



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

IOB Evaluation

Less Pretension, More Realism

An evaluation of the Reconstruction Programme (2012 - 2015),
the Strategic Partnerships in Chronic Crises Programme
(2014 - 2016) and the Addressing Root Causes Tender Process

| Less Pretension, More Realism | IOB evaluation no. 428 | Less Pretension, More Realism | IOB evaluation no. 428 | Less Pretension, More Realism | IOB evaluation no. 428



Preface

For many years, promoting security and the rule of law in conflict-affected countries has been a priority of the Netherlands' foreign aid policy. Managing conflict, reconciliation and disaster preparedness in highly volatile and fragile environments is a daunting task. Sound preparations, a thorough understanding of conflict dynamics and their root causes, professional partnerships with local communities, NGOs and governments, and the ability to respond to changing circumstances are cornerstones of successful programming.

This evaluation focusses on the effectiveness of two important instruments that underpinned the Dutch policy priority of promoting security and the rule of law: the Reconstruction programme (2012-2015) and the Strategic Partnerships in Chronic Crises programme (2014-2016). The total portfolio of these programmes comprised 36 projects in 24 countries, with a total budget of EUR 154 million. The evaluation also covers the tender phase of the subsequent Addressing Root Causes (ARC) programme (2016-2021). The report presents a reconstruction of the key policies underlying these programmes. It also examines the tender procedures that were followed to select the implementing NGOs and analyses the results at activity and programme levels.

A large number of very dedicated professionals in The Hague, national and international NGOs and in the field have worked hard to promote peace, security and development in situations of fragility and conflict. In these complex environments, several tangible outputs have been achieved, such as conflict mitigation measures and disaster preparedness, business and vocational training, establishment of peace committees, savings groups and infrastructural works. However, the evaluation shows that in the longer term, the impact of these programmes has been limited. In terms of programme design, it appeared that tender procedures were not flawless and created barriers for effective implementation. The evaluation also concludes that there was too wide a gap between the overall policy objectives of promoting security and the rule of law and the grim realities on the ground facing the implementing partners; the latter had to cope with limited possibilities for outreach and limited staff capacity, resources and time. Altogether, these challenges resulted in fragmentation and created 'paper realities': unintentionally spurious reported-on-paper 'facts'. This was a far cry from the participatory approaches which were expected to foster synergy across activities on the ground.

The aim of the report is to unravel the structural hindrances that were integral to the design of these programmes and that precluded a longer-term impact. It contains lessons and recommendations that have a wider bearing on formulating programmes for addressing the root causes of conflict and migration by providing sustainable benefits to vulnerable people in situations of insecurity.

This evaluation was carried out in the formal context of Art. 4 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) budget on Peace and Security for Development, and provides input for the overall policy review of Article 4 planned for 2022. It draws on a large number of interviews with the stakeholders involved, a literature review, a desk study of all 36 projects and primary field research in South Sudan, Burundi and Ethiopia.

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Final responsibility for this report rests solely with IOB.

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List of abbreviations

ARC	Addressing Root Causes (programme)
COCA	Checklist for Organisational Capacity Assessment
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDE	Sustainable Economic Development Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
DGIS	Directorate-General for International Cooperation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSH	Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid Department (DSH) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
EFV	Eenheid Fragiliteit en Vredesopbouw (Fragility and Peacebuilding Unit), MFA
EUR	Euro
FG	Focus group
FPA	Framework Partnership Agreement
FTE	Full-time equivalent
HH	Household
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HQ	Headquarters
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOB	Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie (Policy and Operations Evaluation Department), MFA
JPC	Justice and Peace Commission
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MLS	Meerjarenlandenstrategie (Multiannual Country Strategy)
MTR	Mid-term Review
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RTC	Randomised Controlled Trial
SHG	Self-Help Group
SPCC	Strategic Partnerships Crises (programme)
SRoL	Security and Rule of Law
ToC	Theory of Change
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WRR	Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (Scientific Council for Government Policy)



Synthesis and recommendations

This section presents five key recommendations for improving comparable ongoing or future programmes that aim to address conflict and insecurity. Each recommendation is followed by a brief summary of the underlying findings from this evaluation.

In recent years, after decades of decline, the number of violent conflicts around the world has been increasing again. This is having a major global impact and is causing immense human suffering. Moreover, these violent conflicts have become increasingly linked to other global challenges such as climate change, natural disasters, irregular migration and transnational crime (United Nations & World Bank, 2018).



Against this background, the Dutch government's policy document '*Investing in Global Prospects*' of 2018 announced that in the years ahead, the Netherlands would intensify its efforts to help prevent conflict and insecurity. Poverty, conflict, terrorism, climate change, population growth and irregular migration are considered to be closely intertwined, and addressing the root causes of these issues is a key policy objective.

Dutch foreign aid policy was restructured in 2010, dictated by a severe budget cut and influenced by the WRR report '*Less pretension, more ambition*' (WRR, 2010). Important objectives were to bring more focus into Dutch policy and to promote measurable results (TK 2010-2011, 32 605, nr. 2). Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) became one of four priority sectors in Dutch foreign aid. This evaluation focusses on the effectiveness of two important programmes that were financed under SRoL - the Reconstruction programme (2012-2015) and the Strategic Partnerships in Chronic Crises programme (2014-2016) - and also the tender phase of the subsequent Addressing Root Causes (ARC) programme (2016-2021). Findings from this evaluation cannot be extrapolated to the entire SRoL policy.

This evaluation report takes stock of the results delivered by these programmes. It also aims to improve understanding of how development aid can more effectively contribute to preventing conflict and insecurity. The evaluation sought to answer the following main question: *Have the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes been effective and how can programmes that aim to address conflict and insecurity be improved?*

Overall, the evaluation finds that the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes attained positive outputs (such as trainings provided, peace committees established and savings groups established). However, these outputs did not always translate into positive and sustainable outcomes (for example, increased human security) and if they did, the outcomes were often limited to individual cases or were local in scope. In only a few instances did outcomes 'trickle up' beyond individual or group level and have an impact on village or national/subnational socio-economic development or conflict and insecurity. This is partly attributable to the highly complex and dynamic environments characterised by violence, political unrest and economic problems in which projects were implemented. However, context is not the only explanatory factor. This evaluation identified several other factors at the level of policy formulation and the tender process and also at the level of programme and project implementation. Rather than an integrated approach that simultaneously addresses the root causes for violence and instability, the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes produced a thinly spread portfolio of small and often unsustainable activities that in most cases were unable to effectively deal with the complex and volatile situations on the ground.

Despite the restructuring of foreign aid policy in 2010, fragmentation has not been reduced sufficiently, as a result of which resources were spread too thin. The budgets and timespans of interventions are limited, and do not tally with the ambitions of the SRoL policy and the complexity of the contexts in which the programmes are implemented. The outcome and impact objectives of the SRoL policy generally lie outside the sphere of influence of individual projects. The pressure to report on indicators at these levels in a context in which organisations compete for limited funds, incentivises the inflation of results. This contributes to 'paper realities' - unintentionally spurious reported-on-paper 'facts' - and prevents the use of M&E tools for learning. Over the course of the consecutive development of the Reconstruction, SPCC and ARC programmes, DSH built on lessons learned and improved tender design and programme management, yet critical problems remain. In the ARC programme, the gaps remain between the high-level programme and policy objectives and relatively small activities with limited spheres of influence. Development aid should remain ambitious, but first and foremost it should be less pretentious and more realistic.



1) Continue efforts to reduce fragmentation.

Within the Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS), several policy departments now aim to reduce aid fragmentation, responding to previous observations from IOB and others, including the 2017 OECD DAC Peer Review. The Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid (DSH) has indicated that it will primarily focus on reducing the amount of activities, aiming for a 30% reduction by 2022. In both programmes, however, there was fragmentation at multiple levels, and reducing it entails more than simply reducing the number of individual activities IOB recommends the following to reduce fragmentation:

- Limit the number of projects and geographic focus areas for a programme.
- Ensure that different programmes have a consistent geographic focus.
- Make it possible for project activities to be followed-up or continued in subsequent programmes, beyond the limited timespan of individual programmes.
- Facilitate coordination and synergies between different funded activities, by better linking centrally funded programmes to embassy programmes and multiannual plans, and by enhancing coordination with other donors and governments (local or national).

These recommendations draw on the following findings:

The achievement and sustainability of results have been limited by high levels of fragmentation, as resources were spread too thinly between numerous small and geographically dispersed activities.

The cuts to development cooperation budgets in 2011 led to various Dutch NGOs being faced with financial constraints. The ministry aimed to support as many NGOs as possible and organised its tender procedure for the Reconstruction programme accordingly. The result was a fragmented portfolio: the combined budget of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes (EUR 154 million) was divided among 36 projects in 24 different countries, and dispersed over various locations within countries. These programmes were implemented by 25 international and Dutch NGOs and numerous subcontracted partners. Fragmentation of the Reconstruction and SPCC programme had several consequences:

- Funds per activity were limited and the activities therefore remained drops in a bucket. The expenditure per beneficiary was often unrealistically low for creating substantial effects, especially at the outcome level. This has also limited the sustainability of programme results.
- As projects were spread out over vast areas, project staff faced limitations to adequately monitor and provide logistical support to them. As a result, activities were insufficiently coordinated, so opportunities for synergies were missed, with the risk of duplication of efforts. For instance, various projects created their own local structures, leading to a proliferation of local committees with little coordination or knowledge sharing among them. In some cases, the same beneficiaries were part of different committees set up by different NGOs. Moreover, beneficiaries of the Reconstruction programme and SPCC received similar peace trainings from different NGOs.

There was fragmentation at various levels: activities were rarely aligned to embassy programmes or to interventions of other donors or governments (local and national). Fragmentation within the programmes was largely the result of the ministry's policy choices and the requirements stipulated in the invitations to tender. Examples of contributory factors are the aspiration to finance as many organisations as possible, the decision to focus on a large number of countries, and the obligation for organisations to address multiple policy objectives in multiple countries within one project. With SRoL policy priorities changing over the years, organisations were encouraged to change and develop new projects, but this was at the cost of continuity and sustainability of activities that had been funded earlier.

The ARC programme is less fragmented than the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes: it focusses on fewer countries and geographic areas within countries. However, as the resources at its disposal remain limited, the results that can be expected are restricted. Reduction of fragmentation is also being promoted by encouraging the formation of consortia. Yet the coordination and alignment of activities between consortia members is hampered by the competition between individual organisations for funding opportunities. As a result, consortia are not always able to implement projects in the coherent and comprehensive approach they have proposed.



2) Formulate clear and realistic goals.

A gap exists between high-level policy objectives and the limited sphere of influence of the implementing partners. Competition for limited funds, coupled with the need to report outcomes and impacts annually using standardised indicators, incentivises the inflation of reported results and encourages ‘paper realities’. IOB therefore recommends formulating more explicit and realistic policy objectives, taking full account of the spheres of influence of the implementing organisations and the fragile context in which they operate. In addition, there should be more continuity in policy and geographic priorities, and the lifespan of programmes should be increased in order to achieve a more sustainable impact. Concretely, IOB proposes the following:

- Translate general (global) policy objectives into context-specific objectives (i.e. goals specific to the particular country or geographic location). Ensure that the goals of individual programmes are in line with the multiannual country strategies (MLSs). The DSH should make it easier for implementing organisations to design their projects in consultation with the embassy.
- Develop a project-specific Theory of Change (ToC) for security and rule of law interventions that is cascaded under the general ToC for the SRoL policy and embedded in the local or country context. This country-specific ToC should explicate assumptions about the context and local contextual factors that support or hinder progress towards achieving the higher-level policy objectives.
- Be aware of the incentive to over-report results (e.g. number of beneficiaries) given the competition for limited funds in tender procedures.
- Formulate the goals for implementing partners within their spheres of influence, i.e. at output and intermediate outcome levels. Partners should not be asked to monitor at outcome and impact levels but to reflect on the assumptions about why their activities and outputs contribute to the desired outcome and impact. However, this does not dispense with the need for ex post evaluation of projects’ outcome and impact results.
- Promote the involvement of local partners in the development of project proposals from the outset, including in the formulation of goals and indicators.

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These recommendations draw on the following findings:

IOB sees a large gap between the ministry’s overall policy ambitions and the project activities that have been implemented at the local level. There are three main reasons for the gap:

- The overall SRoL policy was not developed and implemented in successive phases: policy formulation and its actual implementation in the field were parallel processes that did not necessarily influence each other. Although the policy was adjusted several times, policy targets remained broad and lacked a clear definition and delineation. Whereas this allowed NGOs to design projects in line with their own priorities and specialisations, most organisations failed to properly operationalise the connection between higher policy objectives at outcome and impact level and local level project outputs.
- Furthermore, the competition in the tenders forced NGOs to focus more on how much their proposals reflected DSH’s policy demands than on the local demands and needs of beneficiaries. This implied less emphasis was placed on addressing local needs and understanding socio-cultural and political conflict dynamics. An improvement compared to the Reconstruction programme was that the SPCC policy framework included specific policy priorities for each region. For ARC, specific objectives were developed for each country in consultation with the embassies.
- The practice of subcontracting and the subsequent development of a chain of implementing partners further exacerbated the disconnect between projects on paper and project realities on the ground. This disconnect also became apparent in the project reports. In several cases, IOB found disparities between reported results and the results on the ground. IOB found the reporting of results ranged from acceptable forms of favourable presentations of results, through undesirable framing of results, to, in some cases, unacceptable fabricated results.



The types of activities implemented cannot be expected to catalyse significant change at the outcome level, particularly given the limited duration of the programmes. The activities most commonly implemented in the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes include: supporting savings groups; providing business and vocational training; setting up peace committees; promoting peace dialogues; providing peace trainings; and stimulating local participation in community development. Available evidence from the literature suggests that the results that can be expected from these types of activities are limited, particularly in fragile contexts. Box 7 in the introductory paragraph of chapter 4 formulates several recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of these activities. The activities implemented can certainly bring about positive change, but this is likely to be small. For example, savings groups can have positive results for individual beneficiaries but are unlikely to have a community-wide effect on poverty reduction and cannot trigger substantial economic progress. Nonetheless, such contribution claims are made in project documents and result frameworks. In addition, a time frame of three to four years was not long enough to attain the behavioural change and intended effects that the ministry expected in terms of human security, peace dividend and legitimate governance. Achieving such outcomes requires a focused and long-term commitment from the NGOs and the ministry. Unfortunately, very few projects were a continuation of previous projects and activities initiated under earlier funding regimes. In general, the findings from the case studies of this evaluation are consistent with the evidence available in the literature. This suggests that the results of the programme activities considered in this evaluation are in line with the results that can be realistically expected in terms of outputs achieved. However, the expected contribution of these results to policy objectives is not aligned with the available resources, duration and sphere of influence of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes.

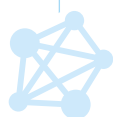


3) Strengthen M&E for learning purposes.

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M&E for accountability purposes mostly focusses on reporting on committed results, whereas M&E for learning purposes is about critically reflecting on the relevance and effectiveness of goals and activities. Most of the M&E activities were geared towards accountability and were underused for learning purposes. To strengthen M&E for learning, it is important to formulate clear and realistic goals at the policy, programme and project levels and to develop country-specific ToCs. M&E can also be strengthened by being more explicit about how activities contribute to outputs and outcomes in the existing ToC of the SRoL policy. Additionally, IOB recommends the following:

- Investigate modalities for iterative programming and adaptive planning, and allow for activities and goals to be adjusted in volatile contexts. Implementing organisations should also use the available flexibility to adjust project activities and objectives when changes in the context require this.
- Be cautious about what can realistically be monitored at the outcome and impact levels, especially in the short term. In addition, ‘paper realities’ resulting from standardised indicators at outcome and impact level should be avoided.
- Undertake annual or biannual reflections on the ToCs and assumptions underlying the SRoL policy, and stimulate implementing partners to similarly reflect on the ToCs of funded projects. A ToC should be viewed as a living document in which the assumptions underlying the different project phases and intervention choices require constant critical reflection.
- Make resources and staff available to promote learning by implementing organisations, learning among implementing organisations and learning within DSH. The MFA should play a leadership role in the exchange of lessons learned and facilitate learning forums.
- Promote and institutionalise the roles of embassies, because they are well positioned to facilitate context-specific learning.
- Improve individual project evaluations and stimulate implementing partners to strengthen their research methodologies and sampling strategies. It is important to take evaluations and their requirements into account already in the phase of project design. For example, project objectives must be validly operationalised in indicators and baseline information about these indicators should be collected.



These recommendations draw on the following findings:

The use of standardised indicators for accountability purposes is certainly justifiable, but the current emphasis on this comes at the expense of also using M&E tools for learning purposes. Updating the ToC and corresponding results framework for SRoL has helped to clarify DSH's objectives and to support the development of programmes, but a gap remains between the ambitions at outcome and impact levels on the one hand, and programme output results in local contexts. This evaluation finds that most M&E activities are geared towards accountability. Several factors contribute to this:

- Parliament expects to see results. The overarching result frameworks that have been developed to meet this demand require reporting on indicators that are beyond the spheres of influence of implementing partners. This contributes to a disconnect between project results on paper and project realities on the ground.
- The activities to be implemented and results targeted are decided three or four years in advance, while projects are implemented in fragile contexts characterised by volatility and change. The focus on achieving pre-set targets hinders timely adjustment of project activities to changing conditions. Although DSH is generally flexible towards adjustments, not all NGOs have made use of this and the evaluation found that not all local implementing partners were aware of or use this flexibility.
- The average project duration of three to four years is generally insufficient to achieve and measure the desired outcomes and impact. It is easy to lapse into 'paper realities', especially when reporting on standardised indicators at outcome and impact level. This is exacerbated by the fact that the causal pathway in the result chain is not always substantiated and sometimes assumptions remain untested or unspecified.

The risk attached to formulating overarching result frameworks should therefore be acknowledged, as these seem to be primarily useful for policy accountability and are hardly suitable for learning from actual experience on the ground. When NGOs and implementing staff fear funding will be withdrawn if the desired results are not achieved, there is an incentive to report results positively. Moreover, although embassies are well positioned to facilitate context-specific learning, they are often insufficiently involved in programme implementation.

The quality of individual project evaluations was often disappointing. Although evaluations were not mandatory for the Reconstruction programme, most NGOs nonetheless conducted external evaluations. This illustrates a willingness to learn and improve. Yet there remains ample room for improving the quality of such evaluations. Most of the results presented in the evaluations are unreliable beyond the output level, and many reports present results more positively than warranted and tend to overestimate the sustainability of these results. Often, organisations did not track the results of their activities beyond the period of implementation and, therefore, little was known about longer-term outcome results. Most evaluations lacked valid baseline information, indicators were poorly operationalised, and the respondents selected and methodologies adopted greatly increased the likelihood of biased findings.



4) Ensure programme and project design is evidence-based.

Strengthening M&E for learning purposes also requires the use of available evidence. To improve the impact of policies and interventions, policy design by the ministry and project design by implementing organisations should both be underpinned by empirical academic and evaluative evidence. Concretely, IOB recommends the following:

- Integrate lessons learned at project level in the development of new programmes and policies.
- Hold reflection sessions with implementing partners during the development phase of new policy and programmes, during which policy objectives, underlying assumptions, expected pathways to attain these objectives and expected activities are critically assessed jointly. This can also prevent setting goals that are outside the spheres of influence of implementing partners.
- Require project proposals to provide evidence supporting the proposed activities. Ensure that the requirement to use available evidence does not preclude innovative programming and the development of new activities. Assumptions underlying activities should be made explicit and backed by evidence where possible. Where no evidence is available, a clear strategy should be articulated for testing and reflecting on assumptions.
- Reserve sufficient time and resources for developing quality project proposals that are grounded in empirical academic and evaluative evidence and that respond to local needs and are adjusted to the context.
- Identifying and targeting vulnerable groups should receive much more attention, as in practice it often proves difficult to reach such groups even when this is the specific aim of a programme. See box 7 in chapter 4 for a list of activity-specific recommendations based on this evaluation.
- Make use of support from knowledge partners such as the Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law when generating and collecting evidence bases for activities and programming. The role of such partners should be more strategically aligned with the development and implementation of SRoL programmes.

These recommendations draw on the following findings:

Knowledge on the effectiveness of activities in fragile contexts and on the requirements for achieving effectiveness is insufficiently used and incorporated into project designs. Although a ToC increasingly forms the basis for M&E, many of the project proposals build on implicit and untested assumptions. As DSH did not require NGOs to back up their assumptions with evidence, the evidence base of the implemented activities was rather thin. In addition, the pressure to report results within short time frames jeopardises critical assessment of the impact of activities and the use of M&E for learning purposes. The substandard evaluations often did not contribute to knowledge about the effectiveness of activities beyond the output level. Yet much evidence is available on the effectiveness of many activities implemented by NGOs and on the conditions for achieving effectiveness (see chapter 4). For instance, available evidence suggests that combining female savings groups with other interventions to improve gender norms has the largest effects on female empowerment.



5) Invest in open relationships with implementing partners and consider alternatives to tender procedures.

The recommendations listed above require a shift in the MFA's relationship with its implementing partners. To learn together instead of being merely accountable requires a different type of partnership. Furthermore, the tender procedures used to allocate funds for projects have several disadvantages. IOB therefore suggests the following:

- Invest in more transparent and deeper relationships with implementing partner organisations that allow for critical reflection on goals and activities. Such reflections benefit both the MFA and the NGO partners, and should not be restricted to the initial start-up phase of projects.
- Stimulate northern NGOs to invest in more transparent relations with their implementing partners. The MFA should ensure that there are enough opportunities for strategic discussions and learning, other than the required reporting cycles. Implementing organisations should be stimulated to invest in critically reflecting on activities and in learning with their implementing staff and partners.
- Embassies can play a key role here, and IOB therefore recommends institutionalising the active involvement of embassies during the implementation of centrally funded projects. Centrally funded programmes could greatly benefit from improved coordination and cooperation with embassies and decentralised funds.
- Reserve more capacity for project management, monitoring, learning and relation management within the MFA, both at the central level and in embassies. Strategic partnerships with implementing organisations cannot be established unless more staff time is deployed to effectively establish and maintain partnerships and critically reflect on the reported results.
- Investigate alternatives to tender procedures. Explore funding schemes that enable iterative programming and adaptive planning. For projects to be implemented by NGOs in a specific country or context, consider devolving budgets to embassies.

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These recommendations draw on the following findings:

The way in which projects are funded and implemented induces an upward accountability that hinders learning and timely adjustment to changing conditions. Tendering for the Reconstruction, SPCC and ARC programmes encouraged the professionalisation of proposal writing (specialised staff and consultants). On the positive side, this results in higher quality proposals, which - in theory - leads to better programmes. The downside is that proposals are increasingly responding to general, overarching policy and tender requirements, at the cost of alignment to local needs and context. The SPCC programme was particularly intended to promote strategic discussions between the NGOs and the MFA and to allow the implementing partners a certain degree of operational freedom, as is the ongoing ARC programme. In reality, however, most projects were still implemented through a contracting chain, in which DSH contracts international or Dutch NGOs that subcontract various national and local partners. With subcontractors being asked to implement activities and report on standardised indicators, this chain stimulates upward accountability. It thereby further limits downward accountability and responsiveness to local needs. During the inception phase of ARC, the engagement and cooperation between implementing organisations, MFA departments and embassies improved much compared to the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes. After the inception phase, however, DSH downscaled central management and monitoring without ensuring fully decentralised ownership and engagement of embassies, with the result that there have been hardly any strategic discussions and the focus lies on reporting standardised indicators. Overall, DSH does not allocate sufficient manpower commensurate with its ambitions to establish strategic partnerships with implementing organisations.



Reading guide

This report is structured as follows. This synthesis presented the main findings and general conclusions of the evaluation, and provided recommendations. Chapter 1 introduces the evaluation's background and the methodology that guided this evaluation. Chapter 2 presents an overview of the policies underlying the Reconstruction, SPCC and ARC programmes. Chapter 3 assesses the tender procedures of the three programmes and analyses how the policies and tender processes affected the projects that were financed. Chapter 4 analyses the effectiveness of some of the most common activities in the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes. Chapter 5 presents the most important findings at the programme level for the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes. Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 are prefaced by summaries of the main findings.



1. Introduction

1.1 Background and aim

Against the background of a resurgence in violent conflicts around the world after years of decline (United Nations & World Bank, 2018), addressing the root causes of poverty, conflict, terrorism, climate change, population growth and irregular migration - issues that are closely intertwined - is key to Dutch development cooperation policy, as stated in the government's policy document '*Investing in Global Prospects*' 2018 (TK 2018-2019, 34 952, nr. 62). This evaluation reviews three programmes pursuing this objective, all coordinated by the Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid Department (DSH) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), aiming to contribute to the objectives of the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) policy priority and sharing the overall aim of promoting stability and self-reliance in fragile contexts. The three programmes are the Reconstruction programme (2012-2015), the Strategic Partnerships in Chronic Crises (SPCC) programme (2014-2016) and the Addressing Root Causes (ARC) programme (which began in 2016 and is due to end in 2021).



The review examines the implementation process and the effects of the two programmes that have ended (Reconstruction and SPCC) and assesses the tender process of the ongoing ARC programme.

For all three programmes, calls for proposals were open to non-governmental organisations (NGOs). NGOs whose proposals were accepted were responsible for project management and implementation. This evaluation assesses the different tender procedures, the results achieved by the three programmes in the field and how they relate to the objectives of the ministry's SRoL policy priority.¹ The analysis focusses on policy, tender procedures, programme and activities. As a result of the geographic case selection (see section 1.3), individual projects are not units of analysis in this report. The evaluation aims to provide information that all stakeholders can learn from and gives recommendations for programme development and future funding mechanisms.

1.2 Delineation

This evaluation sought to answer the following main question:

Have the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes been effective and how can programmes that aim to address conflict and insecurity in fragile contexts be improved?

To answer this question, this study focuses on the Reconstruction programme (2012-2015) and the SPCC programme (2014-2016). It should be noted, however, that project implementation often exceeded the period initially planned: the last projects were officially completed in 2018. The evaluation also assesses the tender procedure of the ARC programme, from publication of the tender in January 2016 until the start of projects in April 2017.

The three programmes are part of the ministry's policy priority SRoL. The combined budget for the Reconstruction (2012-2015) and SPCC (2014-2016) programmes was about EUR 154 million and the budget for the ARC programme (2016-2021) is roughly EUR 126 million. The entire SRoL policy encompasses more than these three programmes; by comparison, the total SRoL budget for 2019 is about EUR 235 million. Note that in 2019, IOB will start an evaluation that simultaneously focusses on various instruments of the ministry's policy priority SRoL.

1.3 Methodology

To answer the main research question, this evaluation focusses on two dimensions:

- the ways in which the process of developing policies and of allocating funds to attain these policy objectives through tender procedures affected the projects and activities implemented and their effectiveness (1.3.1); and
- the extent to which the implemented project activities resulted in tangible outputs, outcomes and sustained impact relevant to the policy objectives on SRoL (1.3.2).

¹ Implementation of the Reconstruction programme started before the SRoL policy had been finalised. See chapter 2.



Box 1 *Evaluation terminology*

Impact	Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.
Outcome	The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs.
Output	The products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention; may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.
Activity	Actions taken or work performed through which inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources are mobilised to produce specific outputs.
Input	The financial, human, and material resources used for the development intervention;
Result	The output, outcome or impact (intended or unintended, positive and/or negative) of a development intervention.

Source: DAC (2002).

1.3.1 *Evaluation of the process*

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This evaluation assesses the process of policy development (chapter 2) and the allocation of funds through tender procedures for the Reconstruction, SPCC and ARC programmes (chapter 3). It also analyses how the lessons learned during the implementation of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes were adopted in the ARC tender. The study draws on a desk review of public policy documents and documentation and communication made available to IOB. Another important source of information used to (re)construct the policy and tender process was interviews with policy officers of the MFA, embassy staff, staff of implementing NGOs and local partners. These interviews contributed to a better understanding of the policy decisions, the motivations for these decisions, the consequences of these decisions and the interplay between the different actors.² All conclusions and findings presented in this evaluation result from IOB's analysis and have been triangulated through desk review and interviews with the aforementioned stakeholders.

1.3.2 *Evaluation of results*

Chapter 4 describes the effectiveness of activities in the field and chapter 5 presents the conclusions about effectiveness at programme level. The first step for evaluating the results of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes was a desk review of the individual project reports. This review inventoried and analysed the activities of all 36 projects. Documents analysed included project proposals, baseline studies, progress reports, mid-term reviews (MTRs), final reports and, when available, project evaluations (whether internal or external).³ Across the board, however, the quality of these evaluations was insufficient, usually mainly because the contribution of the project to the actual or intended outcomes was not convincingly assessed and many of the studies were subject to selection bias (see also section 5.2).⁴ The findings presented in project evaluations were therefore of limited use for this evaluation. Aggregating the results of the external project evaluations would not have yielded valid conclusions for the two programmes.

³ Organisations financed by the Reconstruction programme were not required to have an external evaluation, although most of them commissioned one. In the SPCC programme, however, an external evaluation was mandatory for all participating NGOs. In total, 27 external evaluations are available for the 36 projects financed.

⁴ Selection bias: sample selection correlates with project effectiveness, thereby undermining the generalisability of the findings.



Additional primary and secondary research was clearly necessary to assess the effects of the activities and the two programmes, so IOB carried out fieldwork in three countries. The selection criteria for the countries were the number of projects per country, the expenditure per country and project distribution across both programmes. In total, the two programmes allocated roughly EUR 154 million to 36 projects in 24 countries.⁵ With EUR 41 million and EUR 19 million in 16 and 12 projects, respectively, South Sudan and Burundi were by far the largest recipients of both programmes and so were selected for additional field research. Ethiopia was also selected, mainly because most SPCC projects had been implemented in this country. Together, the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes allocated around EUR 68 million to projects in these countries: roughly 44% of these programmes' total expenditure. Within these three countries, the case selection was further refined to the regions where most projects were implemented. This yielded the following regions:

- Burundi: Bujumbura Rural and Cibitoke provinces;
- Ethiopia: Oromia and Somali regions;
- South Sudan: Central Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal states.⁶

This case study selection resulted in a significant coverage of the two programmes; fieldwork for the six case studies included activities from 18 of the total 36 projects. Because most projects were implemented simultaneously in multiple countries, the evaluation did not evaluate the projects as a whole. Instead, all targeted activities implemented within the selected geographic areas were assessed, thereby allowing the evaluation to transcend individual projects and to focus on the programmes. This geographic focus implied that local context became a key element of the evaluation. It offered an opportunity to examine the interaction between activities implemented within the same geographic areas and to explore possible synergies between them. At the same time, this approach facilitated an analysis of the local conditions that enhance or undermine the effectiveness of specific activities.

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To assess the contribution of the project activities to outcomes, the case studies drew primarily on theory-based evaluation methodologies⁷, and on contribution analysis in particular. Contribution analysis is roughly comprised of the following six methodological steps:

1. Set out the cause-effect issue to be addressed;
2. develop the postulated ToC and the risks to it, including rival explanations;
3. gather the existing evidence on the ToC;
4. assemble and assess the contribution claim, and the challenges to it;
5. seek out additional evidence; and
6. revise and strengthen the contribution story (Mayne, 2011).

To assess the effectiveness of project activities in the six case study regions, IOB inventoried all activities in the selected regions and, based on the desk review (step 1) documented intended outputs and outcomes. Although project proposals, progress reports and evaluations often did present result chains for individual activities, these were often not rooted in the local context and assumptions were rarely stated explicitly. IOB therefore formulated key underlying assumptions that were prerequisites for the interventions to contribute to envisaged output and outcome results. The IOB research team then assessed the plausibility of the causal pathways and assumptions it had formulated. This enabled it to identify gaps in the evidence on outputs and outcomes for it to use to guide the fieldwork (step 2). At this stage, it became evident that many of the assumptions underlying the project designs had not been tested.⁸

⁵ While the Palestinian Territories and Somaliland are not formally recognized as countries, they are separate entities in which projects were implemented and therefore included.

⁶ This evaluation uses the names for the former 10 states of South Sudan that were current when the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes started.

⁷ Theory-based evaluation makes it possible to assess whether and how a programme works, and provides a framework for assessing complex programs in volatile contexts that are unsuitable for experimental or quasi-experimental designs (Bamberger et al., 2016).

⁸ This is not an exceptional state of affairs, as Autesserre (2017) finds that many peacebuilding and reconstruction projects continue to rely on untested assumptions rather than on empirically sound evidence.



The disappointing quality of the project evaluations made it imprudent to use them to gather evidence for the causal pathways IOB had identified. The IOB team therefore reviewed the scholarly and grey literature to analyse the available evidence for the underlying assumptions and effectiveness of the most common activities.⁹ Only evidence from rigorous impact evaluations, systematic reviews and meta-regressions was used for this. The review also included quasi-experimental studies that dealt credibly with the counterfactual and effectively addressed selection bias (step 3).

For each of the six case studies, IOB hired national consultants to collect data in the field. IOB provided training for the national consultants and accompanied them in the field for the first two weeks. During these two weeks, the IOB research team and the national consultants collaboratively finetuned the analysis of the causal pathways and evidence gaps for the selected activities. This exercise yielded the research questions that guided the fieldwork. Taking external factors and the local context into account was crucial and the specific knowledge, expertise and language skills of the national consultants played an important role in this process (step 4).

The consultants generally spent about 10 weeks collecting data in the field. Data collection focused on validating the formulated causal pathways, testing the assumptions and ascertaining whether the intended results (at output and outcome level) had been met. For each case study, the consultants collected data through interviews and focus group discussions with NGO staff, local implementing partners, direct beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries – mostly community members.¹⁰ In addition, they validated and inspected the physical outputs. To highlight local perspectives and priorities, the consultants also examined the political economy of the conflict, mainly through interviews and focus group discussions with community members and local officials. This enabled the evaluation to assess the targets and objectives of the activities in light of local perspectives and priorities. It also made it possible to assess the ways in which implementation was affected by and responded to changes pertaining to insecurity, conflict, natural disasters and political upheaval (step 5).

Combining and triangulating the evidence collected from the fieldwork with the (reconstructed) ToCs and the existing evidence base, the researchers adjusted and revised the logical frameworks to formulate conclusions about the activities' contribution to outcomes. This was a largely iterative process, during which additional contribution claims were formulated, retested and considered. Throughout the evaluation, the IOB research team and the national consultants liaised closely (step 6).¹¹

⁹ Savings groups, business and vocational training, creating peace committees and spaces for dialogue, peace training and civic education, stimulating community participation in community development and building public infrastructure.

¹⁰ Annex 5 outlines the interviews conducted with representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, representatives of national and local government and staff from international and national NGOs, as well as with staff from local implementing partners. In total, 184 individuals were interviewed. In addition, throughout the six case studies, the national consultants interviewed hundreds of beneficiaries (such as community members, peace committee members, savings group members, former trainers and trainees), non-beneficiaries (community members) and other donors, NGOs and local partners in the fieldwork. These are not listed in annex 5.

¹¹ Note that although the local contexts have been taken into account at the individual activity level, not all of the contextual factors are mentioned in chapter 4 when describing the effectiveness of activities, because various activities implemented in multiple countries are discussed concomitantly.



1.4 Limitations

This evaluation assesses the process of policy development and the tender procedures of the Reconstruction, SPCC and ARC programmes. It also assesses the effectiveness of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes. It does not evaluate the effectiveness of the ARC programme, which at the time of writing was still ongoing.

To assess the effectiveness of the separate activities implemented in the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes, assumptions had to be made at different levels. For a start, similar activities were implemented very differently, depending on the implementing organisation and/or the receiving country. Certain trainings, for example, lasted half a day, whereas others lasted several weeks and/or were supplemented with additional support. The evaluators did their best to take account of the differences between activities in their analysis. This report aggregates activities under common denominators to arrive at broad conclusions.

Another problem was the precise estimation of the effects (whether intended or unintended) of ‘soft’ interventions, such as peace training. To overcome this problem, the research team complemented its findings with rigorous impact evaluations of comparable activities. A third issue was that as the country and case selection was based on expenditure and number of projects, the findings from our sample were not entirely representative for the 24 countries and the 36 projects. This too was partially addressed by complementing our analysis with findings from rigorous impact evaluations and systematic reviews. The findings from the field are largely consistent with the available empirical evidence. The substantial coverage of the six case studies (18 of the total of 36 projects were wholly or partially included) added to the validity of findings at the programme level.

The conflict or post-conflict situation in the three countries affected the fieldwork. At times, the freedom of movement of the national consultants was limited. In Burundi, fieldwork was suspended for three weeks during the constitutional referendum of 17 May 2018. In Ethiopia, ethnic and political tensions erupted in violence prior to the evaluation and throughout the fieldwork period a state of emergency prevailed, with internet and electricity outages. In addition to political escalation, natural catastrophes hampered the mobility of the researchers, especially in Eastern Ethiopia, where the Somali region was affected by heavy floods. In South Sudan, the research coincided with a period of high tension due to the conflict between President Salva Kiir and his former military chief of staff Paul Malong; for a while, full access to the research areas was impossible but ultimately the national consultants were able to visit all targeted activities and the large majority of all relevant sites.



2. Policy overview

2.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the development of the SRoL policy and the policies of the Reconstruction, SPCC and ARC programmes. Paragraphs 2.2 to 2.5 chronologically summarise the development of the programmes. Figure 1 presents a timeline of the policy development and programme implementation.

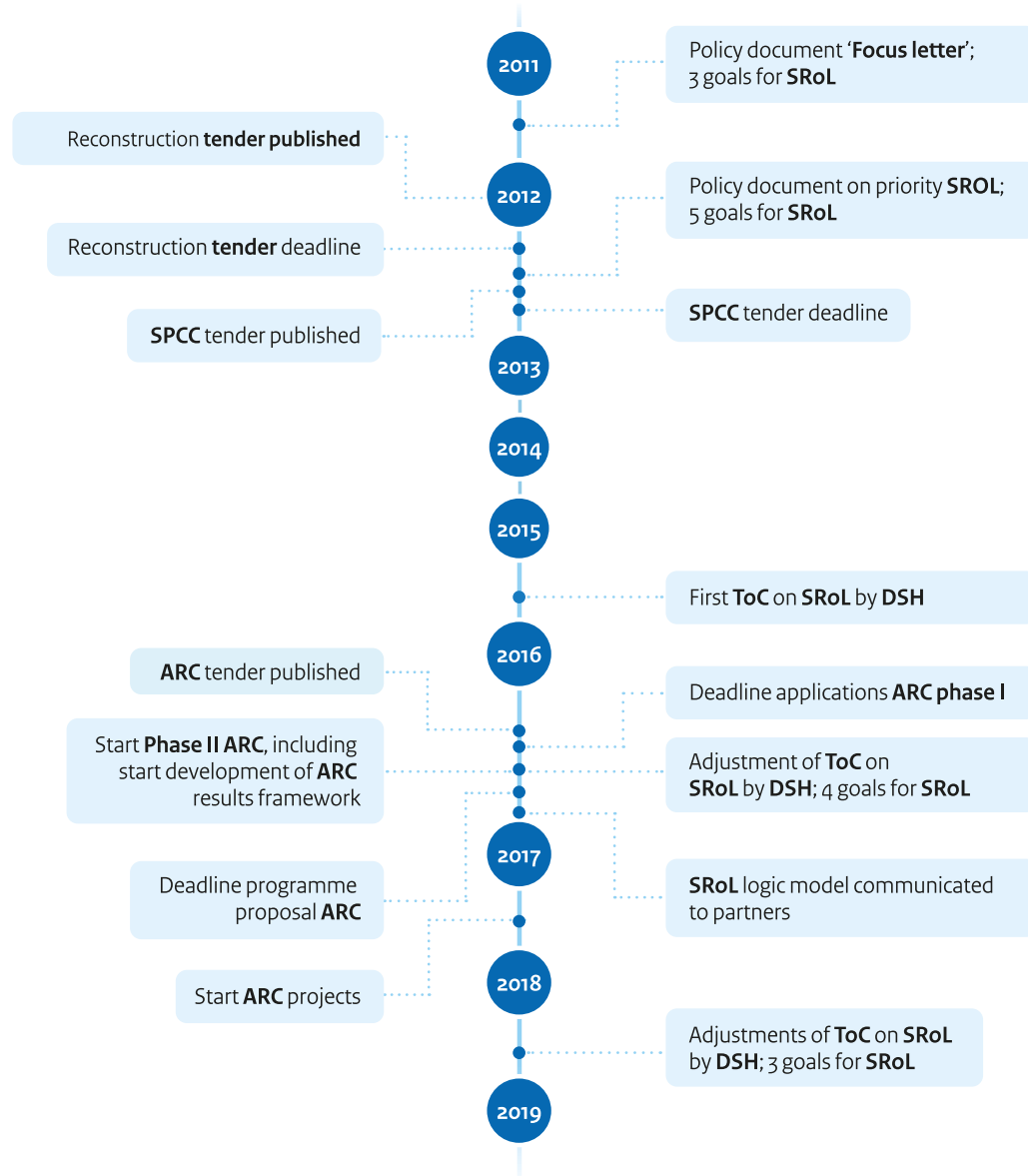
The following are the main findings in this chapter:

- Policy development at the MFA and project implementation in the field did not proceed sequentially but instead were parallel processes; e.g. implementation of the Reconstruction programme started before the SRoL policy had been finalised.
- The SPCC and ARC programmes are following a strategic partnership approach and aim to promote strategic discussions between the NGOs and the MFA and a certain level of operational freedom for the implementing partners.



- The SRoL policy has undergone multiple adjustments since 2011. The targets of SRoL were redefined and clustered during the implementation of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes, and again after the start of ARC projects.
- During the lifespan of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes, the SRoL policy targets remained broad and lacked a clear definition and delineation. This allowed NGOs to use their own definitions and to propose projects that fitted in with their own priorities and specialisations rather than targeted specific SRoL policy objectives.
- The divergence in projects made it difficult to connect the results reported by NGOs to the overarching SRoL policy objectives of the ministry.
- The ToC for the SRoL was developed in 2015 and adjusted in 2018, and the corresponding results framework helped to clarify the ministry's objectives. Nevertheless, a gap remained between the ambitions at outcome and impact levels and project output results on the ground. In addition, the ToC for the entire SRoL policy priority was not grounded in the contexts in which the policy was being applied.

Figure 1 *Timeline of policy development and implementation*





2.2 Reconstruction programme

The Reconstruction programme was developed not only in response to the MFA's SRoL policy but was also intended to contribute to that policy. It was assumed that the NGOs involved in the programme would translate global SRoL policy objectives and concepts into concrete objectives and context-specific operational programmes. However, as the key policy objectives and concepts had not been clearly defined and/or delineated, the implementing NGOs followed their own interpretations, with the result that heterogeneous interpretations and operationalisations of the policy objectives arose within the Reconstruction programme: for example, the ministry's definition of human security as assuring physical security and preventing violence was appreciably narrower than the interpretations already adopted by the participating NGOs.

Box 2 *Description of key policy concepts*

Human security is commonly understood as a concept that places individuals and communities as the referent object of security. Numerous interpretations of human security exist. In the 1990s, the concept of 'human security' was developed to move from the exclusive focus on the military security of the state to a more people-centred conceptualisation of security. The first major manifestation of the human security concept was the 1994 Human Development Report (UNDP, 1994). The report defined the concept to include economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, political security, personal security and community security. Others proposed a more narrow conceptualisation, limiting the definition of human security to violent threats to the individual (Human Security Centre, 2005: 19).

Peace dividend is commonly understood as the benefits gained from reduced military spending and income gains after the conflict ends. It has been described as the immediate results on the ground in terms of economic recovery, but has also been understood to include improved security, statebuilding and wider development (Specker et al., 2010; TK 2008-2009, 31 787, nr. 1). It has furthermore been argued that aid can increase peace dividend (Hoeffler, 2012). The SRoL policy document stated that poverty and unemployment were breeding grounds for conflict and that enhancing the economic position of women and creating employment for young men would contribute to preventing conflict (TK 2011-2012, 32 605, nr. 94). In practice, peace dividend related activities implemented through the Reconstruction programme often included small income-generating activities or activities related to broader social and economic development.

2.3 SPCC programme

The MFA published the policy framework for the SPCC programme in October 2013 (StCrt. 2013, nr. 27543). Underlining the importance of the SRoL policy, the SPCC was introduced as a new instrument that sought to achieve a rapid transition from humanitarian aid to reconstruction in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa. The policy framework focussed on the three target areas set out in the SRoL policy and requested organisations to focus on one region. An improvement compared to the Reconstruction programme was that the SPCC policy framework included specific policy priorities for each region (see box 3).



Box 3 SPCC policy priorities as given in the SPCC policy framework

Goals for the Great Lakes Region:

1. **Security and Rule of Law:** improved human security for the inhabitants of eastern DRC (and the region), as this would increase stability in the region;
2. **food security:** improved access to land, increased agricultural production and better access to healthy food, as this would accelerate development in the Great Lakes Region;
3. **population flows and growth:** improved reintegration of former refugees and displaced persons in their places of origin, by increasing their self-reliance and taking account of population growth.

Goals for the Horn of Africa:

1. **Security and rule of law:** removing the causes of chronic instability in the Horn of Africa that contribute to underdevelopment, humanitarian emergencies, piracy, radicalisation and migration flows in this region;
2. **food security:** improving access to land, increasing agricultural production and improving access to healthy food, as this would increase development in the Horn of Africa;
3. **migration and population growth:** contributing to the stability of the region through improved reintegration, reconciliation and resilience of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees in their new and former places of residence.

The SPCC reflected the ministry's new approach to working with civil society organisations as formulated in its policy letter '*Cooperation with the civil society in a new context*'. Strategic Partnerships were introduced that were based on mutually agreed objectives and a certain level of operational freedom for implementing partners (TK 2013-2014, 33 625, nr. 39). In line with this new approach and driven by the assumption that addressing conflict requires a comprehensive approach that combines diplomacy and development, the SPCC programme aimed to promote strategic discussions and cooperation between the implementing NGOs and the MFA.

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2.4 SRoL Theory of Change and results framework

When the projects of the Reconstruction programme started, key SRoL policy objectives, targets and concepts were not clearly defined and/or delineated and there was no overarching results framework. As a result, NGOs operationalised these policy objectives in their proposals around their own niche specialisations. Consequently, result indicators, activities and target groups were very heterogeneous. Only after the projects had started did the ministry try to produce an overarching results framework with common indicators. However, this attempt was largely unsuccessful, because it was difficult to align the various indicators of the different projects within the same framework.

In May 2012, the MFA issued a SRoL policy letter, arguing that security and rule of law were essential for sustainable development, self-reliance and for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (TK 2011-2012, 32 605, nr. 94). The MFA expanded the original three target areas to five but in the ToC issued in 2015 reduced them to four (DSH, 2017)¹²:

1. **Human security:** reducing the levels of violence and fear experienced by people of all ages, ethnicities and social group;
2. **rule of Law:** strengthening rule of law so that citizens are better able to access their rights through effective, independent, fair and accountable institutions;
3. **peace processes and political governance:** supporting the peaceful settlement of conflicts and enhancing governance structures to strengthen the contract between citizens and the state;
4. **social and economic reconstruction:** reducing conflict-related grievances by supporting income generation, water and education.

¹² In 2018, DSH transferred its responsibility for the target area 'social and economic reconstruction' to the Sustainable Economic Development Department (DDE), reducing the number of target areas of SRoL to three: Human Security, Rule of Law and Political Governance. However, DSH continued to monitor the progress on *social and economic reconstruction* for ARC.



Ideally, a ToC is formulated by first clarifying the problems and the objectives, and describing the context and mechanisms that should bring about the desired change (IOB & BIS, 2015). Based on this description of the context and mechanisms, it is then possible to determine strategies and interventions. However, the development of the ToC for the SRoL policy followed a different trajectory. The ToC was developed when the objectives had been broadly defined but while activities were already being implemented. The policy objectives were refined and necessary conditions made explicit. Concomitantly in the ToC, specious links were made between various activities and objectives.

A ToC should be based on an accurate analysis of both the local context and an understanding of the role of the intervening party (Stein and Valters, 2012: 13) because such analysis is essential for fine-tuning intervention strategies and for monitoring progress, and helps to ensure goals are realistic. By definition, a ToC for an overall policy priority cannot be grounded in a local context. Because the SRoL policy's ToC was insufficiently grounded in the context in which the policy was implemented, a substantial gap emerged between the higher-level policy goals of SRoL at the sub-national, national and regional levels, and the project output results at the local and community levels.

2.5 ARC programme

The MFA issued the call for proposals for the ARC programme in January 2016. The planned budget was EUR 125 million and the focus was on implementing the target areas of the SRoL policy (StCrt. 2016, nr. 6379). ARC's policy framework referred to the ToC for SRoL and noted that tackling the root causes of armed conflict, instability and irregular migration was part of the Dutch government's integrated approach to deal with the European refugee crisis (DSH, 2017; StCrt. 2016, nr. 6379). DSH explicitly encouraged applications from consortia: they would be given priority over equal applications from individual organisations. The premise was that consortia would be better equipped to implement integrated approaches. In addition, it was believed that working through consortia would reduce fragmentation. The ARC programme focused on 12 countries with challenges relating to migration, instability and conflict, in which a Dutch embassy was present and in which civil society could operate in a certain degree of freedom.¹³ For each country, DSH formulated specific goals related to SRoL. Dutch, international and local NGOs were all eligible for funding in the ARC programme.

¹³ Afghanistan, Burundi, the DRC, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Pakistan, South Sudan, Sudan and Syria.



3. Tender procedures

3.1 Introduction

Prior to 2011, the EFV accepted proposals throughout the year for projects to be funded by the Reconstruction Fund. In accordance with regulations that came into force in January 2011, EFV introduced tender procedures. This chapter describes the tender procedures of the three programmes in paragraphs 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4. This chapter assesses how the evolving SRoL policy and these procedures have affected the quality of project proposals and, ultimately, the quality of project implementation in paragraph 3.5. Paragraph 3.6 concludes by presenting the project portfolio of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes.



The following are the main findings presented in this chapter:

- DSH aimed to finance as many NGOs as possible, and spread the available resources of the Reconstruction programme across 29 projects in 24 different countries. This contributed to fragmentation of the project portfolio and affected the quality of project implementation. The SPCC programme aimed at establishing strategic partnerships with implementing organisations, building on the assumption that conflict mitigation requires a comprehensive approach combining development and diplomacy. However, in practice, cooperation and strategic discussions between DSH and the NGOs involved were not elaborated in a structural and coherent manner.
- The Reconstruction programme was the first tender that DSH organised; subsequent calls for proposals, the lessons learned from this were taken into account. As a result, the ARC programme was less fragmented and its inception phase enabled better connections to be made between SROL's broader policy objectives and local activities of implementing NGOs.
- Competition between the NGOs participating in the tender process has encouraged the professionalisation of proposal writing (specialised staff and consultants). Though this may have resulted in higher quality proposals, the downside is that proposals are increasingly responding to centrally defined tender requirements, at the cost of alignment with local needs and contexts. Moreover, in general the project proposals did not present solid evidence to support the proposed activities.
- Shifting thematic and geographic policy priorities impeded the continuity of projects and hampered the sustainability of results.

3.2 Reconstruction programme

The ministry's call for proposals for the Reconstruction programme was published in December 2011 in the Government Gazette, with a deadline of three months (StCrt. 2011, nr. 22804). Funds were available for both Dutch and international NGOs. The total available budget was EUR 120 million. The call was met with enormous interest on the part of the NGOs: in total, 51 different organisations submitted 68 project proposals. A committee composed of the EFV, the MFA's Legal Affairs Department, Clingendael's Conflict Research Unit and Berenschot consultancy assessed the project proposals in three stages:

1. The 'threshold test' (D test) assessed whether basic requirements had been met and whether project proposals were complete;
2. the 'organisation test' (O test) considered the quality of the applying organisation, based on their track record, planning, M&E system and financial and administrative management; and
3. the 'programme test' (P test) judged the quality of the project proposal, based on its relevance for the Dutch policy priorities and the overall added value of the proposed project.

The Government Gazette indicated that if there would be insufficient means to fund all satisfactory applications, grant levels would be proportionate to the organisation's score for the P test. Initially, 48 applications passed the O test and the sums they requested totalled around EUR 310 million, thus far exceeding the available budget of EUR 120 million.

The next step for the committee was to decide which score on the P test could be considered satisfactory. In the end, not bound by statutory restrictions and having room to manoeuvre, they set a P-test score of 60% as a threshold for funding. This decision was influenced by the fact that a sufficient result is commonly interpreted as a 6/10 or 60% score. Moreover, the ministry explicitly aimed to fund as many NGOs as possible; in the wake of the 2011 budget cuts to development cooperation, the Reconstruction programme was considered to be an important source of funding for Dutch NGOs active in reconstruction and peacebuilding. The tender documents did not restrict the number of applications per organisation and, as a result, several large NGOs submitted multiple proposals. Generally, these proposals from large NGOs scored relatively high for the P test; as a result, in order to support as many organisations as possible, the ministry had to award funding to as many project proposals as possible.



In total, 27 proposals from 19 organisations passed the P test. Combined, these applications requested an amount of EUR 196 million, thus exceeding the reserved amount by more than half. The committee subsequently decided to cut allocations for the proposed projects in two steps:

1. A reduction proportionate to the P-test score; e.g. for a 80% P score, a given organisation would receive 80% of the requested budget;
2. a generic reduction of 24% to ensure that all allocated grants combined would not exceed EUR 120 million.

The resulting budget cuts were substantial: grants ranged between 48% and 76% of the initially requested budgets. Relating the quality of proposals to budget reductions meant that the budgets of the lowest quality proposals were cut most. Based on the reduced budgets, EFV asked applicants to submit an adjusted proposal and activity plan within two months. Most organisations reduced quantitative targets in their proposals (e.g. by reducing the target population) but only a few NGOs made significant changes, for example by reconsidering or adjusting outputs and outcomes. Two organisations did not adjust their proposal and only changed the requested budget; their original proposals did not include quantifiable targets. EFV did not perform a formal or uniform check on the adjusted proposals, and the extent to which proposals were reviewed depended on the individual policy officer of EFV responsible. Spreading the budget for the Reconstruction programme over as many projects as possible contributed to fragmentation and increased the workload for project management.

The decision to fund as many NGOs as possible was driven by the implicit objective to support the Dutch NGO sector in a time of budget cuts. Other funding scenarios would have been possible, however. For example, EFV could have decided to award funding to the highest-scoring projects until the budget of EUR 120 million was exhausted (scenario 1 in table 1) or, for example, to fund only projects scoring 70% or higher for the P test (scenario 2). Both options would have resulted in fewer organisations being funded but would have limited fragmentation at different levels (fewer projects, organisations and countries) and would have restricted the budget cuts per proposal.

Table 1 *Different funding scenarios*

	Funding scenarios			
	Actual: award > 60% for P test + budget cut based on score + generic 24% cut	Alternative 1: award highest- scoring projects until 120mln + no budget cut	Alternative 1b: award funding to highest- scoring projects until 120mln + generic 0.16% budget cut	Alternative 2: award > 70% for P test + generic 7.37% budget cut
Number of projects funded¹⁴	27	20	20	21
Number of different NGOs/ consortia with 1 or more projects	21	15	15	16
Number of countries with activities	24	17	17	17
Average budget cut per project	38%	0%	0.2%	7.4%
Total budget (EUR mln.)	120.0	120.2	120.0	120.0

Following two successful appeal procedures, the total number of projects increased to 29, with a total budget of EUR 127 million (see the list of projects awarded funding and their budget reductions in annex 1).

¹⁴ Excluding projects that appealed, or may have appealed in alternative scenarios.



3.3 SPCC programme

The call for proposals for the SPCC programme was published in October 2013. With the SPCC, DSH aimed to improve cooperation among programme partners, stimulating more efficiency, mutual accountability and strategic coordination between NGOs and the MFA. This was in line with a broader shift at the MFA towards working increasingly with mutually agreed objectives, strategic agreements and a certain level of operational freedom for implementing partners. The total budget available for SPCC was EUR 30 million and the focus areas were the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa.

The selection procedure was open to Dutch organisations that had a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with the European Commission under the Humanitarian Aid Regulation. Organisations could apply only if they had successfully passed an organisation test or Checklist for Organisational Capacity Assessment (COCA) in the preceding four years. The MFA assessed organisations solely on their track record and past achievements, and NGOs did not have to submit a full project proposal. By the deadline, 15 applications had been received. A selection committee consisting of four external consultants with experience and knowledge of the regions selected the eight best applications. As one of the organisations selected did not have an FPA for the entire duration of the SPCC programme, ultimately only the submissions of the seven remaining organisations were awarded funding (EUR 3.75 million each).

In theory, there would have been more time for strategic discussions between the MFA and NGOs on aligning wider policy objectives with concrete activities and results. In practice, however, this opportunity was not seized: most of the strategic discussions between stakeholders only started after work plans and log frames had already been agreed.

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3.4 ARC programme

Prior to the publication of the call for proposals for the ARC programme, DSH formulated several lessons learned about the tender procedure of the Reconstruction programme. An important lesson was that the short time frame of three months between the call for proposals and the deadline for a fully developed proposal adversely affected the quality of proposals. Organisations could not perform local needs assessments and the workload to formulate a competitive proposal was very high. Other lessons pertained to achieving more clarity on M&E indicators, establishing a clearer geographic and thematic focus, arriving at fewer projects to reduce the management burden, creating synergy with the multiannual country strategies and better engaging embassies and other relevant departments in the MFA. DSH intended to address these lessons while preparing for the tender procedure of the ARC programme.

The selection procedure for the ARC programme was split into two phases. The first consisted of a threshold test to ascertain whether the applying organisation met the entry requirements, an assessment of the quality of the applicant's 'concept note' (a first outline of the project proposal including minimum and maximum requested amounts) and the organisation's track record.¹⁵ In total, the ministry received 127 submissions, of which 78 passed the threshold test. In this stage, the majority of the proposals from local NGOs had been rejected by the selection committee, mainly because they were incomplete.

Applicants that passed the first phase had to develop a programme document based on an indicative grant amount. DSH provisionally awarded the full requested minimum amount to the highest-scoring 'concept notes' in each of the 12 focus countries, and the runners-up with 90% of their requested minimum. In total, 21 'concept notes' were selected for the second phase of the procedure.¹⁶

¹⁵ Requirements included information on the legal status of the organisation, preconditions relating to the organisation's financial capacity, and a maximum salary for its managing staff.

¹⁶ In three countries only one project was selected, as the runners-up were deemed of insufficient quality.



Phase two started with a one-day kick-off meeting of applicant NGOs and DSH staff in The Hague in June 2016. The MFA subsequently organised two-day country-specific meetings; it was intended to hold these in each of the 12 countries, but circumstances led to some of the meetings being held in neighbouring countries instead. During these meetings, the applicants met with DSH and embassy focal points to: (1) determine a common conceptual framework and a learning agenda; (2) establish complementarity and synergy between the ARC projects and between ARC-funded and similar donor-funded programmes; and (3) agree on collaboration between DSH and partner organisations. After the kick-off meetings, DSH requested each applicant to develop a programme document. Although this turned out to be a time-consuming process involving a large number of DSH staff, it helped to align expectations about project implementation, indicators and the assessment process. The 21 final versions of the programme documents were submitted in October 2016 and approved by the ministry with a funding portfolio of EUR 126 million.

The organisations awarded funding subsequently entered into an inception phase in which they further operationalised their programme documents. This involved updating the outcome and output indicators on the basis of the finalised ARC results framework, updating the monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) plan, planning a baseline and integrating the findings of needs assessments. In April 2017, almost a year after the 21 proposals had been selected, the projects started.

The tender process of the ARC programme clearly benefitted from earlier experiences with its predecessors. The second phase of the ARC selection procedure during which project proposals were fully elaborated brought significant improvements that enabled a better connection between general policy objectives and local activities. Fragmentation was reduced: the Reconstruction programme funded 29 projects in 24 different countries whereas ARC supported 21 projects in 12 countries and within these countries, projects focused on specific geographic areas in line with the priorities of the Dutch embassies. Embassies were engaged from a much earlier stage than in the earlier two programmes: developing proposals in dialogue with embassies and DSH promoted synergies between policy objectives, embassy programming and the proposed activities.

3.5 Implications of tender procedures

It is generally believed that tendering enhances efficiency and effectiveness. This is based on the assumption that proposals with high scores on predefined tender requirements improve project performance and thus lead to better programmes. This evaluation of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes does not validate this assumption - on the contrary. It shows in particular that:

- Competition over limited funds in tender procedures has contributed to specialisation in acquisition and proposal drafting, with some NGOs contracting consultants to ensure that their proposals were in line with the high-level SRoL policy objectives of the ministry and scored as high as possible. This stimulated the incorporation of over-ambitious objectives in project proposals and the design of an intervention logic that was geared towards attaining overall policy objectives but which lacked rigour and context-specific analysis. In many project proposals, the logic behind activity → output → outcomes and the related indicators was not clear. The link between higher policy objectives at outcome and impact level and the local level outputs resulting from project activities was not thoroughly operationalised by participating organisations, especially in the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes.
- Another negative effect of the professionalisation and specialisation in proposal drafting has been that proposals have increasingly become disconnected from the reality on the ground. This disconnect created difficulties for implementing staff, as they were expected to bridge this gap and to work towards and report on complex and unrealistic policy objectives that were difficult to translate into the practical realities of economic and political instability, insecurity, conflict and natural disasters.
- The evidence base underlying many of the proposed activities was rather thin, as is further elaborated in chapter 4: the activities were not based on tested assumptions and often the solid evidence for their success was lacking. DSH did not require NGOs to elaborate on specific assumptions or to build on an evidence base for the proposed activities.



- The assessment and scoring methods used to rank and select proposals during tender procedures were unable to adequately detect and address the shortcomings listed above. The format for proposals offered limited space to explain the evidence base and the connections between input, output and outcomes. Furthermore, the extent to which connections between input, output and outcomes as presented in proposals are realistic is often difficult to assess on paper.
- The tender documents for the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes required the projects to simultaneously focus on multiple policy themes. On paper, they appeared to apply an integrated approach, but in reality, the integration of different activities was more often than not absent and implementing staff struggled to establish a degree of coherence between separate activities.

The changing policy objectives and geographic and thematic preferences of the ministry's programmes also affected the sustainability of achieved results. For example, of the 23 countries targeted in the Reconstruction programme, only eight were targeted in ARC and four additional countries were included (see table 2). Furthermore, this lack of continuity was not conducive to developing strategic partnerships with development partners. As donors often display similar patterns in thematic and geographic priority shifts (IOB, 2016), many organisations that had previously received funding through the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes were forced to withdraw from the areas and countries in which they were active.¹⁷ Besides negatively affecting the quality of project implementation and the capacity of local implementing organisations, this also undermined continuity of investments and left the target population without further assistance. In the Reconstruction programme, for example, one organisation implemented a project in the Ethiopian and Kenyan border area, yet, as a consortium partner with funding from the ARC programme, could only continue their activities on the Ethiopian side of the border since Kenya was not included in the latter programme.

¹⁷ A lack of continuity is not only the result of shifting donor policies: NGOs themselves also contribute to this. Even during implementation of Reconstruction and SPCC projects, several NGOs had problems with their partners that related to capacity issues or dysfunction of partner organisations, and some organisations even replaced the implementing partners during the phase of implementation, thereby shifting the geographic focus of the project.


Table 2 Targeted countries by the Reconstruction, SPCC and ARC programmes

	Reconstruction programme	SPCC programme	ARC programme
Afghanistan	X		X
Bangladesh	X		
Benin	X		
Burundi	X	X	X
Colombia	X		
DRC	X	X	X
El Salvador	X		
Ethiopia	X	X	X
Ghana	X		
Guatemala	X		
Honduras	X		
Indonesia	X		
Jordan			X
Kenya	X	X	
Lebanon			X
Mali	X		X
Mozambique	X		
Nicaragua	X		
Pakistan	X		X
Palestinian territories	X		
Rwanda	X	X	
Somalia	X	X	X
South Sudan	X	X	X
Sudan		X	X
Syria			X
Uganda	X	X	
Yemen	X		

3.6 Portfolio description of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes

The Reconstruction and SPCC programmes resulted in portfolios of respectively 29 and 7 projects: 36 projects in total. These projects were implemented by both Dutch and international NGOs or consortia of NGOs and had a combined budget of about EUR 154 million. Implementing organisations were active in 24 countries, with 16 projects partially or entirely implemented in South Sudan. Over a quarter of the entire budget of the two programmes was reserved for South Sudan. Table 3 presents some key characteristics of the programmes.


Table 3 Characteristics of the Reconstruction, SPCC and ARC programmes

	Reconstruction programme	SPCC programme	ARC programme
Number of projects	29	7	21
Total budget (EUR million.)	127.3	26.3	126.2
Planned period of implementation*	2012 - 2015	2014 - 2016	2016 - 2021
Number of countries	23	9	12
Average number of countries per project	3	3	1
Average annual budget per project per country (EUR mln.)	0.4	0.4	1.2
Number of individual NGOs supported	22	7	15
NGOs targeted by call for proposals	Dutch and international	Dutch	Dutch, international and local

* Several projects started later than initially foreseen and were allowed extensions (no-cost or otherwise).

As mentioned above, the ministry identified three target areas (human security, legitimate governance and peace dividend) and required individual projects to contribute to at least two of them, with human security as an obligatory target area in the Reconstruction programme. The 36 projects generally included multiple activities aiming to contribute to the broad policy objectives:¹⁸

- *Human security*: All projects financed through the Reconstruction programme were required to improve human security. Many organisations provided peace trainings in which participants were instructed in practical ways to deal with conflict within their communities. Furthermore, the establishment and/or work of peace committees was supported at the community level to promote dialogue and conflict resolution within and between communities.
- *Legitimate governance*: NGOs aimed to promote the responsiveness of government actors to the needs of citizens by facilitating dialogue between communities and government representatives. Some organisations trained government staff in good governance, conflict resolution and human rights.
- *Peace dividend*: The great majority of the projects aimed to stimulate employment and improve people's living conditions in order to create so-called peace dividend. The implementing organisations promoted entrepreneurship and self-employment by providing business and vocational training. Sometimes, this support was complemented with small grants or materials to facilitate the start-up of a business. Some projects also stimulated participants, sometimes specifically women, to organise themselves in savings groups. Members saved small amounts on a weekly basis and could subsequently apply for loans for consumption or investments. Activities related to peace dividend also included the construction or rehabilitation of public infrastructure, ranging from boreholes to larger infrastructure works, such as marketplaces or dams.

To illustrate what projects exactly entailed on the ground, the following three boxes provide detailed descriptions of three projects as presented by the implementing NGOs in their documentation.¹⁹ Annexes 1 and 2 briefly present the implementing organisations and the budgets of the 36 projects funded through the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes.

¹⁸ The distribution of the six most common activities is presented in Annex 3. Chapter 4 examines the effectiveness of these six activities.

¹⁹ These examples have been selected randomly.



Box 4 Project 1 (Reconstruction programme)

This project focused on numerous communities in Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia. Its objective was to increase stability by bridging divisions between and inside these communities through structurally improving their economic and social position, with specific attention for women and youth. The project focused on three main goals:

- **Capacity building of civil society on conflict prevention and solution, for increased human security.** In order to achieve this goal, the implementing NGO organised various activities such as peace education campaigns and provided conflict prevention training to various local stakeholders such as local youth or CSOs. The project established various groups, such as widows' advocacy groups in Afghanistan and peace committees in Somalia. The project implementers actively encouraged women's membership in the Somalian peace committees; the project aimed to link traditional and formal conflict resolution mechanisms in order to actively mediate in local conflicts;
- **Improved role of women and youth in governance, leading to increased legitimacy of governments.** The implementing NGO aimed to empower women and youth through numerous initiatives, including advocacy and awareness training. In addition, the project encouraged active participation of beneficiaries in local governance bodies. For example, it aimed to enable 8,000 Afghan women to actively participate in Community Development Councils. In Yemen, the NGO supported multiple youth-led community-based initiatives and dialogue sessions to influence decision making on youth needs. Furthermore, the project supported the production of multiple documentary films in Yemen addressing youth concerns;
- **Improved economic opportunities for women and youth, creating peace dividend.** To enhance the economic position of women and youth, the project implemented a wide variety of activities. Among other interventions, the project targeted women in cash-for-work infrastructural development activities, provided various vocational and business trainings as well as basic training on numeracy and book keeping, and set up savings groups.

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Box 5 Project 2 (Reconstruction programme)

This project was implemented in South Sudan, Burundi and Yemen and aimed to contribute to conflict prevention by granting economic opportunities to vulnerable groups. It aimed to explicitly include youth, women and marginal groups in the areas most prone to destabilisation. As a result, the project would contribute to human security and create peace dividend.

The programme's overall target was to create 3,000 jobs. Together with partners and local government agencies, the implementing NGO conducted a value chain analysis of the vulnerable target groups. Participants received training and mentoring in entrepreneurship, business planning, financial management, marketing and product development. Some beneficiaries were given access to capital to facilitate business start-up.

In South Sudan, project activities ended in 2016 because of renewed civil strife. The project received a no-cost extension and continued until December 2017 in Burundi and until June 2018 in Yemen.



Box 6 Project 3 (SPCC programme)

This SPCC project implemented activities in Moyale, a drought- and conflict-affected border area between Ethiopia and Kenya, and in Akon North, former Warrap State in South Sudan. The project mainly focused on increasing food security and targeted poor and rural households and IDPs. The main objective was to reduce conflict and migration by improving food security. The project focused on four main goals:

- 1. Increased and diversified agriculture and livestock production.** The NGO implemented a wide range of activities, aiming to increase the amount of land available, for example through physical rehabilitation and improved use. In addition, the project introduced different types of livestock (such as goats, donkeys) or beehives, and drought-resistant seed. It also aimed to set up value chains for livestock and to improve beneficiaries' marketing;
- 2. increased disaster risk reduction, mitigation and preparedness (drought, flood and conflict).** To reduce the risks of disaster and conflict, the implementing NGO organised a cross-border peace conference and formulated resource-sharing agreements. The project also trained local communities and government departments on how to prevent, mitigate and prepare for disasters. Activities included setting up and training so-called disaster risk reduction committees. The project also aimed to improve water management, for example through the rehabilitation or construction of water points, in order to reduce the risks of drought;
- 3. alternative income sources available from off-farm activities.** Through the project, various self-help groups were established in which participants were encouraged to save small amounts of money. Beneficiaries also received vocational and business training encouraging the development of small business. Additional training provided included courses on HIV, food diversification, gender roles and the risks associated with female genital mutilation;
- 4. general humanitarian and rehabilitation needs adequately fulfilled.** When necessary, the project could provide humanitarian assistance as a direct response to natural disaster or conflict.



4. Effectiveness of activities

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the effectiveness of the six most common activities implemented through the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes in separate paragraphs. It roughly follows the six methodological steps of contribution analysis described in section 1.3.2. The paragraphs in this chapter start by describing the planned activities on the ground as described in the project documentation, and the underlying key assumptions, as described by the IOB research team and the national consultants. The subsequent sections then discuss the evidence base behind the formulated assumptions and behind the interventions' effectiveness, drawing on a review of state-of-the-art empirical studies of comparable interventions in post-conflict settings.^{20 21} Finally, key field findings from the case studies are presented.

²⁰ The analysis draws on systematic reviews, meta-regressions and individual impact evaluations. Only experimental and quasi-experimental studies that deal credibly with the counterfactual and effectively address selection bias were considered. See paragraph 1.3 for a full description of the methodology.

²¹ Step 4 consisted of the the IOB research team and the national consultant together assessing the contribution story, identifying gaps in the evidence and formulating the research questions to guide the fieldwork.



Box 7 Activities

Many of the 36 projects undertook similar activities (see annex 5) and also had comparable (implicit) assumptions. The most common activities are:

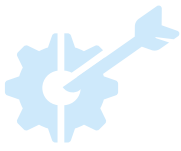
 Savings groups (15 projects)	 Peace training (34 projects)
 Business and vocational training (21 projects)	 Stimulating community participation (14 projects)
 Creating peace committees and space for dialogue (34 projects)	 Building public infrastructure (11 projects)

Although approaches varied among the different organisations and in practice the activities were often combined, by analysing the most common activities separately it is possible to assess their effectiveness and the extent to which underlying assumptions and prerequisites were met.

Combining the evidence from our fieldwork and state-of-the-art literature, the main findings about the effectiveness of the implemented activities are the following (step 6):

- Although savings groups can bring about positive effects for individual beneficiaries, they have only limited effect on poverty reduction and cannot trigger substantial economic progress. Poor group members in particular struggled to continue saving during periods of crises and economic stress. Savings groups can have a modest effect on female empowerment, especially when complemented with additional interventions to improve gender norms. The sustainability of savings groups was limited: after the projects had ended, a large proportion of the established groups ceased their activities.
- In general, business training can improve trainees' entrepreneurial knowledge but this does not automatically translate into better business performance or higher earnings. TVET can have a modest positive effect on beneficiary employment or earnings, but crucial for its success are the method and quality of the training. The case studies found some examples of positive benefits resulting from training, but on the whole the results were disappointing. Training is more effective when accompanied by additional support, such as cash, microcredit or in-kind support. Training observed in the case studies did not necessarily match participants' needs or capacities. Diversification of income sources hardly materialised.
- Bringing groups together can promote reconciliation: many of the established peace committees contributed to resolving local disputes. The impact of these interventions was generally modest. Dialogues should be led by professional facilitators with a thorough understanding of the local dynamics, as improper conflict management risks aggravating tension, polarisation and psychological stress. Most of the peace committees focused on interpersonal conflicts and had a limited role in intercommunal disputes and curbing political violence. The sustainability of these structures was limited, as many of the established peace committees did not continue to function beyond the actual project implementation period.
- Available evidence on the effectiveness of peace training and civic education is inconclusive and even after our fieldwork it remains difficult to establish how effective this training was. The trainings may have had modest short-term effects on interpersonal conflict resolution. Crucial factors that enable success are the extent to which training fits the local context and is built on the needs of the target group, and whether participants are in a position to implement their newly acquired skills in practice. Findings from our fieldwork indicate that former trainees cannot always recall the contents of the training, hence it would be unrealistic to expect less violence as a result.
- Interventions that promote community participation are more effective when supported by a responsive state government. Without a government willing and able to support community participation, results are unlikely to be institutionalised or sustained. Our fieldwork did not provide evidence for the hypothesis that induced community participation enhanced social capital at the local level.²²

²² Social capital refers to 'the connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (Putnam, 2001: p. 19)



- Many pastoralist conflicts are the result of limited access to water. By investing in public infrastructure, projects aimed to contribute to poverty reduction and to remove important incentives for conflict. IOB's fieldwork, however, demonstrated that the limited capacity and support of local government entities affected the quality of construction and maintenance of essential public works. This hampered potential positive effects and severely limited sustainability.
- Though most projects explicitly aimed to reach the poor or the most vulnerable part of local communities, in many cases this did not happen. Opportunity costs are highest for vulnerable groups and, therefore, in harsh times they are most likely to drop out. During fieldwork, various examples of elite capture and self-selection were identified, as well as non-stringent selection of beneficiaries by local project implementers, thereby excluding more vulnerable members of the community.

Box 8 *Recommendations at the activity level*



Savings groups

- Invest in additional support in times of crisis such as war or drought, to prevent the poorest members from dropping out. Safeguard complementary support measures beyond the lifespan of project support.
- Combine female savings groups with empowerment training to better enable female empowerment.
- Be realistic about the potential impact of relatively modest loans.



Business and vocational training

- Complement training of rural beneficiaries with investments in market access;
- Business and vocational training must be tailor-made and last long enough, to facilitate effective knowledge transfer.
- Complement business training with cash, microcredit, or in-kind transfers.
- Provide cash, capital goods or livestock to stimulate self-employment. Alongside cash-for-work, these inputs are the most effective tools for getting people to work and boosting incomes in fragile states.



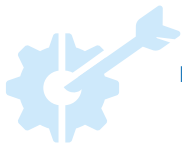
Peace committees and spaces for dialogue, and peace training and civil education

- Be realistic about the sphere of influence of peace committees and peace training. Be careful not to assume that the effects of such interventions will 'trickle' up beyond the interpersonal or intercommunal level.
- Build upon existing structures and other donor and government initiatives and hesitant to establish new structures alongside existing ones.
- Be aware of the potentially negative side-effects of bringing together rival or previously rival groups.
- Make sure dialogue sessions are led by professionals with sufficient context-specific knowledge.



Building public infrastructure

- Identify infrastructural works in a participatory process that actively involves the local communities and government (local and national).
- Formulate a strategy involving the local communities and government, to ensure smooth transfer of responsibility for operating and maintaining infrastructural works after the project ends.



4.2 Savings groups

4.2.1 Activity description and intervention logic

Lack of access to capital is an important challenge for the rural poor, especially in fragile and post-conflict countries. Microfinance initially became a popular instrument for addressing the lack of capital in low and lower middle income countries, but the evidence for its impact is disappointing.²³ In recent years, the promotion of savings has gained momentum in international development cooperation.

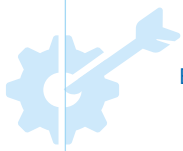
Several projects in the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes established or supported savings groups, sometimes also referred to as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) or Village Savings and Loan Associations. Membership generally ranged between 10 and 30 community members. These groups were either women or men only or mixed and in most cases groups selected their own members. The implementing organisations often trained one or a few (literate) group members in the principles of the savings group and basic bookkeeping. Trained individuals then informed the rest of the group. Savings group members usually committed to saving a small amount of money weekly or monthly. After a set amount of time, members could apply for a loan. Beneficiaries used loans both for consumption and for investment and in some cases also decided to invest as a group. The groups themselves largely decided on the amount and frequency of saving, on interest rates and on the maximum allowable loan. In some cases, deposits of group members served as a guarantee for the loans of others.

The objectives of the savings groups were twofold. In the first place, the NGOs involved formed and supported savings groups to stimulate the economic resilience of beneficiaries against shocks. The assumption was that in harsh economic times, savings group members can utilise their savings to avert crises. The ultimate aim was to reduce poverty levels and increase members' economic opportunities. It was expected that gaining access to credit would stimulate members to make investments to enhance their productivity. Sometimes, savings group members also received some form of business training or received inputs for diversifying their sources of income, such as fishing equipment. The second objective of savings groups was to enhance social capital and empower their members. It was assumed that active participation of community members would enhance social engagement and improve cohesion. In addition, granting women access to credit was expected to enhance female empowerment. More broadly, savings groups reduce dependence on external organisations and/or financial institutions. All in all, the NGOs involved expected that savings groups would help improve beneficiaries' living conditions, creating peace dividend and increased resilience.

To achieve their objectives, savings groups have to meet several crucial assumptions during implementation. This study primarily scrutinised the validity of the following assumptions:

- Group formation is an inclusive process that encourages active participation.
- The amounts saved are sufficient for the beneficiaries to invest and enhance their productivity and income, savings group members invest their money responsibly and profitably.
- Beneficiaries are willing and able to continue saving during economic shocks and periods of insecurity.
- Savings groups are self-reliant and remain intact and active beyond the period of project implementation.
- Access to capital (especially for women) is accompanied by/stimulates self-esteem, a belief in one's ability to initiate change, and the right to control one's life.

²³ Many microcredit interventions have been rigorously evaluated. A well-performed Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) showed that access to microcredit increased borrowing behaviour in rural Ethiopia. However, increased borrowing did not result in non-farm business creation, nor did it increase the revenues, wages or socio-economic status of beneficiaries (Desai and Tarozzi, 2011; Tarozzi et al., 2015). This finding is not unique. Based on numerous comparable studies from a wide array of developing countries and various systematic reviews, it is safe to conclude that there is little evidence for positive effects of microfinance on poverty reduction or women's empowerment (Van Rooyen et al., 2012; Steward et al., 2010; Vaessen et al., 2014; Roodman, 2012).



4.2.2 Evidence base

Considering the available scientific evidence on the effects of savings groups, three broad conclusions can be drawn. First, participation in a savings group generally enhances beneficiaries' access to savings and credit. However, this does not mean that beneficiaries are able to increase their income or reduce their poverty level. Many high-quality impact evaluations from various developing countries have reported that savings groups have hardly any effects on income generation or poverty reduction. Several studies have found some positive effects on outcomes, such as asset ownership or consumption, but across the board the effects are rather small. Furthermore, there is no compelling evidence that savings groups increase business profits or business ownership. The literature seems to confirm that savings group members use the money to avert crises; most studies find group membership positively affects food security (Karlan et al., 2012; Gash and Odell, 2013; Gash, 2017). There are some indications that supporting formal supply-side saving interventions, such as increasing access to mobile banking, is more effective in promoting the saving behaviour of beneficiaries than supporting savings groups (Steinert et al., 2017).

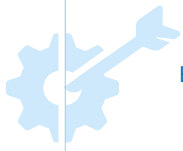
Secondly, the evidence that savings groups can enhance female empowerment is modest. Results from different impact evaluations are not unequivocal and vary between different indicators of empowerment. A systematic review revealed that, on average, savings groups have modest positive effects on the social, political and economic empowerment of women. However, no effects could be established for psychological empowerment. The largest effects were found when savings groups were accompanied by additional training (Brody et al., 2016). Another review of 53 studies (Gash, 2017) found that savings groups regularly serve as a channel for other development activities and that complementing them with other interventions such as women empowerment training enhances their otherwise limited impact. According to that review, half of the 21 rigorous evaluations found that participation in savings groups increased women's decision-making power.

Thirdly, the poorest of the poor are often not well represented in savings groups. Two reviews (Gash and Odell, 2013; Gash 2017), reported that, on average, members of savings groups tend to be wealthier and better socially integrated than non-members. One explanation is that self-selection of community members leads to the poorest of the poor being excluded. Another reason may be that the most marginalised people are simply too poor to be able to save even small amounts of money or that opportunity costs of joining a savings group are too high.

4.2.3 Fieldwork findings

IOB's fieldwork revealed that there was a clear incentive for the implementing partners and local facilitators to establish as many savings groups as possible in order to maximise the number of beneficiaries reached. Quantity often prevailed over quality: for example, one project established over 1,400 new savings groups. In many cases, implementing organisations solely reported the number of established savings groups and assumed that they remained active after the project had ended.

Because most of the SHGs established were not legal entities, the beneficiaries could generally not open bank accounts for their savings. Nevertheless, savings groups increased members' credit and gave them the opportunity to take out small loans for consumption or investment. However, savings were mostly insufficient to enable the necessary investments to be made increase members' income permanently. Small loans were used to buy some cattle or sheep, engage in petty trade, or to pay school fees and buy medicines. In individual cases, some beneficiaries were able to start small businesses with the loans obtained from savings groups (see photos 1 and 2).



Photos 1 and 2 Left: a butcher in southern Ethiopia who opened a shop with a loan from an SHG; right: an SHG beneficiary who opened a small shop in Ndava, Cibitoke in Burundi.



More often, however, businesses that NGOs reported as newly started were in reality subsistence farming or other income-generating activities that people were already engaged in. The returns to investments were often insufficient to structurally increase their income or resilience against shocks. Conversely, economic shocks negatively affected the members' saving behaviour. Savings group survival rate beyond the period of project implementation was highest in the fieldwork areas with fewer crises. The inability of the poorest to continue saving in times of stress and insecurity is a serious impediment for the intervention's objective to reduce poverty and to increase resilience against shocks. It is important to note that the NGOs involved had not put in place effective safeguards to guarantee the sustainability of the savings groups beyond the project period.

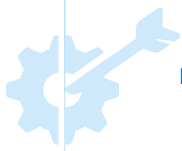
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Box 9 *Illustration of fieldwork findings - Oromia, Ethiopia*

In the pastoralist southern part of the Oromia Region in Ethiopia, one project established a large number of savings groups. As a result of three consecutive years of drought, many cattle died and the poorest members from the groups were unable to continue saving, even after the weekly contributions for savings groups had been lowered. Some savings groups were dismantled and members sometimes moved to other areas. In groups that remained active, members continued to struggle and could save only marginal amounts. Members who were unable to continue saving often dropped out and were replaced with other, better-off individuals. In the kebeles visited for IOB's fieldwork in the south of Ethiopia, one project created 230 savings groups (each of roughly 15 members), but by 2018, only 122 were fully or partially operational.

Another finding from IOB's fieldwork is that the implementing organisations did not always target the most vulnerable groups in society, even when project documentation stated that they did. NGOs rarely performed wealth-ranking exercises to identify the poorest community members. Instead, the intention to form savings groups was often announced via local institutions, such as churches or traditional leaders, through which members were recruited.

IOB's fieldwork provided anecdotal evidence on how savings groups contributed to empowering individuals and enhancing their social capital. Female participants, for example, gained access to and control over financial means, sometimes for the first time in their lives. Group membership also enhanced self-esteem among some of the marginalised members. A case in point was a successful Ethiopian savings group comprised entirely of disabled members, which reduced their reliance on others. Participants generally valued their membership of these groups. Several groups supported individual members who experienced family tragedy, illness or acute stress. On the basis of the fieldwork, however, it is unjustifiable to claim that savings groups have spurred empowerment and enhanced social capital.



4.3 Business and vocational training

4.3.1 Activity description and intervention logic

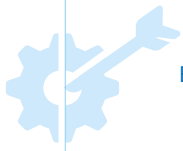
In many low-income countries, there is a structural lack of formal job opportunities, especially for the poor. Many people therefore live from subsistence farming and sell surplus products, or are self-employed in small and informal businesses. Many donors aim to increase employment and reduce poverty by promoting business and skills development. A common intervention is to provide beneficiaries with the skills to start their own business, generate income and possibly create employment for others. The rationale at the ministry and among NGOs for promoting business development and job opportunities is the shared belief that the lack of these is one of the root causes for conflict. Encouraging participation in the labour market is expected to contribute to increased stability and create 'peace dividend'.

Photo 3 *Income-generating activity in Ethiopia - Beekeeping*



Many projects included (short) courses on technical business skills, which in practice often taught basic numeracy, literacy and accounting. In addition, NGOs often provided income-generating activities and TVET on topics such as beekeeping, fishing, carpentry, tailoring and hairdressing, in order to facilitate the diversification of local sources of income.

Within the programmes, there was substantial variation in the approach towards the content of training, group selection and duration. Courses ranged from one or a few days to several months. They were given in classes, or through apprenticeships with local businesses. Some projects combined the training with a small grant or with the establishment of a savings group to help trainees to start up a business.



If business and vocational trainings are to achieve their stated objectives, various conditions have to be met during implementation. This study primarily looked at the following assumptions:

- An enabling business environment is available.
- Trainings are tailor-made, build on existing skills and successfully transfer new knowledge.
- Trained beneficiaries have sufficient access to markets.
- Business trainings and TVET enable poor beneficiaries to increase their productivity.
- Positive effects of trainings spill over to the village and community level as a result of increased employment opportunities.
- Better economic prospects at local level reduce the risk of conflict.

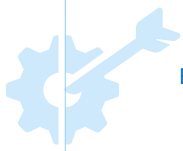
4.3.2 Evidence base

There is little sound evidence available on the effects of business training in post-conflict settings. It is, however, possible to distil some valuable lessons from low and lower middle income countries, while taking into account that post-conflict environments pose additional challenges. A meta-regression of 37 impact evaluations (Cho and Honorati, 2013) revealed that business trainings on average have a positive effect on general business knowledge and practices. Beneficiary disaggregation revealed that people from urban areas with basic businesses skills improve their business practices as a result of trainings.²⁴ However, increased knowledge and improved practices do not automatically translate into better business performance, as measured by sales, inventories or number of employees.

A systematic review of the effects of TVET provided initial evidence that, on average, there are some positive effects on beneficiaries' employment status and earnings. The large heterogeneity across findings, however, also demonstrated that the method and quality of the courses are very important. The review could not demonstrate the effects of TVET on self-employed earnings or the number of hours worked (Tripney et al., 2013). A more recent review of the available evidence (Fox and Kaul, 2018) confirms the mixed results of TVET interventions. The available evidence furthermore suggests that the average employment effects are limited, mostly short term and achieved at relatively high cost. Lack of business knowledge may not be the most critical constraint for potential entrepreneurs in low income countries. When the intervention is complemented with cash, microcredit or in-kind transfers, the effects of business trainings on business start-ups or employment are slightly more positive, especially for youth (Cho and Honorati, 2013; Fox and Kaul, 2018). Complementing trainings with additional support allows beneficiaries to put their acquired skills into practice. However, even when there is a positive impact on employment rates, the effect size is modest (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2012). As a result, it is unlikely that effects of comparable interventions can 'trickle up' and structurally transform economic opportunities beyond the level of the individual.

An important assumption underlying Dutch policy (see chapter 2) and programmes in fragile areas is that improving economic opportunities creates peace dividend and thus reduces the risk of violent conflict. Blattman and Ralston (2015) reviewed the available empirical evidence to test whether promoting employment also enhances social stability. They conclude that cash-for-work programmes and injections of capital, cash, goods or livestock have the most potential to stimulate employment or increase savings or consumption in fragile countries. These can result in modest reductions in materially motivated violence, for example as a result of theft. However, the review also shows that there are several other forms of violence (for example, those spurred by grievances) that are not mitigated by raising income or employment.

²⁴ The returns of trainings tend to be the smallest for the most marginalised groups. In this light, Banerjee and Duflo (2011) argued that many microenterprises in low and lower middle income countries are too small and undifferentiated to ever grow beyond subsistence size. In addition, they stated that many of the entrepreneurs are not 'natural entrepreneurs' capable of growing a business beyond self-employment.



4.3.3 Fieldwork findings

Box 10 *Illustration of fieldwork findings – Cibitoke, Burundi*

One project trained farmers in different agricultural techniques and renovated a dilapidated seed multiplication centre in Cibitoke, Burundi. The aim was to make new crop varieties available to the local farmers. The implementing organisation trained four farmer associations who were running the centre in agricultural techniques. During the fieldwork in 2018, the seed multiplication centre was still functional. Farmers were using their newly acquired skills in seed multiplication and could access quality seeds of maize and soybean. The intervention reportedly increased production and made crop varieties available. The fieldwork also revealed some challenges, most notably the continued need for investments in the centre and training for the farmers. Technical and management capacity at the centre should be improved to further increase the level of seed production, which was still low.

Implementing organisations did not have clear strategies for monitoring or evaluating the effects of business trainings beyond reporting on the number of people trained. Although project documents sometimes provide some anecdotal evidence, systematic follow-up on the effects of trainings seldom took place during project implementation. It was assumed that the skills provided would guarantee sustainability, but this was never tested. IOB's fieldwork shows that many of the business trainings and TVET provided did not yield the expected outcomes in terms of enhanced productivity and increased employment opportunities and that peace dividend was not realised.

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The main reason for these limited results was that the quality of the trainings provided did not always match the activity objectives. In general, trainings were too superficial and short to realistically facilitate sustained knowledge and skill transfers. Often, the trainings were one-off affairs that lasted for only one or a couple of days. They were of insufficient intensity and depth to truly and sustainably enhance business skills and increase productivity. In the three countries in which IOB's case studies were conducted, the general level of schooling is low, especially in remote rural areas. Participants who lacked basic business and vocational skills were in need of tailor-made long courses in order to enable them to apply the required knowledge in practice.

Many of the 'businesses started' and 'jobs created' reported in the project documents were in reality short trainings and support for individuals who then became (and sometimes already were) active in petty trading, such as fattening livestock, selling surplus agricultural produce or chopping and selling wood. Often, these 'trained entrepreneurs' could not improve their livelihoods in the longer term because they had started businesses in sectors that were susceptible to ongoing crises such as drought or environmental degradation. As a result, many beneficiaries who had been trained in specific trades (i.e. animal husbandry, shop keeping), were no longer active in these sectors. In addition, in most conflict areas, market and job opportunities were limited.

When business or technical training was provided in isolation, results were often limited. IOB's fieldwork revealed that the beneficiaries targeted in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Burundi often lacked start-up capital and had insufficient access to markets. When trainings are not accompanied by access to microcredit or banks to support investments, it is unrealistic to expect substantial effects. Savings groups could not provide sufficient access to credit because of the limited amounts that beneficiaries could generate (see section 4.2). Almost none of the projects effectively addressed the lack of market access, especially for the rural poor. Important conditions for success are: (1) the extent to which trainings or income-generating activities were embedded in the local context; and (2) the extent to which trainings were complemented with additional support.



4.4 Creating peace committees and space for dialogue

4.4.1 Activity description and intervention logic

Donors and international organisations believe that facilitating dialogue is a first step towards (re)building trust and reconciliation at the local level. To some extent, this belief is rooted in the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), which states that under the right conditions and when properly managed, interpersonal contact can reduce prejudice between groups. Since the 1990s, peacebuilding has increasingly focused on local ‘grassroots’ conflict transformation. This shift was influenced by peacebuilding theories of Galtung and Lederach, which promoted peacebuilding as a long-term process of transformation, focused on rebuilding relations and addressing structural and cultural aspects of conflict (Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 1995; 1997; 1999). Broadly speaking, a distinction can be made between activities targeting interpersonal dialogue at the community level and activities facilitating intercommunal dialogue.

Most projects evaluated for this report focused on interpersonal dispute resolution and aimed to create structures to promote peace and reconciliation. These structures have different names, such as *community action groups*, *community security working groups*, *peace committees*, *peace clubs* or *disaster risk reduction committees*.²⁵ Although these committees vary in their mandate, structure and composition, they share more similarities than differences. The committees draw on both traditional and modern conflict resolution mechanisms. Most NGOs trained the members of peace committees on issues such as conflict resolution, non-violent communication, human rights and gender issues. The committees often include traditional leaders, women and youth representatives, and local authorities. The members are self-selected, or put forward by their leaders, or a mix of both. Peace committees generally provide mediation and conflict resolution support to communities and aim to solve local disputes and conflicts and develop by-laws, thereby preventing escalation of violence. Some of the structures created had an advisory role only and did not have the powers to actively engage in conflict resolution.

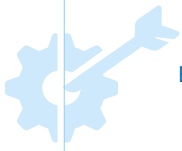
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NGOs also encouraged intercommunal dialogue between groups with a history of violent interaction. Examples of such intercommunal interventions are meetings (including cross-border) between rival communities and peace conferences or round-table discussions for participants from various ethnic groups. Sometimes these meetings resulted in tangible agreements mitigating potential sources of conflict, such as cattle movement, land and grazing rights, usage of water points or border crossing. Some projects also promoted peace dialogue by organising sports events or constructing public amenities, such as market places, where different communities may trade and interact.

This study analysed the following crucial assumptions underlying activities related to peace dialogue and reconciliation:

- Contact and communication between rival groups in a conflict setting can reduce tension and remove causes for violence.
- All groups involved respect peace agreements.
- Peace committees include representatives of key influencers and drivers of conflict.
- Peace committees fill a gap in provision of community security and have the mandate to effectively resolve conflict and curb violence.
- Peace committees will continue to function beyond the period of project implementation and have a positive and lasting effect on peacebuilding.

²⁵ In this evaluation, all these structures will henceforth be referred to as ‘peace committees’.



4.4.2 Evidence base

Only a few evaluations validly estimated the effects of facilitating dialogue between different ethnic groups in conflict settings. Testing assumptions in this domain is inherently difficult and there is a risk of evaluations being biased because persons willing to participate in dialogue are likely to be interested in improving relations, while those who are most prejudiced or have different interests might avoid (voluntary) peace initiatives.

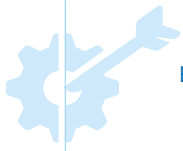
There are some robust studies that support the contact hypothesis in post-conflict settings. One, in Sierra Leone, found that forums organised to bring victims and perpetrators together increased feelings of forgiveness in those who had suffered from violence and that trust - for example, in ex-combatants - also increased significantly. The intervention also increased the network strength of beneficiaries (Cilliers et al., 2018). Studies of projects in Ethiopia, Colombia, Israel and Palestine have reported similar findings (Svensson and Brounéus, 2013; Berger et al., 2016; Rosen and Salomon, 2011; Ugarriza and Nussio, 2017). What these studies also show is that results are often modest. In the aforementioned case of Sierra Leone, for example, the project did affect people's perceptions, but there was no effect on levels of crime, conflict or conflict resolution in the intervention area (Cilliers et al., 2018).

Studies also demonstrate that stimulating dialogue between groups that are or have been rivals, or between victims and perpetrators, can have unintended and negative side-effects. A study of a project promoting dialogue between students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds in Ethiopia showed that it resulted in a modest improvement in trust of other ethnicities, but at the same time also enhanced the participants' awareness of their own ethnicity as well as their perception of being ethnically discriminated against (Svensson and Brounéus, 2013). In the aforementioned project in Sierra Leone, despite the positive interpersonal effects of the intervention, bringing victims and perpetrators together in a reconciliation process also resulted in lasting psychological damage to the beneficiaries (Cilliers et al., 2018).

In conclusion, bringing together groups with histories of violence can help to promote reconciliation and peaceful cohabitation but the impact is generally modest, may also lead to unintended and adverse side-effects and may aggravate ethnic identification, psychological stress or polarisation. In order to minimise the risk of negative side-effects, dialogues should be led by professional facilitators and be based on a thorough conflict analysis prior to the start of the project.

4.4.3 Fieldwork findings

Our fieldwork indicated that creating space for dialogue between different groups can lead to increased mutual understanding and acceptance of conflict issues, especially at local level. Many participants in conferences and round-table discussions valued these sessions. In several cases, such meetings led to tangible results. Key for the establishment of an effective approach to mitigate traditional conflicts are proper understanding of the local drivers of conflict and an elaborate local network. Furthermore, effectively functioning state institutions are pivotal to maintain and sustain established or new by-laws and agreements. Peace committees cannot therefore be expected to compensate for a lack of state functioning.



Box 11 *Illustration of fieldwork findings – Central Equatoria State, South Sudan*

Two neighbouring communities in South Sudan had been in conflict for some years. The implementing organisation of one project organised consultation meetings with the two rival groups of pastoralists and agriculturalists, mainly to discuss seasonal arrangements pertaining to grazing rights and the use of water points. Subsequently, these groups participated in a peace conference, signed a peace contract and developed by-laws. In the two years after the agreement was signed, no resumption of conflict between these ethnic groups was reported. Minor disputes are now immediately addressed by a council of elders and by peace monitoring committees.

Fieldwork findings suggest that local initiatives that complement fragile state institutions or fill a gap in service provision can generate positive change. Most peace committees primarily contributed to resolving local interpersonal disputes, such as elopement, domestic violence, dowry payments or quarrels between neighbours. Some of them also addressed intercommunal disputes, including issues related to cattle raiding or land and water rights (see box 9). These peace committees often had no formal relationship with the local government, and were tolerated as long as they did not challenge the mandate of state authorities. Moreover, without outside support they had little leverage to address higher-level conflict and insecurity issues, such as the persistence of armed groups or political violence. The effects of these higher-level conflicts can sometimes seriously undermine the mandate of local peace groups. Project documentation, however, seems to overestimate the political role that such committees can play, especially in a context of structural and violent political and ethnic tensions. In many areas, local peace committees mentioned that they did not deal with ‘political’ issues.

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As different implementing organisations established their own committees in the same community, the proliferation of peace committees was encouraged. New committees were regularly set up instead of building on already existing structures or revitalising inactive committees. In various instances, these newly created structures worked in parallel with existing ones, with hardly any interaction or knowledge sharing, let alone coordination. The case study findings contain many examples in which the same people were members of different committees organised by different NGOs.

In many cases, project reports did not paint a realistic picture about the sustainability of the newly created peace committees. In South Sudan, for example, one project established community security groups comprising chiefs, youth, women, policemen and local authorities. Their aim was to bring law enforcement agencies and the community closer together to solve local conflicts, crimes and security issues. According to the final evaluation, all groups were entirely self-managed, addressed local conflicts effectively and did not require additional support. However, during fieldwork, IOB’s evaluators found that most of these community groups no longer existed. This is attributable partly to the eruption of violent conflict in the area and partly to the fact that in the more stable areas the community structures were no longer operating. This finding from South Sudan was not unique: in all three countries, most newly created community peace groups became less active or entirely inactive after programme implementation ended.

The voluntary nature of the committees is an important obstacle for their sustainability, as many of them meet less regularly or stop functioning altogether once NGO funds are no longer provided by the NGOs. Regular monitoring and logistical and financial support from implementing agencies are often critical for the functioning of these committees. To improve sustainability, some projects have started to link the peace committees with income-generating activities, in the hope that improving their economic status may reduce their dependency and vulnerability. However, this shift of focus towards income-generating activities has undermined their legitimacy as actors in conflict resolution. For example, in Burundi, people now sometimes refer to members of peace committees as ‘*muceza madiri*’, literally: ‘those who make deals’, i.e. those who take advantage of projects to advance their own interests.



4.5 Peace training and civic education

4.5.1 Activity description and intervention logic

Most projects included various civic education programmes and peace trainings intended to change beliefs, values and social norms in order to promote solidarity. Their content ranged from courses on democratisation, formal (national) justice mechanisms and property or family law, to subjects such as communal dispute resolution or trainings on negotiation, non-violent communication, gender relations or environmental issues. A project in South Sudan informed beneficiaries about the mandate of local government, in order to improve the relationship between communities and the police. Another project conducted rights awareness-raising sessions for thousands of women in Afghanistan. In Somaliland, sensitisation meetings and awareness-raising drama performances were organised about charcoal production, land degradation and deforestation. Some projects provided these trainings in combination with other interventions, such as income-generating activities or savings groups. Others provided these trainings as standalone interventions for community members. Projects generally focused on community members but also trained local administrators, traditional leaders and police officers.

This evaluation analysed the following assumptions that underlie peace trainings and civic education programmes:

- Training and awareness raising can positively affect the behaviour of trainees, enhance social cohesion and reduce violence;
- Curricula relate to local conflict dynamics and are tailor-made;
- The effects of peace trainings are sustainable;
- These trainings have a spill-over effect to the wider community.

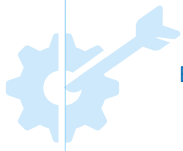
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4.5.2 Evidence base

The effectiveness of peace training in post-conflict countries is rather mixed and depends largely on the context and the quality of the intervention. In the short term, peace training appears to contribute to conflict resolution. Studies of eight-day workshops on dispute resolution and human rights training provided by the UNHCR and Justice and Peace Committee (JPC) Community Empowerment Programme in Liberia randomly to residents of 86 of 246 towns found that in these 86 towns, non-violent resolution of land conflicts increased significantly in comparison to the control towns in which no trainings were held (Blattman et al., 2011; 2014). These positive effects were sustained over a longer period. Three years after the intervention, another study found that although there was no effect of the intervention on the number of land, business or interpersonal disputes, violence associated with these disputes decreased significantly (Hartman et al. 2018). Engaging community leaders in such processes is important. A study of a training project in Zimbabwe consisting of two three-day modules on best practices in conflict management techniques found a positive effect if not only the village chief but also other change agents such as teachers, religious leaders or women group leaders were involved in the training (Baldwin and Muyengwa, 2014).

Across the various studies, however, effect sizes are relatively modest and it is unlikely that the effects of civic education programmes alone will sustainably trickle up beyond the individual or the group level. A study of a project in Liberia that focused on ex-combatants indicated that the effects of civil education increase when combined with other support. Impact analysis showed that in the short term, therapy and cash reduced participants' antisocial behaviour. When the participants received only therapy, the effects did not last (Blattman et al., 2016).

Civic education and peace training may also have unintended consequences. There are initial indications that the effects of peace trainings are unequally distributed because informal institutions might favour the well-connected. In the UNHCR and JPC project, the well-off and politically connected experienced increased feelings of security, while the poor felt slightly less secure (Hartman et al., 2018). In addition, a rise in extrajudicial punishments and non-violent disagreements emerged, for example between youth and elders (Blattman et al., 2011; 2014). This finding corresponds with results from the study in Zimbabwe, which demonstrated that social tension increased among different community leaders and representatives (Baldwin and Muyengwa, 2014).



4.5.3 Fieldwork findings

Peace trainings were assumed to lead to a transfer of knowledge that would have a sustainable impact on the way in which people behave and interact with each other. Many of the peace trainings, however, were one-off events of one or a few days, without adequate follow-up. Project documentation did not provide information beyond the number of individuals trained and does not present clear evidence about the effects of the trainings. Final reports and external project evaluations assumed these trainings have lasting effects without actually measuring their impact. Because of the shortcomings of the data available, this evaluation could not properly assess whether trainings increased trust, peaceful conflict resolution or knowledge about justice and the rule of law.

Some initial indications from our fieldwork suggest that the results of peace trainings might be mixed at best. Various trainees mentioned that they had benefitted from the trainings on conflict resolution and that they used their acquired knowledge in practice. In Burundi, for example, several trainees have acted as peace brokers in conflict resolution. In other cases, trained beneficiaries were initially quite positive about the training received. These responses might have been socially desirable, however, because trainees could often not recall *the contents* of the training nor could they indicate which specific skills they had practised in the training sessions.

Sometimes trainings were not given in the local language and the curriculum did not match the participants' knowledge base. Furthermore, community members who had followed similar courses on conflict resolution sometimes exhibited training fatigue. Finally, the effects of peace trainings were influenced by external factors. These included high turnover rates among project staff and the fact that trained individuals moved to different functions and locations and were replaced by people who had not received any training. A case in point is the training of local councillors in a selected number of counties in South Sudan on decentralisation and governance, as after the creation of 28 new states in 2015, many were reassigned to different counties.

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4.6 Stimulating local participation in community development

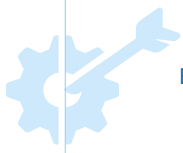
4.6.1 Activity description and intervention logic

Interventions that aim to actively engage the local population in the implementation of community development projects became popular in the 1990s, including in many post-conflict countries. This continues to be the case. Most projects in the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes stimulated collective action and community participation by actively involving local groups in project implementation, albeit to different extents.²⁶ Some organisations supported and trained existing community development committees, whereas others formed committees to manage and maintain concrete outputs, such as dams. In some cases, a 'Community Score Card system' was introduced, for users and service providers to jointly analyse the progress of project implementation. By encouraging communication and collaboration between community members, participatory initiatives aim to enhance trust and social capital at the local level.

This evaluation looked at the following assumptions underlying activities that promote community participation:

- Mobilising community members in project implementation increases community ownership and empowerment.
- Community participation reinforces bottom-up planning, local monitoring and longer-term sustainability of interventions.
- Active community participation contributes to more inclusive governance and enhanced social capital.

²⁶ There is some overlap with sections 4.4 - creating peace committees and spaces for dialogue - and 4.5 - peace training and civic education.



4.6.2 Evidence base

Participatory planning is often an organic process, effective precisely because it has arisen bottom-up. Many aid projects in post-conflict settings aimed to mobilise communities with the intent of empowering them. This is sometimes referred to as *induced participation*, as it is promoted by external actors. The main question, though, is whether effective and sustainable participation *can* be induced at all. One review of 500 empirical studies found little evidence that induced participation builds long-lasting social cohesion or enhances trust between groups (Mansuri and Rao, 2012). These interventions are specifically difficult in post-conflict settings with weak formal institutions. Participatory interventions work best when supported by a responsive state. Benefits of programmes are generally unevenly distributed. Usually, project participants are on average wealthier, better educated and politically better connected than non-participants, which results in the interests and preferences of the poor being totally ignored. The non-poor also appear to benefit more from the construction of local infrastructure in so-called community-driven projects (Mansuri and Rao, 2012).

Other studies and reviews of participatory interventions similarly point at disappointing social results. A systematic review of 17 high-quality impact evaluations of community-driven development projects did not find positive effects on the social capital of beneficiaries (Wong, 2012). In addition, the review did not show effects on conflict reduction or enhanced governance. More recent impact studies in Sudan (Avdeenko and Gilligan, 2015), the DRC (Humphreys et al., 2012), Sierra Leone (Casey et al., 2013) and Afghanistan (Beath et al., 2015) also found comparable interventions had no effect on social capital, governance or conflict reduction.

4.6.3 Fieldwork findings

Broadly in line with the literature, IOB's fieldwork resulted in the conclusion that stimulating community participation was often not sustainable beyond the lifespan of project activities. Without able and willing local or national governments that continue supporting participatory approaches at local level, results cannot be sustained. Different NGOs established numerous local development committees in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Burundi, but during our fieldwork we observed that hardly any of these structures were still active.

Box 12 *Illustration of fieldwork findings - Burundi*

In Burundi, two projects adopted an approach for scoring the services provided by the government, including health, justice and security. This included a process in which communities and government actors jointly assessed, planned, monitored and evaluated the services provided. In one project, the achievement of targets resulted in financial incentives that could be used to further improve service provision. For example, a police station was refurbished with glass windows and a court was provided with computers. In some of the communities where this approach was implemented, it resulted in a noticeable improvement of services to the population. After the project ended, however, action plans were no longer updated and meetings no longer held, and the government was unable to fill the gap left by the departed NGO.

Another project in Burundi stimulated local youth committees to identify micro projects aiming to: (1) increase access to social services; and simultaneously (2) promote social cohesion. In the end, seven of the 40 proposed micro projects were funded. The poorer segment of the community benefitted from these small projects (making bricks and building shelters). However, case studies could only find some anecdotal evidence of a connection between these micro projects and enhanced social cohesion at the local level.



4.7 Building public infrastructure

4.7.1 Activity description and intervention logic

Some NGOs constructed or rehabilitated a range of infrastructural works such as marketplaces, slaughterhouses or community centres. In IOB's fieldwork sample, three projects in Ethiopia were involved in constructing or rehabilitating dams, ponds or boreholes in order to directly enhance the resilience of pastoral and agro-pastoral communities. Lack of access to water was a major problem for these communities in Ethiopia. The situation had been exacerbated in recent years as a result of recurrent droughts. By building or rehabilitating water points, these projects aimed to improve the food and water security of the beneficiaries and their animals and to address causes of conflict between different groups relating to scarce water points and land.

The research team formulated and tested the following critical assumptions:

- The infrastructure facilities are in line with the needs of the local population;
- Facilities have been well constructed and are functioning properly;
- Committees have been trained to operate and maintain the facilities;
- Constructed and rehabilitated water points and facilities are aligned with government initiatives and are responsibly handed over after project completion.

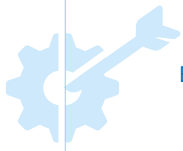
4.7.2 Evidence base

There is broad consensus, both in micro- and macro-economic literature, that under the right conditions, infrastructure development can play an important role in promoting economic growth and poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa (Calderón and Servén, 2010; 2014). In line with IOB's fieldwork, this section focusses mainly on the effects of constructing or rehabilitating water infrastructure projects that are especially important in environmentally vulnerable areas, such as the Somali and Oromia regions in Ethiopia. There is a direct link between the environment and poverty ratios in sub-Saharan Africa (Heger et al., 2018). Furthermore, empirical evidence shows that investments in water infrastructure can enhance agricultural productivity and contribute to poverty reduction (Knox et al., 2013). Returns on investment in water infrastructure and water institutions are S-curved, meaning that to reap the beneficial effects of investments in water infrastructure, the infrastructure and the functioning institutions must exceed a certain threshold. Below that threshold, societies remain vulnerable to water-related shocks and the effects of investments remain marginal and, thus, large investments are necessary to achieve positive effects (Grey and Sadoff, 2007).

Empirical research has shown that environmental factors have an effect on political and social unrest and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa (particularly in rural areas) (Hendrix and Salehyan, 2012; Raleigh and Kniveton, 2012). Conflicts between pastoralist communities in East Africa are partly attributable to by scarcity of water or deviations in rainfall patterns (Ayana et al., 2016; O'Loughlin et al., 2012). Thus, if investments in water infrastructure enhance the resilience of rural pastoral communities against environmental shocks, interventions could contribute to the reduction of conflict.

4.7.3 Fieldwork findings

Our observations in the field indicate that most of the rehabilitated or constructed infrastructural works were no longer in use. Major impediments encountered were the low quality of construction material and the failure to adequately consult the local population beforehand. Fieldwork further showed that a crucial factor for success was the level of involvement of national or local government, both in planning the infrastructure works and in taking over responsibility for its operation, management and maintenance after the project ended. In several cases, the government did not have enough capacity to properly sustain the facilities.



Box 13 Illustration of fieldwork findings – Ethiopia

Three projects constructed and rehabilitated several water points in Ethiopia. Of the 20 water points visited during fieldwork for this evaluation (including ponds, dams and boreholes), only four ponds were still fully functional; the other 16 were no longer in use or only partially functional. Observations from the fieldwork raised concern about the quality of construction. Some of the reasons for non-functioning water points were:

- Pumping systems were either absent or had broken down and had not been repaired or replaced. As a result, water could not be (re)directed to the constructed water reservoirs or to the animal troughs, which were left empty and unused (see photo 4). Humans and animals had no other option but to use the water directly from the ponds, negatively affecting water quality and posing health risks.
- Supply-driven construction, limited community ownership and bottom-up planning, and poor quality of material. The earth dam in Lafta Galol kebele broke early 2018 (see photo 5). Building this dam was the largest activity in one of the projects. Its breaching directly affected the land and livelihood of the surrounding households. The local population indicated that they had not been properly consulted throughout the process. Influenced by the local government, the dam constructed was larger than originally planned. The construction material was of low quality and, hence, not durable.
- Lack of proper institutional follow-up. In 2015, in Oromia, southern Ethiopia, the implementing organisation transferred the management of two ponds to the zonal water office. Members of the water committee stated that the subsequent follow-up and support from the zonal water office was insufficient. As a result, one pond was no longer functional due to problems with the pump system; the other pond remained functional, albeit facing some technical issues.

Photos 4 and 5 Left: unused animal trough in Gobyere kebele, Somali Region, Ethiopia; right: Earth dam break in Lafta Galol kebele.





5. Programme findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the most important findings at programme level for the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes. Paragraph 5.2 reflects on the quality of M&E in the Reconstruction and SPCC programme. Paragraph 5.3 discusses the results at output and outcome levels. Paragraphs 5.4 to 5.6 look at factors that limited impact. The policy and tender requirements as discussed in chapters 2 and 3 had a strong influence on these factors, indicating that significant improvements can be made. Paragraph 5.7 assesses how these programmes were managed by DSH.

The central message in this chapter is that the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes produced a thinly spread portfolio of small and often unsustainable activities that in most cases were unable to effectively address the complex and volatile situations on the ground. Centrally formulated ToCs at the programme level and standardised indicators led to paper realities and undermined programme effectiveness.



The main findings in this chapter can be summarised as follows:

- The Reconstruction and SPCC programmes attained positive results at the output level. For example, a large number of beneficiaries were trained in peace concepts and many peace committees were established.
- The NGOs involved are increasingly investing in monitoring results and learning. Although external evaluations were not mandatory for the Reconstruction programme, 20 of the 29 projects commissioned them. All projects in the SPCC programme conducted an evaluation.
- The quality of such evaluations, however, can be improved. In most of the studies valid baseline information was lacking and indicators were poorly operationalised. Results presented in the evaluations were not based on a valid analysis beyond the output level. In fact, reports often present results more positively than actually warranted.
- Most activities did not have follow-up arrangements and NGOs rarely tracked results after the actual implementation period.
- Results at the output level did not always translate into positive and sustainable results at the outcome level. When positive outcomes were achieved, this was often at the individual level or sometimes at the community level, but these effects rarely ‘trickled up’.
- There is a large gap between the ambitious policy objectives of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes on paper and the modest scale of the interventions in reality; this negatively affected the programmes in terms of achieving the intended outcomes. The limited budgets and time frames per activity proved to be additional obstacles for sustaining impact.
- Another factor that limited the results at outcome level was the high level of fragmentation. Fragmentation occurred within the programmes – DSH spread resources between a large number of NGOs, projects and countries – and within countries and projects as NGOs divided resources across geographic areas and between multiple local implementing partners. Relatively small activities in fragile areas with poor infrastructure can hardly generate impact if they are not embedded in an integrated approach with mutually supportive activities.
- Adopting ambitious policy objectives and fostering competition for limited funds through tender procedures contributed to a disconnect between paper and practice. In addition, projects were implemented through a contracting chain, in which DSH contracted (inter) national NGOs, which subcontracted various implementing and local partners. These contracting chains stimulated upward accountability, inflating results on standardised indicators at the cost of downward accountability and alignment with local needs and context.
- Compared with the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes, the ARC programme significantly improved DSH’s engagement with implementing organisations and embassies. However, after the inception phase, central management and monitoring was downscaled without ensuring decentralised ownership. As a result, strategic discussions about the implementation phase of the programme were virtually absent after the projects had started: the focus was to report on predefined indicators.

5.2 Substandard monitoring and evaluation

Impact evaluations are not common in conflict or post-conflict countries. In these circumstances, ethical dilemmas and operational difficulties of identifying comparison groups often emerge. It is possible to address these issues properly, however (Gaarder and Annan, 2013; Puri et al., 2015; 2017). In recent years, practitioners and evaluators have increasingly embraced impact evaluations as a tool for testing and substantiating assumptions, including in fragile settings.

For projects financed through the Reconstruction programme, DSH did not require an external evaluation. Nevertheless, 20 out of 29 projects did perform an external evaluation. All (seven) SPCC projects were externally evaluated.



The NGOs involved did not integrate M&E in their project design from the outset. DSH made few stipulations with regard to monitoring and evaluation. As M&E standards were only developed *during* project implementation, the quality of the M&E was negatively affected:

- Most projects were designed for and implemented in multiple countries and in multiple regions. Formulated project proposals and log frames were often not country-specific: for example, one project intended to strengthen civil society in three separate countries by simultaneously implementing the same activities, such as media campaigns and training government staff. None of the NGOs implementing the projects had formulated tailor-made ToC for interventions in specific countries or geographic areas. Causal pathways and assumptions were not rooted in the context in which activities were implemented. Several NGOs did not report separately on results for different countries or geographic areas but simply used the same logical framework. This uniform approach did not do justice to the enormous variety in economic and political conditions, environmental hazards and conflict dynamics between countries and between different regions within countries.
- Of all 36 projects, only two proper baseline studies were carried out that actually collected information about project indicators. Most baseline studies were in reality needs assessment exercises (see annex 4).²⁷
- None of the implementing NGOs identified control groups or reflected on the decision not to do so. Identifying control groups would in some cases, have allowed the evaluators to attribute observed changes to the interventions more validly (see annex 4).
- None of the project evaluations based their result chains on tested assumptions. The assumptions underlying activities were not soundly backed up by referring to the literature or scientific evidence. Final reports often presented concrete outputs and assumed that corresponding results would then be achieved at the outcome level. For example, one project provided sensitisation campaigns to 500,000 people. Without substantiating how or how much the campaigns contributed to this, the final report claimed that accomplishments of the project were reduced levels of election violence in three countries and effective courts that contested election results in two countries.
- Project evaluations often presented anecdotal evidence or personal quotes to support the narrative but generally lacked a systematic analysis. Data from internal monitoring reports was often directly used in external evaluations without critically examining its quality. Many evaluations used only a few key informant interviews with implementing staff and/or focus groups with beneficiaries but did not elaborate on respondent sampling techniques and/or had small sample sizes (see annex 4). In some cases, respondents for the external evaluation were directly selected by the implementing agency, which introduced the risk of selection bias.
- Many of the progress reports and evaluations relied partially or entirely on self-reported data (see annex 4). The researchers asked beneficiaries if they thought that their knowledge, competencies or income had improved as a result of the intervention. Self-reported data about sensitive topics may be subject to social desirability bias and systematically inflate estimates about project effectiveness (Grimm, 2010).

Across the board, the quality of end evaluations can be improved: the results presented were not very reliable beyond the output level.²⁸ In various cases, IOB observed a disparity between the results as reported on paper and the actual results observed during the fieldwork. Deviations ranged from acceptable forms of biased presentation, to artificial framing of results and fabricated results. Examples include:

- Target groups identified in project documentation did not necessarily correspond with the actual project beneficiaries on the ground. Rather than explicitly targeting vulnerable groups, vocational training and savings groups often involved people who already had some business experience or were not the poorest of the poor;
- Several reports mentioned the number of 'jobs created' as a result of the project activities. In practice, these were not structural jobs but concerned the creation of temporary/seasonal employment. It was also not evident whether jobs had indeed been newly created or whether people who already had a job were further supported;

²⁷ In some cases, these baseline studies were conducted prior to identifying the exact geographic location for project implementation.

²⁸ Annex 4 presents the characteristics of the final evaluations.



- Some reports presented their project activities on the ground in an unwarrantedly positive light. One report, for example, stated that a number of ‘legal aid clinics’ had been established by a project, while in reality the NGO staff had only provided legal aid, without setting up clinics that would provide services after project finalisation;
- On multiple occasions, representatives from beneficiary communities made claims contradicting M&E reports. In one example, project documentation and the local project coordinator claimed that rangeland development and bush clearing had been a project activity, while members of the local community indicated that there had been no external support at all and that these activities were actually a community initiative;
- Irregularities were identified only in exceptional cases. In one case, a borehole that had been reported could not be located during fieldwork. In another case, project evaluations for two separately funded projects implemented in the same area presented identical results (borehole, inter- and intra-community dialogues, conflict resolution training).

5.3 Output results positive, outcome results limited

The basic approach of most projects was to create conditions for reconciliation between conflicting communities (e.g. agriculturalist and pastoralist communities), promote security at the village level, work on socio-economic development from the bottom up, and provide essential means to improve basic services. This approach aimed to contribute to pockets of relative peace and stability. Findings from IOB’s case studies indicate that both the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes brought about positive results at the output level. The most notable output results are that the programmes:

- Trained large numbers of beneficiaries (at both community and local government level) on conflict resolution;
- Facilitated and supported local peace agreements and developed by-laws (i.e. on cattle movements or dowry payments);
- Established and supported various community-based peace committees;
- Organised meetings (sometimes cross-border) and created platforms for peace dialogue;
- Provided technical and vocational training for youth, men and women;
- Trained beneficiaries in business skills and entrepreneurship;
- Provided agricultural training, often in combination with the introduction of new farming techniques and the provision of seeds;
- Supported income-generating activities (i.e. provision of beehives, seeds or fishing rods);
- Established savings groups; and
- Constructed or rehabilitated local public infrastructure (i.e. ponds and boreholes).

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Despite these positive results at output level, a key finding of this evaluation is that the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes had only limited effects on beneficiary income and often did not directly address violence and conflict. Outcomes were mostly at the individual and group levels but not at village, regional, subnational or cross-border levels. Furthermore, they were often not sustained beyond the lifetime of the programmes.

Progress in project activities was often frustrated by the broader conflict context and by political developments at the national level. Yet the lack of results at the outcome level cannot be attributed solely to these contextual factors. In practice, the operationalisation of the approach designed by most organisations was often superficial. On paper, projects combined various initiatives, such as local peacebuilding and socio-economic support and service provision, but in practice, activities were often not rolled out simultaneously, or were in different geographic locations or involved different groups of beneficiaries. Paragraphs 5.4 - 5.6 provide more information on the main factors that contributed to the programmes’ limited results at outcome level.



5.4 Ambitious objectives versus limited time, capacity and resources

The policy objectives of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes were broad and ambitious (see chapter 2). When the tender procedure for the Reconstruction programme started in 2011, DSH had not yet developed an explicit ToC for its SRoL policy. Key concepts such as ‘human security’ and ‘peace dividend’ had not been clearly defined and/or delineated. The framework for SPCC adopted similar goals, with minor specifications for two focus regions. The ministry assumed that implementing organisations would translate the global SRoL policy objectives into locally responsive activities.

The tender documents stipulated that participating NGOs had to contribute to the high-level policy goals of the MFA. Tendering spurred competition among NGOs and provided an incentive for these organisations to formulate overly ambitious project objectives in their proposals. Most organisations did not thoroughly operationalise the ministry’s policy objectives (at outcome and impact level) into concrete outputs on the ground.²⁹ Project ambitions and intended outcomes were often not in accordance with limited resources, staff capacity, logistical constraints and project duration or with the security context in which they operated. Within a period of only three to five years, NGOs aspired to change traditional patterns of insecurity and conflict, cultural attitudes and behaviour (e.g. towards cattle raiding and gender inequality) and assumed a lack of self-reliance and disaster preparedness. Even in less complex and less unstable circumstances, these are not realistic aspirations.

Some projects were built on the premise that they would address vulnerability and curb political violence, despite the fact that they generally focused on local issues and did not link their activities to broader political tension, drivers of conflict and higher-level actors. For example, one project in the Great Lakes Region focused on community-driven research and dialogue, aiming to engage regional politicians to contribute to peace. Overall, the project was able to mobilise civil society members and got communities to participate in dialogue, but it failed to include those who were in a position to bring about political change and increase stability. Similarly, another project in the Great Lakes Region that promoted cross-border cooperation resulted in a small increase in cross-border trade but did not engage the government representatives who authorised restrictions on this trade. Often, regional or cross-border initiatives were in practice not very ‘regional’ or ‘cross-border’, but rather involved similar local projects in multiple countries or on either side of a border, but with hardly any links between them.

There was no universal way of calculating beneficiaries, but several organisations inflated the number of intended beneficiaries. Although some proposals mentioned only the number of direct beneficiaries, other proposals included both direct and indirect beneficiaries, assuming that positive effects of the interventions would automatically spill over to family members, neighbours or other people. One project, for example, outlined that it had established around 1,450 self-help groups and supported around 735 existing groups. Assuming that on average, groups consist of 16.5 members and the average household size was 6, the project report estimated that over 200,000 persons had been reached. Some projects inflated the numbers in their proposals by including the entire population in a catchment area (village level or higher) as beneficiaries of infrastructural works or training. For example, one proposal with a total budget of some EUR 5.6 million for four years targeted over one million beneficiaries in Burundi, Rwanda and the DRC: per beneficiary, a budget of less than EUR 1.5 per year to achieve the project’s aims to increase beneficiaries’ livelihoods, reduce poverty among beneficiaries and enhance beneficiaries’ capacities to resolve conflicts peacefully.

Across the board, budgets per beneficiary were small or derisory, including for direct beneficiaries. For example, budgets to increase livelihoods and economic opportunities through the provision of start-up capital, income-generating activities or agricultural inputs rarely exceeded EUR 50 per beneficiary per year, which is only a fraction of per capita income, even for the poorest of the poor. This does not automatically mean that these activities were not effective. After all, investments in the diversification of means of production might have a multiplier effect and raise income structurally. However, these small budgets per beneficiary are not proportionate to the higher-level objectives as presented in the project proposals.

²⁹ On paper, this improved for the ARC programme: the steps from activities towards contributions of policy objectives and the assumptions underlying these steps have been made explicit. In dialogue with the embassies, project ToCs have been developed to place activities within the local context and relate them to country-specific policy objectives of the ministry.



In paragraph 5.4 it was concluded that the programme budgets were spread out over many different locations and were too small to have a sustainable impact on the often large target groups. Fragmentation was a serious impediment to effective programme implementation and led to duplication of activities, and lack of coordination and cooperation between the organisations involved. Fragmentation of funds and activities took place at different levels:

The tender documents of the Reconstruction programme stipulated that participating NGOs focus on at least two countries or on South Sudan alone. The SPCC programme focused on a number of countries in two broad regions. As a result, 17 out of 36 projects from the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes were executed in three countries or more. The total expenditure of both programmes amounted to roughly EUR 154 million, which was spread out over 24 countries. Extreme examples include an NGO that was awarded less than EUR 3 million for a proposal focussing on seven countries and another NGO that could spend less than EUR 1 million in five countries. Figure 2 graphically presents the distribution of funds of both programmes by country and separates the budgets per project. It reveals that the large majority of funds was spent in a few countries only: about two-thirds of all funds was spent in six countries (South Sudan, Burundi, DRC, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Pakistan), while the remaining third was spread out over 18 countries. In six individual countries, the only contribution of the SPCC and Reconstruction programmes was a small part of a single project (see figure 2).

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The ARC programme reduced fragmentation between countries: the programme budget of EUR 126 million was divided over 21 projects in 12 countries. As a result, the average budget per project increased somewhat. At country level, ARC projects were brought in line with the embassies' programme and priorities, limited to specific geographic areas.

Fragmentation within countries

The Reconstruction and SPCC programmes also experienced fragmentation at country level. To start with, there was very little alignment of the programmes with other decentralised programmes, other development partners or local government interventions. In addition, fragmentation also existed within the programmes. In South Sudan, total expenditure of both programmes was about EUR 39 million, allocated through 16 individual projects, with a duration of three to four years (see figure 2). This means that, excluding overhead costs, expenditure per project in South Sudan was on average some EUR 2.4 million.³⁰ In most other countries, the average budget per project was less than this.

Projects in South Sudan often focused on different states, spreading limited resources thinly over various areas in the country.³¹ Sometimes, projects were implemented by several consortium partners that were active in a different geographic areas and used their own thematic approach. Since coordination was often limited, projects were in practice made up of a collection of smaller, relatively isolated activities.

In other cases, DSH contracted different NGOs to undertake identical activities in the same countries, or even within the same subnational areas. For example, seven organisations were involved in eight projects in two relatively small provinces in Burundi. Within the framework of the Reconstruction programme there was often little coordination between the activities of different organisations. For example, two projects in Burundi introduced indicators/score cards in the same communes to measure service provision by state actors but did not coordinate this initiative. In the SPCC and ARC programmes, collaboration between the implementing organisations improved: NGOs increasingly coordinated activities geographically and created opportunities to learn from each other's approaches. The role of the embassy in managing the coordination of activities between organisations involved was not institutionalised, however, and therefore varied substantially from country to country.

In the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes, implementing organisations often worked through contracting chains: DSH contracted NGOs, which subcontracted other implementing organisations and local CSOs. This contributed to a lack of oversight at all levels. In the Reconstruction programme, (inter) national NGOs often submitted project proposals without actively involving local counterparts. Consequently, the intervention logic was often not finetuned to the local context and the capabilities and interests of local government or other local organisations. Instead, NGOs used largely standardised approaches, irrespective of the intervention area. During implementation, local NGO partners struggled to adjust project designs to the needs on the ground. Interventions would have been more effective and results more sustainable if they had been planned bottom-up and used a participatory approach. This improved in the ARC programme: the implementing organisations carried out needs assessments prior to formulating the final project designs and the local implementing partners were also more actively involved in project design than they had been in the Reconstruction programme. The ARC programme has promoted a collaborative process with input from the ministry (both DSH and embassies), the implementing NGO, consortium partners and local CSOs (see also section 3.4).

³⁰ In total, there were 39 (out of 99) project contributions to individual countries that in three or four years did not exceed EUR 1 million. In Kenya, five projects were implemented in four years and total expenditure was EUR 3.7 million, which is roughly EUR 0.7 million per project, or EUR 0.2 million per project per year.

³¹ For example, one project in South Sudan divided EUR 4 million among five organisations in four regions.



In practice, working with other NGOs in consortia or working with local partners did not always contribute to coherent or comprehensive project implementation. In the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes, the information flow in the contracting chain was largely aimed at upward reporting on standardised indicators. With upward accountability affecting each link in the contract chain, there was a tendency to report results positively (see also section 5.2). At the same time, there was little investment in downward accountability; local implementing parties were often hardly informed about the broader projects they were working in. In several instances, local implementers were unaware of the project's context or duration, with the result that CSO partners often worked in relative isolation, both from other NGOs in the same region and from their own contracting chain, which led to a proliferation of small and uncoordinated activities. The lack of oversight regarding progress and constraints in implementing activities created a risk for irregularities.

5.6 Limited sustainability of programme results

Implementing organisations commissioned project evaluations while they were still completing projects, or shortly afterwards, which made it difficult to present evidence on the sustainability of interventions. Most organisations did not track the durability of results beyond project termination and were therefore unable to assess the sustainability of the project's results. This evaluation found that programme results systemically lacked sustainability. In many cases, results achieved dissipated rapidly after the individual projects had ended. Although this was partially due to unstable political and security contexts, there was also a tendency to overestimate the impact and sustainability of results. Project designs had often not been adjusted to take account of changed circumstances and many activities lacked a viable exit strategy.³²

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Photo 6 *Unused and deteriorating shack built for local government and disaster risk reduction committee, Megado kebele, Ethiopia.*



³² In the ARC programme, all project documents describe the necessary conditions and approaches the implementing organisations will use in order to safeguard the sustainability of interventions.



Project activities mostly included training and setting up local committees in order to institutionalise intended activities related to disaster risk reduction, income generation or conflict resolution. Knowledge gained in trainings was assumed to have a sustainable impact even if these trainings were one-off events and lacked proper follow-up. Generally, there was no clear evidence of the impact of skills training or vocational training. In the case of the establishing of local committees aimed at promoting peace and development, an implicit assumption was that they would continue after support terminated and that they would sustain achieved results. In practice, many of the community groups that were established have since ceased functioning. Some NGOs, however, were able to find alternative funding to continue or follow-up on their activities. New rounds of tenders pushed these organisations to work in different locations, set up new activities or make a shift in thematic specialisation. There were shifts in the priority geographic areas of the Reconstruction, SPCC and ARC programmes. The Netherlands is no exception to a general rule that donors employ relatively short funding cycles and require that activities are ‘new’: they tend to be less willing to continue with existing activities. This forces NGOs to go for new locations and to propose new types of activities, sometimes even in sectors they were not previously engaged in. In other cases, NGOs themselves decided to shift their attention to different geographic or thematic areas. The overall sustainability of programme results was thus affected by the ministry’s policy choices as well as by NGOs’ internal decisions and policy shifts.

Sometimes, implementing organisations handed over activities to beneficiaries, CSO partners or local government agencies. In most case studies, local government entities had limited capacity and resources to continue to implement the activities long term. One project in South Sudan, for example, constructed a slaughterhouse and livestock auction market, which were handed over to the local government in 2015. The authorities started to levy taxes for the use of the sites, but did not use the income for the maintenance of the slaughterhouse and market. As a result, cattle traders and butchers no longer use these facilities and they are now abandoned and dilapidated (see photos 7 and 8).

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Photos 7 and 8 *Left: abandoned slaughterhouse; right: abandoned livestock auction market, both in Muni Payam, Central Equatoria, South Sudan.*





5.7 Project management

Overall, NGOs were positive about DSH as a donor. Organisations generally characterised DSH as flexible, open to discussion and willing to accommodate adjustments when necessary. However, DSH's relationships with NGOs varied substantially, and the level of monitoring and management support depended on individual staff. Relationships were often not institutionalised. Across the board, the high turnover of staff did not facilitate the establishment of mutually supportive relationships throughout the implementation chain (at the DSH, NGO and local implementation levels). During implementation of the Reconstruction programme, four or five different contact persons in DSH were no exception, which negatively affected the quality of support, management control and monitoring. Newly appointed contact persons have to re-establish relationship, and are disinclined to adjust agreements made by their predecessors. Moreover, monitoring these complex programmes was delegated to a relatively small number of staff.

The engagement of the respective embassies with Reconstruction and SPCC projects varied greatly. Again, on both the embassy and NGO sides the relationship depended largely on individuals; cooperation was not formalised and was often absent. Embassies and DSH put in insufficient effort to promote coherence between centrally funded programmes and projects funded by embassies. Better coordination would have stimulated synergies across different projects, ensured continuity, better monitoring and flexibility in responding to changing realities on the ground. In addition, individual projects could have benefitted from diplomatic and lobbying efforts, as embassies can play a role in connecting local projects to regional and national development opportunities. Embassies could also have facilitated learning and collaboration between the NGOs themselves and with other relevant actors.

A key objective of the SPCC programme was to move from a traditional donor-implementer relationship towards a new form of partnership. Yet DSH's efforts to establish and use these strategic partnerships were insufficient. The operationalisation of the partner relationships with and among organisations was mainly left to the embassies, which received little guidance or operational support from DSH. At best, the role of the embassies in nurturing and facilitating these partnerships was mixed. Throughout the process, strategic exchange of information and cooperation between implementing partners and the MFA (headquarters and embassies) remained limited. However, the SPCC programme did spur cooperation among some implementing NGOs.

The ARC programme has explicitly aimed to address some of the abovementioned shortcomings of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes, with the result that embassies have been engaged more actively with the design and implementation of the programme from the outset. NGOs formulated project proposals in close collaboration with DSH and embassies. While relatively complex and time-consuming, all stakeholders considered this a positive and productive process which helped to align expectations and objectives. The process also raised expectations among the implementing organisations about a more hands-on approach to monitoring and support, and a more intensive dialogue on strategy and project implementation. After the projects started, however, DSH sharply reduced the amount of FTE allocated to managing the 21 ARC projects. As a result, DSH has not been optimally engaged with monitoring progress and local developments. The primary focus has shifted towards reporting.

The embassies in the ARC programme countries have been expected to follow up on operational and practical issues, yet in reality, this has hardly materialised. Interviews revealed that embassy staff generally did not feel responsible for managing centrally funded projects and had requested DSH to take the lead in programme management. Downscaling central management and monitoring without fully decentralised ownership of ARC projects has led to limited oversight and a lack of management control on progress, constraints and expected results. This has brought the risk of institutionalising ineffective working relations between NGO partners, embassies and DSH.



The comprehensive inception phase of the ARC programme helped to link general policy objectives with local activities (see section 3.4). However, discrepancies have remained between the wider policy objectives of the MFA focussing on outcome and impact levels, and the ability of NGOs to deliver these primarily through output level results. Particularly problematic in this regard have been plans to incorporate outcome indicators in the MFA fiscal budget and to report progress annually. By definition, the sphere of influence of NGOs concerning outcomes is limited and positive changes often require longer-term involvement and well thought-out locally embedded interventions. IOB believes that reporting at this level at relatively short intervals - particularly with quantitative indicators - should be approached with caution, especially in fragile contexts. For example, the ambition to report on a yearly basis on targets such as 'reduced willingness of people to migrate', and the demand made of NGOs to show how they contribute to this objective bring risks of failure, biased reporting and paper realities.

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Annexes

Annex 1 Reconstruction programme projects awarded funding and the disparity between requested and allocated budgets

Project name	Implementing organisation	Requested budget (in EUR)	Awarded budget (in EUR)	% of requested
Foundation for peace	CARE NL	9,953,077	7,602,035	76
Peace under construction	CARE NL	9,803,942	7,102,905	72
Warrap reconstruction for peace and human security	World Vision Nederland	5,755,780	3,982,592	69
Beyond borders: a roadmap to peace for the Great Lakes	Oxfam Novib - Burundi / Rwanda / DRC	9,035,039	6,207,879	69
Partnership for peace - communities and governments working together for improved services	International Rescue Committee UK - Af-Pak	8,555,932	5,802,242	68
Strengthening human security through rapid rural job creation in fragile states	Spark	8,699,635	5,824,085	67
South Sudan peace and prosperity promotion programme	Oxfam Novib	6,480,654	4,327,392	67
From fragile to stable: peacebuilding in La Macarena (Colombia) and Alta Vera Paz (Guatemala)	IKV Pax Christi and VNG International	2,441,406	1,602,260	66
Promoting peace and security in Burundi and Rwanda through access to justice and livelihood opportunities	International Rescue Committee UK	7,116,738	4,569,975	64
Hope and recovery on the Ethiopia - South Sudan border	ZOA	4,806,981	3,083,448	64
Empowerment of youth for economic development and peace building in South Sudan and Uganda	Save the Children NL	6,632,721	4,195,613	63
Legitimate and democratic governance as a foundation for human security in South Sudan; capacity building programme for the local councils of Western and Central Equatoria states	AWEPA	9,061,940	5,623,582	62
Increased basic service delivery and socio-economic empowerment of women and youth in Pakistan and Afghanistan	Save the Children NL	5,066,123	3,077,955	61

Project name	Implementing organisation	Requested budget (in EUR)	Awarded budget (in EUR)	% of requested
Promoting human security in Ruzizi Valley	ZOA	9,818,570	5,895,728	60
Land and Water for human security	ZOA	9,978,655	5,976,102	60
Consolidating peacebuilding in the Great Lakes of Africa	The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)	5,544,316	3,280,134	59
A road map to sustainable peace	SOMO	1,690,101	987,195	58
Building peace and promoting human security in post-conflict societies: South Sudan and the Great Lakes	The Centre for conflict resolution	3,389,004	1,954,465	58
Strengthening citizen participation on critical social issues to prevent conflict: Palestinian Territories and the Great Lakes of Africa	Search for Common Ground	9,089,458	5,172,934	57
Semi Pastoralist Conflict Mitigation programme	ZOA	4,268,943	2,417,877	57
Interlinking peacebuilding, decentralisation and development	VNG with IKV and Cordaid	8,195,127	4,575,650	56
Improving the conditions for reconstruction and development in South Sudan, Yemen, Bangladesh and Kenya	Saferworld	9,348,824	5,265,156	56
Restoring the contract	Cordaid	8,025,921	4,353,253	54
Contributing to the development of enabling conditions for vulnerable pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities in border areas of Ethiopia and Somaliland	Oxfam GB	8,498,884	4,523,189	53
Citizens first: improving human security in Afghanistan and Pakistan	Oxfam Novib NL	9,956,618	5,237,848	53
Human Security and Justice in Central America	Hivos	4,580,407	2,385,988	52
Linking civil and political societies; joint efforts for human security	Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)	9,769,000	4,802,184	49
Building protection by empowering people in Latin America	ICCO	8,546,100	4,174,325	49
Pan Africa Programme for community peace recovery and reconciliation	Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development - Community (ACORD)	6,218,080	2,957,646	48

Source: DSH/CU.

Annex 2 SPCC projects awarded funding and their budgets

Implementing organisation	Region	Allocated budget (in EUR)
ZOA	Great Lakes Region	3,750,000
War Child	Great Lakes Region	3,750,000
PAX	Horn of Africa	3,750,000
TEAR	Horn of Africa	3,750,000
Dorcas	Horn of Africa	3,750,000
Netherlands Red Cross	Horn of Africa	3,750,000
Care	Horn of Africa	3,750,000

Source: DSH/CU.

Annex 3 Distribution of the most common project activities

	Savings groups	Business and vocational training	Peace committees and spaces for dialogue	Peace and civic education training	Community participation	Public infrastructure
P01			X	X		
P02	X	X	X	X	X	
P03		X	X	X	X	X
P04			X	X		
P05		X				
P06			X	X	X	
P07	X	X	X	X		X
P08			X	X		
P09		X	X	X		
P10			X	X		
P11		X	X	X	X	
P12	X	X		X	X	
P13		X	X	X		X
P14	X	X	X	X	X	
P15	X	X	X	X	X	
P16			X	X		
P17			X	X	X	X
P18			X	X		
P19	X	X	X	X	X	X
P20	X	X	X	X		
P21	X	X	X	X	X	X
P22	X	X	X	X		
P23		X	X	X		X
P24			X	X		
P25			X	X		
P26			X	X		
P27			X	X		
P28			X	X		
P29			X	X		
P30	X	X	X	X	X	X
P31	X	X	X	X	X	X
P32	X	X	X	X	X	X
P33			X	X		
P34	X	X	X			
P35	X	X	X	X		
P36	X	X	X	X	X	X

Annex 4 Characteristics of project evaluations

Project	Baseline	M&E of entire project		End evaluation		
	Baseline data available	Control group used	Use of self-reported data	Sample size (quantitative survey)	Sample size (qualitative research)	Risk of selection bias
P01	no	no	-	216 + 180 HHs	127	medium
P02	yes	no	yes	459	153	low
P03	no	no	yes	216	3 + 18 FGs	low
P04	no	no	-	-	56	high
P05	no	no	yes	-	61+20 FGs	high
P06	no	no	-	-	-	-
P07	no	no	-	-	-	-
P08	no	no	yes	1.312	448	medium
P09	no	no	-	-	165	high
P10	no	no	-	-	-	-
P11	no	no	yes	-	-	-
P12	no	no	no	-	114	high
P13	no	no	-	5	-	high
P14	no	no	yes	279	468	high
P15	no	no	-	-	444	medium
P16	no	no	yes	-	23 FGs	high
P17	no	no	yes	826	347	medium
P18	no	no	yes	-	-	-
P19	no	no	yes	356 HHs	56	high
P20	no	no	no	2.120	-	high
P21	no	no	yes	-	16	high
P22	no	no	yes	-	31 + 12 FGs	high
P23	no	no	yes	20	168	high
P24	no	no	-	-	14	high
P25	no	no	yes	-	-	-
P26	no	no	yes	-	-	-
P27	no	no	yes	-	434	high
P28	no	no	no	-	-	-
P29	no	no	-	-	-	-
P30	no	no	yes	1.850	26 + 34 FGs	high
P31	yes	no	no	80	9 FGs	medium
P32	no	no	yes	-	101	high
P33	no	no	-	-	11	high
P34	no	no	yes	-	475	high
P35	no	no	-	-	-	high
P36	no	no	yes	-	-	high

Source: respective final evaluations.

NB. HH = household; FG = focus group. Risk of selection bias is authors' estimation.

Annex 5 List of interviewees

Netherlands	
Organisation	Number of individual interviewees
DSH and EFV staff (past and present)	9
Knowledge Platform	2
DJZ	1
BIS	1
AWEPA	1
World Vision	1
ZOA	4
SPARK	2
VNG	3
ACORD	1
Dorcas	1
Saferworld	1
PAX	4
Cordaid	2
Oxfam	4
SOMO	2
CARE	1
Save the Children	2
CCR	1
TEAR	2
NRK	2
IRC	1
War Child	2

South Sudan	
Organisation	Number of individual interviewees
Embassy staff	2
AWEPA	5
ZOA	1
Oxfam	3
ACORD	2
SNCDI	9
SRRC	1
SSPPPP	3
Local government officials	5
SPARK	1
World Vision	1
SSLS	2
Save the Children	3
CARE	2
DOW	1
Cordaid	3
UCDC	1
TOCH	2
Dorcas	4
CEPO	3
HARD	2
VNG	1

<i>Ethiopia</i>	
Organisation	Number of individual interviewees
Embassy staff	3
EKHCDC	3
TEAR	4
Former community facilitators (TEAR)	9
Dorcas	4
ACORD	4
Local government officials	7
Oxfam	5
OWDA	2
HAVOYOCO	2
CDSA	1
Ethiopian Red Cross	4
Wetlands International	2

<i>Burundi</i>	
Organisation	Number of individual interviewees
Embassy staff	3
IRC	3
War Child	3
Cordaid	2
SPARK	2
ZOA	6
Oxfam	2
CARE	3
OAP	2
ACORD	1

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- Photo front: Afghan workers pile bricks to dry at a brick factory on the first day of their brick-making season, in the outskirt of Kabul, Afghanistan, Monday, April 18, 2005. Many of the bricks will be used for the reconstruction of buildings destroyed over two decades of war. (AP Photo/Tomas Munita)
- Photo Synthesis: Ethiopia, Amhara Region, Sekota, May 2016 Rehabilitation of a hand dug water pump, serving many people in the local community with drinking water. (Hollandse Hoogte/Petterik Wiggers)
- Photo chapter 1: Kakuma town, Turkana region, Kenya - Young graduate of carpentry course working in his workshop in Kakuma town near Kakuma refugee camp. (Shutterstock)
- Photo chapter 2: Close up pile of unfinished business documents on office desk. (iStock)
- Photo chapter 3: Businessmen are signing a joint venture agreement to expand business. (Shutterstock)
- Photo chapter 4: Somaliland, northern Somalia, March 2017 Location - on the way to Fadigaab, approximately 10 km away from Garadag pastoralists resettling in the Garadag district after a 60km journey on a truck with their animals. (Hollandse Hoogte/Petterik Wiggers)
- Photo 1: A butcher in southern Ethiopia who opened a shop with a loan from an SHG. (Getahun Tafesse)
- Photo 2: An SHG beneficiary who opened a small shop in Ndava, Cibitoke in Burundi. (René Claude Niyonkuru)
- Photo 3: Income-generating activity in Ethiopia - Beekeeping (Khalid Abdinasir)
- Photo 4: Unused animal trough in Gobyere kebele, Somali Region, Ethiopia. (Khalid Abdinasir)
- Photo 5: Earth dam break in Lafta Galol kebele. (Arjan Schuthof)
- Photo chapter 5: Suggestion box in South Sudan. (iStock)
- Photo 6: Unused and deteriorating shack built for local government and disaster risk reduction committee, Megado kebele, Ethiopia. (Getahun Tafesse)
- Photo 7: Abandoned slaughterhouse in Muni Payam, Central Equatoria, South Sudan. (Lona James Elia)
- Photo 8: Abandoned livestock auction market n Muni Payam, Central Equatoria, South Sudan. (Lona James Elia)

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