TERMS OF REFERENCE: RAPID EVIDENCE ASSESSMENTS ON SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME

These terms of reference are designed to select and contract a supplier to conduct a rapid evidence assessment (REA) on the effectiveness of interventions to tackle serious and organised crime.

BACKGROUND

Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) is both a major threat to the UK’s national security and to its development objectives internationally. The Department for International Development (DFID) has committed to supporting the delivery of the HMG Serious and Organised Crime Strategy (2018), with a focus on tackling the root causes and drivers of serious and organised crime and the harmful impacts it has on development processes. To inform development of new SOC programming, DFID needs to better understand the evidence on drivers of, and effective approaches to addressing, serious and organised crime.

What is SOC?

SOC is defined, by HMG, as individuals planning, coordinating, and committing serious offences, whether individually, in groups, and/or as part of transnational networks. SOC can involve a range of crime-types including, but not restricted to, drug trafficking, people trafficking, modern slavery, arms smuggling, fraud, money laundering, environmental crime incl. illegal wildlife trade, economic crime (incl. grand corruption), and child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA).

SOC and development

SOC is particularly damaging because it disrupts development processes as well as perverting the benefits of development. It is often transnational, not confined by traditional borders, and impacts countries across the world. According to the United National Office on Drugs and Crime, in 2009 criminal proceeds amounted to 3.6% of global GDP. The African Union and United Nations estimate that Africa alone has lost more than $1 trillion to illicit financial flows over the past 50 years. Whilst these figures are contested, they provide a sense of the scale of the industry and need for evidence on SOC.

SOC is deeply political and has the potential to infiltrate every sphere of life. Organised criminal groups (OCGs) often take advantage of institutional weaknesses in developing countries to capture political systems, influence the outcome of elections and ensure impunity. SOC undermines growth and prosperity by capturing markets, siphoning resources away from the formal economy, draining economic productivity, and undermining the tax base. Infrastructure investments that support trade and livelihoods can be exploited by criminal groups to facilitate the trade in illicit goods. Where public procurement systems are controlled by criminal groups, the result is often expensive and poor-quality

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2 UNODC, Estimating illicit financial flows resulting from drug trafficking and other transnational organized crimes (2011)
provision of basic services. Criminal organisations operate outside of the law and regularly use violence to settle disputes or redress grievances, undermining stability and human security. However, they can also provide a function, or survival mechanism, to local communities by, for example, offering employment to youth. For these reasons, and many more, DFID has a key role to play within HMG to address the underlying causes and impacts of SOC in the developing world.

SOC in DFID

As part of efforts to deliver the SOC strategy, DFID have committed to new work, including development of a Global Protect and Prepare Programme. In practice, this means a portfolio of new and/or existing programming in a range of countries/regions to address the socio-economic, governance, and criminal justice factors that underpin SOC. This work will be coordinated with, and complementary to, the work of other government departments.

PURPOSE & SCOPE

DFID is committed to ensuring that policy and programmes are informed by a rigorous and up-to-date understanding of the evidence base. As the academic literature on SOC is rapidly growing, including in developing contexts, this requires systematically identifying existing work and evidence gaps. Specifically, we want to better understand the evidence on drivers of, and effective approaches to addressing, serious and organised crime. This will be used to inform the development of a theory of change (ToC) that will in turn be used to shape and inform DFID’s, and wider HMG, programming responses to SOC.

To build our understanding in this area, we wish to commission a rapid evidence assessment (REA) that will provide a structured review and synthesis of the literature on the effectiveness of approaches to tackle serious and organised crime, including lessons learned from ineffective approaches. Evidence from high-income countries (HICs) should be included where limited evidence from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is available.

The REA should draw primarily on the global evidence base from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and prioritise the countries and regions in which DFID operates. However, acknowledging there may be a limited evidence base from these settings studies from high-income countries may be included but it should be clearly identified throughout the review where evidence is from, drawing out contextual differences in findings and highlighting where findings are context specific.

A short literature review was undertaken as part of a preliminary scoping exercise to explore the availability of evidence. This provides a summary of evidence on the impact of livelihoods programmes on SOC (Shultze-Kraft, 2018).

The term ‘rapid evidence assessment’ is used in this document to refer to a rigorous and systematic search and synthesis of evidence within a short timeframe. It is similar in nature to a systematic review but acknowledges that methodological concessions are required to ensure the report can be produced in a timely fashion. It is essential that the reviews are easily accessible to decision makers in both DFID and the broader development community to promote evidence-informed discussion and action.

This research is being commissioned alongside another REA exploring the development impacts of serious and organised crime. Whilst being commissioned as stand alone reports, the two REAs are

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/guidance/where-we-work
related pieces of work that will feed into the development of each other, as well as the theory of change (ToC).

We expect the proposal to outline how the proposed team will ensure close collaboration with suppliers delivering the related REA.

A ToC is a graphic representation of how a proposed intervention, or series of interventions, is hypothesised to cause long-term changes. It connects interventions to outputs, then outcomes, and finally long-term goals, highlighting the assumptions being made at every stage. The SOC ToC will provide a high-level articulation of DFIDs approach to tackling SOC and how programming is expected to contribute to its reduction. The ToC will be developed collaboratively by, at a minimum, bringing together stakeholders from DFID, other Government departments, and the supplier(s) of these REAs. The ToC will be used to help guide the development of DFID’s central, regional, and country-level approaches and interventions to tackle SOC. A preliminary ToC can be found in Appendix A, but the development of a more thorough, and tested, one is key to effective programming.

The following sections outline the approach (including the research questions), expectations, timelines, and required outputs.

## Approach

### Research Questions

This REA should seek to address the overarching research question ‘**What works’ in tackling serious and organised crime (SOC)?**

It should explore the effectiveness, and ineffectiveness, of approaches to tackle serious and organised crime. Hence, the review should consider the following questions:

1. **What approaches are used to tackle serious and organised crime?**
   2. **How effective are these approaches in addressing SOC?** Considering specifically:
      1. a. Which approaches are successful in tackling/preventing SOC?
      2. b. What are the intended and unintended impacts of these approaches? This should include consideration of short, intermediate and long term impacts.
      3. c. What is the scale of said impacts?
   3. **What approaches have been used to measure the impact and effectiveness of SOC interventions?** What lessons can be learnt for future assessment?

These questions can be refined in collaboration with DFID during the initial scoping phase.

The aim of the evidence syntheses will be to draw out key findings that are supported by strong or very strong evidence (i.e. areas in which we can be confident about ‘what works’), to highlight areas of limited or no evidence (i.e. in which areas we don’t yet know ‘what works’) and prioritise evidence gaps to be filled.

Given the importance of integrated, multi-sectoral approaches to addressing complex problems like SOC, as well as the fluidity with which SOC actors and networks move between different crime types, it is suggested that the review should be focused on thematic areas/outcomes, rather than the impact of specific types of interventions or crimes. This could include, but is not limited to:

- **Violence reduction and security** – Sustainable reductions in violence generated by SOC and improved perceptions of security at both the community and societal level.
• **Community resilience** – Reduction in support for SOC actors and networks and diversion of people away from activities linked to SOC.

• **Government and state capture** – Reduced control and influence of SOC actors over political institutions and processes.

• **Economic transition** – Shifting balance of economic activity from illicit activities to forms of productive economic activity that do not rely on criminality or rent seeking to sustain itself.

• **Service provision** – Extent to which citizens are able to access basic services, such as water, healthcare, justice, and nutrition, without exposure to SOC (either directly through SOC actors, or indirectly through SOC penetration of the supply chain).

• **Free and independent media** – Increased ability for the media to investigate, document, and expose criminality without fear, intimidation, or sanction.

• **Investment** – Increased investment by government and private sector.

Whilst effectiveness should primarily be determined by the extent to which approaches achieve the intended outcomes, the review should also consider whenever possible:

• **Sustainability** over time

• **Avoidance of negative unintended consequences**

• **Inclusion and gender equality** – extent to which all members of society, particularly the most marginalized benefited.

• **Value for money**

• **Public perception**

The REA should address ‘what doesn’t work’ and lessons learnt from approaches to SOC which evidence suggests have not been effective or where there have been unintended consequences. It should also consider the impact of important variables such as context, duration, and the adaptability of interventions from high-income countries.

It is anticipated, even including evidence from HICs, there may be a lack of rigorous empirical research. We expect the proposal to set out how limitations in the evidence base will be dealt with, and the type of studies the review will include. The assumption is that theoretical and conceptual studies and those that lack methodological transparency will be excluded.

### SEARCH, SCREENING, AND DATA EXTRACTION

The literature search, screening, and data extraction should follow a clear protocol, which should specify search strings and what databases are going to be searched. The literature search need not be exhaustive, but the steps followed should be fully documented, with a clear rationale for how the search has been constrained and description of any likely biases that result from not having undertaken a fully comprehensive search.

It is likely that the research team will amend some of the initial search strings, or slightly deviate from the research agreement, during the search. The key is that these changes and additions to the search methodology are clearly signposted so that the search process remains transparent and replicable.

The protocol should clearly outline the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to determine which of the studies found during the search are included in the REA.

The protocol should also cover how the selected studies will be consistently coded. REAs typically limit how comprehensively the studies are described to save time. At the minimum, the coding framework will contain details of the following: author(s), year of publication, country, region, type of study.
(primary, secondary, theoretical/conceptual), and study design (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, mixed method, experimental, quasi-experimental, observational). The coding should capture the types of approach, duration, outcomes, and, where possible, the scale, length and nature of the impact.

**QUALITY APPRAISAL**

The quality of the evidence identified in the literature search should be assessed according to clear criteria.

Proposals should indicate the suggested criteria and scoring protocol and are welcome to draw on DFID’s How To Note on *Assessing the strength of Evidence*\(^5\), adapting the criteria if necessary. The approach to quality appraisal must be transparent, proportionate, and fully justified.

We anticipate that the quality of the evidence base will vary, with a substantial proportion of the literature falling into ‘low’ or ‘moderate’ quality categories. At the end of the scoping phase the supplier should agree with DFID whether thresholds should be set on the quality of evidence included in analysis. High quality evidence should be prioritised, but at this stage, we do not anticipate setting a quality threshold on studies included for analysis.

**SYNTHESIS OF THE EVIDENCE BASE**

Proposals should indicate the approach to synthesis and the tools that will be used to conduct analysis. The evidence syntheses should draw out trends from the evidence base, including highlighting key findings that are supported by strong or very strong evidence and areas of limited evidence. The syntheses should also identify areas in which there is no evidence.

The report should provide a summary of the characteristics of the overall body of evidence reviewed, as well as the subset relating to each research question.

The evidence syntheses must make frequent reference to the quality assessment of the evidence, including commenting on the quality, consistency, context and size of the evidence base upon which conclusions are based. It is likely that the relevant evidence bases will contain limited robust evidence on the outcomes of interest. The report should clearly distinguish between causal evidence and evidence that deepens understanding of the relationships between variables, but which does not establish causation. Please refer to DFID’s How To Note on *Assessing the Strength of Evidence* for guidance on DFID’s expectations for assessing and describing the overall strength of a body of evidence.

**LINKING RAPID EVIDENCE ASSESSMENTS**

Proposals should clearly indicate how they will establish connections and work collaboratively with the team delivering the related review to ensure that they are suitably feeding into each other’s development. This could include having an overlapping team, meetings at key points in their development, appropriately sequencing the reviews, and so on.

**INCEPTION**

The supplier is expected to attend an inception meeting with DFID at the point of contract. This meeting is to discuss the scope of the project, and for both sides to ask any questions they have for this work.

**SCOPING EXERCISE**

An initial scoping phase will take place at the outset of the project in order to:

- **a.** Agree the final research question(s) – including exact scope for the review;
- **b.** Agree how the teams for each REA will be structured and interact to enable cross-review collaboration;
- **c.** Agree how the team will contribute to the ToC development;
- **d.** Agree the project work plan;
- **e.** Test the search strategy as a means of assessing the feasibility of the review based on the size of the evidence base;
- **f.** Agree the framework for the quality appraisal of literature;
- **g.** Agree the report structure.

The supplier is expected to present the results of the scoping phase to DFID and supply a scoping phase document which sets out the critical elements of the work. DFID expects the supplier to make recommendations on the feasibility of scope and research questions. DFID will review the scoping phase document. The supplier will not be able to continue with this work until DFID has approved this documentation.

**Break Point**

There will be a break point at the end of the scoping phase. The supplier will require approval from DFID before commencing work on the REA. DFID may terminate the contract at the end of the scoping phase if the work undertaken during scoping phase is unsatisfactory, or agreement cannot be reached on the work plan for the remaining phases. If DFID decides not to proceed, the contract will be terminated at no cost to DFID and only costs agreed for work during the scoping phase will be paid.

**OUTPUTS**

Six outputs are required for the review two of which are related specifically to the development of the theory of change – these include:

1) **Scoping report**, setting out final research questions, scope, work plan, the proposed framework for quality appraisal of the literature, and suggested report structure;

2) **A first draft** of:
   - **a.** The complete rapid evidence assessment (max 30 pages each excluding bibliography);
   - **b.** The 2-4 page accessible written summary reports which should give consideration to the use of data visualisation/infographics;

3) **A final version** of:
   - **a.** The complete rapid evidence assessment to include:
i. a 1-2 page executive summary;
ii. a description of the methodology, including a summary of the literature search;
iii. a summary of the characteristics of the evidence base;
iv. analysis of the evidence for each research question and a summary of the characteristics of the literature upon which conclusions are based – this should include describing the geographical coverage and highlighting key findings supported by strong/very strong evidence;
v. indication of evidence gaps (i.e. areas of limited or no evidence);
vi. lessons learned and practical recommendations for programming;
vii. conclusions;
viii. reference list; and
ix. options for further research.

b. The 2-4 page accessible written summary report;

4) A set of presentation slides that DFID can use to share the work with stakeholders. To include:
   a. Key findings from the review;
   b. 1-2 example studies that illustrate, or support, these key findings.

The outputs required to feed into ToC development:

5) Briefing document and participation (in person) in theory of change workshop:
   a. 2-4 page briefing document outlining how the work (at draft stage) can contribute to formulating a ToC;
   b. Attend a theory of change workshop and actively contribute to discussions, highlighting where there is existing evidence;
   c. Continued input and comments on draft version(s) of the ToC.

6) Delivery of a presentation to key stakeholders in DFID and across HMG.

REPORT TEMPLATE & STYLE

A template for the full report will be provided by the DFID Evidence into Action team at the outset of the project. Examples of potential formats for the summary reports will be provided, however suppliers will be required to develop a template for the 2-4 page accessible summary, which they will share at the stage of submitting full drafts. It is expected that suppliers will do the copy-editing of all products supplied.

A key requirement of the rapid evidence assessments and summary paper is that they are accessible and relevant for policy makers. The final report should be written for a non-research policy audience, in plain English and clearly highlighting the main findings. It is anticipated that the main content of the review (i.e. all parts excluding the bibliography) will be no longer than 30 pages in length. Additional publications, for example in academic journals, will be supported but should comply with DFID’s Open Access Policy.
EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS REQUIRED

The Team Lead should have demonstrable experience in the field of serious and organised crime within in low- and middle-income or high income countries, however if expertise is predominantly from HICs other team members must have expertise in international development programming in LMICS. The team leader should also have demonstrable expertise in research and evidence synthesis, quantitative and qualitative methods and writing for policy audiences. They will have overall responsibility for quality assuring the research approach and deliverables and ensuring the work undertaken aligns with agreed approaches and is of sufficiently high quality.

The team should be multi-disciplinary and bring in experience and expertise from different disciplines that intersect with serious and organised crime, such as criminology, anti-corruption, and security. All team members responsible for preparing the reviews should have synthesis experience whether with REA(s), systematic reviews, or other robust synthesis products. The team should also include expertise in tackling SOC in high-income countries (HICs), as well as expertise to contextualise these finding into LMIC settings, particularly DFID priority countries.

SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL

Proposals should clearly set out the suppliers suggested approach to addressing the research question at the outset of the document, the team structure and delivering the required outputs. The final research questions, scope, and approach to project delivery (including quality assurance) will be agreed between DFID and the selected supplier at the end of the scoping stage.

The proposal should describe how the team plans to undertake each of the following stages of the rapid evidence assessment method, given the constraints of time and budget. The proposal should be no longer than 20 pages excluding CVs.

1. Defining research questions and conceptual framework;
2. Searching for studies;
3. Screening studies;
4. Assessing quality and relevance of studies including thresholds for allocation to different quality categories;
5. Approach to synthesis, including proposed strategy for handling a severely restricted evidence base;
6. Presentation of findings;
7. Quality assurance of analysis and clarity of reporting including the named individual(s) accountable for QA of written outputs;
8. Strategy for collaboration between REAs;
9. Contribution to ToC development.

Proposals should include the CVs for all project staff and clarify roles and responsibilities of each member of the project team(s) (including days required for each and the associated day rates). Proposals should also identify which member of the project team is the subject expert for serious and organised crime in both LMIC and HIC contexts.

BUDGET

The budget available is up to a maximum of £60,000.
**TIMEFRAME**

The expected timeframe for the entire process is a maximum of 6 months (from contract award). There are six milestones within the contract, and dates for delivery of each will be agreed as part of the scoping phase. Suggested delivery milestones and associated payments are set out below however these will be finalised during contract negotiations.

We are open to sequencing the reviews (i.e. delaying the start of this REA by a few weeks in order to allow for interim findings from the related REA to be considered).

1) **Approval of scoping report:** This should be achieved within four weeks of the contract start date and will release 15% of the total payment.

2) **Approval of first draft of the rapid evidence assessment.** This should be a complete first draft of the full rapid evidence assessment and summary paper. It should be achieved within three months of the contract start date and will release 25% of the total payment.

3) **Approval of briefing document and participation in theory of change workshop.** This should be completed within four months of the contract start date and will release 10% of the total payment. Date for workshop to be confirmed.

4) **Approval of final version of the rapid evidence review and summary paper.** These should be copy-edited, ready-to-publish version of the review and summary paper. It should be achieved within six months of the contract start date and will release 30% of the total payment.

5) **Approval of presentation slides.** This should be achieved within six months of the contract start date and will release 10% of payment.

6) **Delivery of presentation and final comments on ToC.** This should be achieved within six months of the contract start date and will release the final 10% of payment.

Although these milestones represent the major deliverables, suppliers should expect DFID to monitor and quality assure progress of the REAs throughout the review process.

**General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)**

Please refer to the details of the GDPR relationship status and personal data (where applicable) for this project as detailed in App A and the standard clause 29 in section 2 of the contract.

**EXAMPLES OF USEFUL RESOURCES**

The following examples of REAs may be useful to consult with regard to their methods, general scope and length: [https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rapid-evidence-assessments](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rapid-evidence-assessments). The reports include sections on how the REA was undertaken. The following link provides information on REAs and a tool kit for individuals intending to carry out an assessment of this type.
The following example may be useful in considering a potential format for the summary report:
Below is a sector-agnostic intervention framework, which provides the beginning of a theory of change.

**Impact**
SOC groups and networks weakened and community resilience increased, harm from SOC reduced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interventions</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market disruption activities</td>
<td>Financial gain is a key driver of criminal activity; access to finance is essential for SOC groups and networks to operate</td>
<td>Criminal networks cannot operate without access to effective and affordable sources of protection</td>
<td>Increasing consequences of engaging in criminal activity increases incentives to desist/not engage in criminal activity, incl. raising the cost of doing business</td>
<td>Cost of participating in illicit markets outweigh the benefits / licit markets offer a more attractive alternative</td>
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<td>Decrease demand</td>
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<td>SOC actors and networks no longer able to access sources of protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tackling illicit finance flows</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stronger and more accountable governance counteracts clientalism, patronage and corruption</td>
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<td>Regulatory reform</td>
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<td>Increased purity for SOC increases incentives to oppose or disengage in criminality</td>
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<td>Public-private</td>
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<td>Community resilience to SOC strengthened, legitimacy and support for SOC reduced</td>
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<td>Support to civil society and press</td>
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<td>Anti-corruption and governance reform</td>
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<td>Conflict resolution and peacebuilding</td>
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<td>Alternative Livelihoods</td>
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**Assumptions**

1. Financial gain is a key driver of criminal activity; access to finance is essential for SOC groups and networks to operate.
2. Criminal networks cannot operate without access to effective and affordable sources of protection.
3. SOC operates in areas of weak governance; support in some form from state actors is essential for them to operate.
4. Increasing consequences of engaging in criminal activity increases incentives to desist/not engage in criminal activity, incl. raising the cost of doing business.
5. SOC activity requires direct/tacit support from local communities. Main source of support and legitimacy is provision of livelihoods, security and justice.

**Outcomes**

1. Cost of participating in illicit markets outweigh the benefits / licit markets offer a more attractive alternative.
2. SOC actors and networks no longer able to access sources of protection.
3. Stronger and more accountable governance counteracts clientalism, patronage and corruption.
4. Increased purity for SOC increases incentives to oppose or disengage in criminality.
5. Community resilience to SOC strengthened, legitimacy and support for SOC reduced.