

**ICAI follow-up of:
UK aid in a conflict-affected country:
Reducing conflict and fragility in
Somalia**

A summary of ICAI's full follow-up review

June 2018

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Executive summary

ICAI's follow-up review is an important element in the scrutiny process for UK aid. It provides the International Development Committee and the public with an account of how well the government has responded to ICAI's recommendations to improve spending. It is also an opportunity for ICAI to identify issues and challenges facing the UK aid programme now and in the future, which in turn helps to inform subsequent reviews.

This document is a summary which focuses only on the results of our follow up of UK aid in a conflict-affected country: Reducing conflict and fragility in Somalia. The full follow-up report of all our 2016-17 reviews, including overall conclusions from the process and details of our methodology, can be found on our website.

Findings

UK aid in a conflict-affected country: Reducing conflict and fragility in Somalia

ICAI conducted a performance review of the UK aid effort to reduce conflict and fragility in Somalia. This was published in June 2017, shortly after the London conference on Somalia in May 2017. We awarded a green-amber score, concluding that the UK's aid activities were making a positive contribution to state-building and stability in Somalia in extremely challenging circumstances. However, the review also noted that there were several important areas where improvement was required. It made eight recommendations, listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of the government's response to ICAI recommendations

ICAI recommendation	Govt's initial response	Our assessment of progress since then	
		By recommendation	Overall
UK aid in a conflict-affected country: Reducing conflict and fragility in Somalia, June 2017			
Develop a more systematic and shared understanding of the drivers of conflict.	Accept	There is a range of new research and analysis, including a new Joint Analysis of Conflict for Somaliland and a macro-level analysis of conflict risks and conflict drivers for Somalia.	Positive action in some areas, limited progress in others
Promote inclusion and human rights across the portfolio of UK aid to Somalia.	Accept	DFID has begun an initiative to improve inclusion of marginalised groups, but this has not yet led to noticeable changes in practice.	
If programmes are intended to contribute to peace- and stability-related outcomes, this should be built into their objectives.	Partially accept	The refresh of the government's strategy for Somalia has more clearly articulated the connection between some programmes and their objectives, but not across the board.	
Provide sufficient oversight and support to private contractors, and ensure they are accountable to national authorities.	Partially accept	No significant initiatives.	
The CSSF should strengthen its focus on monitoring, evaluation and learning.	Accept	The CSSF has committed to improving its monitoring, evaluation and lesson-learning capabilities for Somalia, but there have been no significant actions yet.	
All CSSF ODA-funded activities should have clear developmental objectives.	Partially accept	Some initiatives to strengthen the focus on ODA eligibility assessment in the design phase and annual review of CSSF programmes, and in the refresh of the government's strategy for Somalia.	
Adopt a more systematic approach to learning on what works in addressing conflict and fragility.	Accept	There is a cluster of new learning initiatives and research on what works, initiated by both DFID and the CSSF and involving cross-government collaboration.	
Greater integration between DFID and the Foreign Office on operations in Somalia.	Accept	Some useful IT improvements and other changes to encourage cross-government working.	

Develop a more systematic and shared understanding of conflict drivers

Some of the programmes assessed in this review were managed by DFID; others were managed by the CSSF and delivered by the FCO. We found divergent understandings of the causes of Somalia's problems among different departments delivering aid in the country, and we recommended that the government "should develop a more systematic and shared understanding of the drivers of conflict and fragility there, to help target aid programmes and ensure that they 'do no harm'".

The government accepted this recommendation in full and responded with substantial improvements. As one stakeholder put it, there has been a "significant cultural change", with the clear acceptance that a deep understanding of conflict drivers is central to the aid effort in Somalia. Since our review, a new, formal Joint Analysis of Conflict for Somaliland, and a macro-level analysis of conflict risks and conflict drivers for Somalia, have been undertaken. Though more progress is needed, these and other recent analyses are likely to support more sensitive programming and to mitigate the risk of doing unintentional harm through UK-funded interventions.

This said, we also noted that the CSSF's Somalia management appears latterly to have developed an overlapping concept of 'political sensitivity', which we were told was intended to capture the effects of UK government actions on local political dynamics and the consequent conflict risks. The lack of clear guidance on the meaning and application of this concept and its relationship to the government's 'do no harm' policy is a concern. A more recent review of the CSSF, published in March 2018 and primarily assessing other CSSF programmes,¹ expressed similar concerns. This review, which did not include Somalia as one of its case studies, found that the CSSF had insufficient safeguards against unintentional harm, and tended to focus more on reputational risks to the UK than harm to local populations when assessing risks. It therefore recommended that "programmes should demonstrate more clearly and carefully how they identify, manage and mitigate risks of doing harm". We will continue our scrutiny of this issue when we conduct our follow-up of the CSSF review next year.

Promote inclusion and human rights across the aid portfolio in Somalia

Our review found that UK aid efforts in Somalia often did not include civil society and local communities in state-building processes, and programmes were missing opportunities to mainstream inclusion, human rights and gender equality. The government addressed only parts of our recommendation to "do more to promote inclusion and human rights across the portfolio of UK aid to Somalia". It has made few concrete commitments on engaging local communities in state-building efforts. The Stabilisation Unit is developing an approach to human rights through DFID's security and justice programming, but this seems to be precautionary, focused more on ensuring that DFID-funded projects do not have a negative impact on human rights, rather than actively aiming at improving human rights conditions. DFID has commissioned a pilot project examining barriers to aid for marginalised groups in Somalia, but this has yet to lead to significant changes in the practices of implementing agencies.²

If programmes are intended to contribute to peace- and stability-related outcomes, this should be built into their objectives

Most DFID humanitarian and economic programmes we looked at claimed to have an impact on peace- and/or state-building, but seldom explained how and why this would happen. This weakness in programme design hampers the monitoring of progress in these areas at outcome level. Our review therefore recommended that "if economic development and humanitarian programmes are also intended to contribute to peace- and stability-related outcomes, this should be specified as part of their objectives and built into their associated delivery plans and monitoring and reporting arrangements".

The government has taken some useful action in response to this recommendation. The refresh of the government's strategy for Somalia has more clearly articulated the overall connection between some programmes and their overriding objectives. DFID teams have addressed these questions more explicitly in annual reviews, in discussions of programme results and in commissioned analyses. We are disappointed,

1. *The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's aid spending: A performance review*, ICAI, 29 March 2018, [link](#).

2. *Somalia Humanitarian Action Support Hub: Ensuring equitable and effective humanitarian support to the most vulnerable, pilot project, final report*, Centre for Humanitarian Change, September 2017, unpublished.

though, that more has not been done to avoid making statements about intended outcomes that are not clearly derived from the work of the programme being described.

Provide sufficient oversight and political support to private contractors

We had been impressed by the contribution made by individual private sector delivery partners but noted that some seemed not to receive the support they need to engage effectively with the UK's Somali counterparts. We were also concerned that opportunities were missed for delivery partners to collaborate, learn lessons and avoid duplication or working at cross-purposes. The review therefore recommended that DFID and the CSSF should ensure that they provide sufficient oversight and political support to their private contractors, and agree with their counterpart government authorities' memoranda of understanding to provide a clear framework of accountability.

The government only partially accepted this recommendation, choosing to focus on the question of formal memoranda of understanding (which it said it would consider on a case-by-case basis) rather than the broader issue of addressing the challenges of the remote management of delivery partners in volatile settings. The government pointed to the implementation of the new partnership for Somalia, agreed at the London conference, which provides the overall framework for engagement between the Somali government and donor partners. It also noted that it is in the process of signing project implementation agreements with the relevant federal member state authorities for the second phase of the UK's Public Resource Management (PREMIS) programme.

'One HMG' integration of DFID and FCO operations in Somalia

DFID and CSSF programmes in Somalia are managed from different offices and with separate budgets, management systems and staffing arrangements. Our review therefore recommended that DFID and the FCO should explore opportunities for greater integration of working space, programme management systems, documentation and terms and conditions of tenure. The government has since made some useful IT-related improvements, making cross-governmental teamwork easier. There is also evidence of efforts to ease cross-team working through virtual teams and cross-government policy discussions in a number of forums. The DFID and CSSF Somalia teams have also chosen to share adjacent office space to foster better collaboration and coordination.

CSSF programmes: ODA eligibility and monitoring and evaluation

Recommendations 5 and 6 of the Somalia review were concerned with how the CSSF designs and develops ODA-funded projects. Our recommendation to improve monitoring and evaluation was accepted by the CSSF, which committed to "take steps by spring 2018 to improve further our monitoring, evaluation and lesson-learning capabilities for the CSSF in Somalia". It is imperative that it follows up on this commitment: the findings in our Somalia review were reflected in our March 2018 review of the CSSF, which highlighted continuing shortcomings in the Fund's results management practices.

The Somalia review also found tensions between developmental and national security objectives in some CSSF projects and recommended that the Fund ensure that all ODA programmes had development-related primary outcomes. The CSSF only partially accepted this recommendation, arguing that all its ODA-funded activities in Somalia were vigorously tested to ensure they fully met the internationally agreed ODA rules. The government nevertheless committed to address this issue in the refresh of the UK National Security Strategy for Somalia, and in the design phase and annual review of CSSF programmes. In our recent CSSF review, we found the Fund to have satisfactory ODA eligibility procedures.

More systematic learning on what works in addressing conflict

We recommended that "departments operating in Somalia should adopt a more systematic approach to the collection and dissemination of learning on what works in addressing conflict and fragility, particularly for programmes that are intended to be experimental or adaptive in nature". This was based on our findings that learning was not sufficiently built into the design of programmes that aspired to be adaptive or experimental in nature, that the sharing of learning about failure was not incentivised, and that implementing partners were often not required to support learning activities.

This recommendation led to a cluster of initiatives that will go far in remedying our underlying concerns. There is a section on lesson learning in the new Somalia strategy. The second phase of the Somalia Stability Fund will enhance third-party monitoring, lessons from which will be shared across all government departments operating in Somalia. Several processes are in place to ensure joint learning across departments. DFID has introduced a special 'learning lessons' review of adaptive programmes, while the CSSF will use the annual review process to scrutinise what works in adaptive programming and ensure that lessons are shared between programmes. The CSSF has developed cross-government 'challenge workshops' to spread learning and best practice. These are also used to test and challenge assumptions about new, sensitive programmes. This strong response will improve both learning and cross-government collaboration, encouraging working as 'One HMG'.

Conclusion

Somalia is a challenging operating environment for aid activities. The government has responded well to our recommendations on improving its understanding of conflict drivers and on more systematically learning lessons on what works. However, there is scope for more action in response to the other recommendations. Overall, the government's response to this review is likely to have a positive impact on the quality of UK aid delivery in Somalia.



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