military provision of services is that it is very difficult to combine support for service delivery with 'force protection' in a hostile environment. By definition, hostile environments which require force protection will not fulfil many of the criteria for successful service delivery. These might be a basic level of security, some local governance, and a coordinated civil-military approach which prioritises joint planning with local authorities and populations. Military-led QIPs are now generally considered an implementation modality of last resort.

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80 Sultan Barakat, Seán Deely and Steven A. Zyck (2010) 'A tradition of forgetting': stabilisation and humanitarian action in historical perspective,' Disasters, ODI, Vol. 34, Issue S3

81 Stuart Gordon (2011) *Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand*, Feinstein International Centre and SIGAR op. cit.

48. There are other contexts again where there is **no real likelihood of the central state providing services**. In stabilisation contexts, the central state is often absent outside key urban centres, whether due to a lack of capacity or a lack of political will to extend service provision. In such cases, actors such as UN agencies, NGOs and community organisations are more likely to directly deliver services themselves. This can be challenging, as some organisations will be aiming to mobilise and deliver within different timescales than those envisaged for stabilisation, and there are risks around engaging ostensibly neutral actors in more political stabilisation activities. Stabilisation actors should try and work with other organisations to build the evidence on the impact that others are having on state authorities, with a view to highlighting when such organisations are undermining and displacing the central state.
49. More broadly, external actors have commonly held that the national government must be seen to have a leading role as a way of building legitimacy. As argued above, it is now understood that the links between service delivery and legitimacy are complicated. Furthermore, recent evidence from the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, albeit relating to longer-term service delivery, has shown that other agencies delivering services only has a limited impact on perceptions of government. There are examples of NGO-delivered services having a somewhat negative impact on perceptions of local government, but only in some contexts.<sup>82</sup>

 **Key questions**

Steps	Prompt questions	Tools and further reading
Delivering services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who currently governs (rather than delivers) the services we wish to support, both locally and nationally? How much control do they have? Are there tensions with local political power structures?</li> <li>• What role do those local actors play in the conflict and how does it affect their governance role?</li> <li>• Can we mitigate the risk of securitisation of interventions, for example through appropriate civil-military coordination modalities?</li> <li>• How should service delivery be 'branded' in this context? What is the most pragmatic approach?</li> <li>• Should the local government lead in delivering services?</li> <li>• What capacity do multilateral partners have to deliver services in support of stabilisation efforts?</li> <li>• Can existing national systems be preserved or strengthened during stabilisation? As a contribution to long-term stability, what can be done to improve quality, coverage, equity and accountability of services?</li> </ul>	

82 Nixon and Mallett (2017) op. cit.

## Which services to deliver



### Case study: Aligning service delivery with local needs and expectations in Afghanistan

In the early days of stabilisation efforts in Helmand, the coalition did not always understand local needs. Schools and health centres were built where none existed before, without understanding what was wanted. For example, in 2009 the Provincial Reconstruction Team completed a large co-educational secondary school in Sangin District Centre. This was bombed by the Taliban within a week of opening, and subsequently closed. The Taliban knew that the school did not respond to local needs for community-based schools where children could work after lessons. After this, the District Stabilisation Team made greater effort to respond to local needs, not just in education but also small infrastructure projects and the distribution of wheat seed. This helped to reduce tensions, leading to the Sangin Accord, which effectively brought 'reconcilable' local Taliban elements onside with the national government.

50. External actors must also decide which services most require their support. Far too often, needs have simply been assumed, often reflecting external actors' perceptions of what is lacking. Although service delivery needs may be obvious in the immediate aftermath of conflict, once basic services are in place, **engagement with beneficiaries** becomes increasingly important. Since stabilisation-related service delivery interventions are intended to reassure the population that life will return to normal, beneficiaries themselves are the best guide to what is needed. We must try to understand the different needs of women, men, girls and boys, and those who are most severely marginalised, such as people with disabilities. There is a lot to learn here from humanitarian good practice, where beneficiary participation and accountability are core principles. The UNDP-delivered Funding Facility for Stabilisation in Iraq highlighted the importance of shaping interventions around the needs of IDPs.<sup>83</sup>



*Since stabilisation-related service delivery interventions are intended to reassure the population that life will return to normal, beneficiaries themselves are the best guide to what is needed*



83 UNDP Funding Facility for Stabilisation reporting sourced from <http://www.iq.undp.org/content/iraq/en/home/library/Stabilization.html>

The UK National Action Plan (NAP) on Women Peace and Security emphasises the importance of needs-based responses that promote meaningful participation and leadership (in this case by women and girls). The NAP also draws attention to the importance of addressing the needs arising from gender-based violence which are often hidden.<sup>84</sup>

51. Beyond listening to beneficiaries, there are various other considerations for stabilisation planners when determining what to deliver:
- **The politics of service provision.** Different sectors can be more or less politically sensitive, depending on the context. Education provision, for example, can be controversial where access has previously been determined by gender or ethnicity, or where schools have been used to propagate divisive narratives.
  - **Balancing short-term and long-term objectives.** There is a considerable tension between shorter-term stabilisation objectives and more transformative ambitions around service provision. Striking this balance can involve a robust consideration of standards of provision, leading to the parallel development of broader governance arrangements that will own service delivery over the longer term.
  - **Managing expectations and ambitions.** We must be careful not to raise expectations that we may not be able to meet. Projects which seek to be transformative are more likely to fail, and this can have serious consequences. A visible failure to deliver promised large-scale projects can rapidly undermine the population's trust in stabilisation processes and actors. Insurgent groups can exploit this to gain people's loyalties, by delivering more modest services which are nonetheless in line with people's needs and expectations.
52. A further issue to consider is **developing local governance capacity**. Some stabilisation planners have seen building the effectiveness of local authorities as part and parcel of service delivery. In Helmand, for example, considerable support was provided to the District Community Council and the Governor's Office. Similarly, governor's offices in places such as Anbar have been supported in Iraq. The theory is that focusing on local rather than national governance helps decision-making to be more context-specific, and also increases pressure for accountability as there is a more immediate connection with communities and beneficiaries. However, establishing new or better local accountability mechanisms can be a lengthy process.<sup>85</sup> Therefore they can only make a limited immediate contribution to stabilisation (though they are important as they make a statement of political support and can establish foundations for longer-term progress), and any improvements are inherently vulnerable while the situation remains highly unstable and at risk of returning to more serious violence. Care should also be taken to ensure that central government endorses and is committed to sustaining any such local governance structures. Experience with local initiatives in Afghanistan (notably in Sangin) and elsewhere shows that without central government agreement and involvement, such structures will only have a limited impact and their failure will add to popular grievances and perceptions of central government indifference. Investments in functioning grievance mechanisms could, however, pay more immediate dividends.<sup>86</sup>

84 UK Government (2018) op. cit. See also Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender-based Violence (GBV) Guidelines

85 DFID (2017) Tamkeen Project Completion Report Unpublished

86 SLRC research across four post-conflict countries showed that access to grievance mechanisms corresponded with improved perceptions of government. Nixon and Mallett (2017) op. cit.

53. The aforementioned UNDP Funding Facility for Stabilisation in Iraq put many of these points into action. It focused on delivering relatively simple, non-controversial, quick-to-deliver projects, consciously leaving more complex questions to a later date when, it was hoped, institutions would be better able to handle them. This approach mostly delivered success on the ground. It also made it easier to agree interventions in the first place across multiple donors and the Government of Iraq.<sup>87</sup>



### Key questions

Steps	Prompt questions	Tools and further reading
Understanding and responding to beneficiary needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are we taking a lead from the actual expressed needs of beneficiaries, ensuring all voices are heard?</li> <li>• Are we being sufficiently pragmatic, and aiming for an acceptable level of service provision rather than attempting substantive institutional transformation?</li> <li>• Are we making assumptions about a sustained and linear improvement in the security situation?</li> <li>• What if an intervention should fail? What might be the wider consequences of any such failure?</li> <li>• Have all actors involved in service delivery, including governance mechanisms, been considered?</li> </ul>	

87 United Nations Development Programme (2018) Funding Facility for Stabilisation: Lessons Learned Review

## How services are delivered

54. The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) research found that **how services are delivered and experienced** is sometimes just as important, if not more, to public perceptions of legitimacy, than the value of these services. The presence of grievance mechanisms and beneficiary consultation about services correlated with improved perceptions of government.<sup>88</sup>

### Case study: Using service delivery interventions to improve accountability in northern Syria

The DFID-supported Tamkeen programme in northern Syria imposed a degree of accountability on local councils by making funding dependent on having transparent budgets, accounts and procurement processes and setting up community complaints structures. After initially resisting this, several local councils reported favourably of this approach. Communities had previously suspected that councillors were pilfering funds but could now see that this was not the case.<sup>89</sup>

55. Equally, poor beneficiary experiences of service delivery have a negative impact on perceptions of government legitimacy. The SLRC found that “perceived unfairness, corruption or exclusion are important factors influencing how people connect their experience of services to their views of the government. This speaks to the idea ... that services have the potential to act as vehicles for transmitting or signalling wider norms and values, both for the good, and the bad.”<sup>90</sup> Importantly, fairness matters regarding both the outcome and the process. In the Terai region of Nepal, SLRC found that many felt unfairly treated by the state despite the material benefits they had received.<sup>91</sup> In Swat, Pakistan, people often had access to hospitals, but poor people described being unfairly treated by doctors.<sup>92</sup>

### Case study: Afghanistan's Sangin district

One of the factors that led to the collapse of the Sangin Accord, described in a previous example, was a failure on the part of the coalition to follow up the agreement quickly with the service delivery. Small infrastructure projects promised to local leaders in the Upper Sangin Valley, along with the failure by ISAF and the Afghan government to provide sufficient security to allow for the delivery of these services, also led to the collapse. A change in the funding mechanisms available to the District Stabilisation Team has been cited as a contributory factor.

88 Nixon and Mallett (2017) op. cit. See also Nayana Godamunne (2015) *The Role of Social Protection in State Legitimacy in the Former Conflict Areas in Sri Lanka* (London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium)

89 DFID (2017) Tamkeen Programme Completion Report. Unpublished

90 Nixon and Mallett (2017) op. cit.

91 Cumming and Paudel (2018) op. cit.

92 Aoife McCullough, Shehryar Toru (2018) *Imagining and Experiencing the State in Swat, Pakistan* (London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium)

56. The SLRC also found that local political actors generally gain more legitimacy from service delivery interventions than national actors, whereas perceived exclusion or unfairness tends to be projected upwards towards national-level actors. This needs to be taken into consideration when assessing how service delivery interventions might affect elite bargaining processes at different levels.
57. Above all, **service delivery interventions need to be flexible**. They must be able to adapt to specific local contexts. They must also be able to respond quickly as circumstances change or new opportunities arise. This requires decision-making mechanisms and funding modalities that can move quickly at all levels, both among international partners and within national and local government agencies. It also requires effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms that can highlight risks and opportunities as they arise. These mechanisms need to include **qualitative feedback from beneficiaries and intermediaries**, rather than simply equating funds disbursed or numbers of services provided with positive outcomes. This is clearly a challenge in many contexts, but stabilisation interventions should always aim to be as flexible as possible.
58. The question of who controls the money often brings broader questions about politics and power to a head. National authorities often use the process of disbursing funds to the local level as an instrument of control. This is clearly in tension with the needs for flexibility and responsiveness set out in the previous paragraph.
59. Lastly, all actors involved in service delivery, regardless of whether they are national or international and whether they are humanitarian, stabilisation or development actors, must be conscious of the potential power imbalances between service delivery agents and beneficiaries. They must have **robust mechanisms to counter the threat of exploitation** in all its forms.



## Key questions

Steps	Prompt questions	Tools and further reading
Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are delivery modalities and due diligence requirements flexible enough to deal with a degree of rent seeking, if this can be demonstrated to be an acceptable trade-off for securing important objectives?</li> <li>• Can the wider impact of interventions on the local distribution of power and resources be monitored effectively?</li> <li>• On a practical level, can money be controlled from the right place?</li> <li>• Can safeguarding standards be met?</li> </ul>	