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# Addressing Root Causes (ARC) Programme

## Final Report

Client: Department for Stabilisation and  
Humanitarian Aid (DSH),  
Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Rotterdam, 9 July 2020

# Addressing Root Causes (ARC) Programme

Mid-Term Review

Client: Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid (DSH),  
Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Rotterdam, 9 July 2020

# Foreword

This report is the outcome of a review process that has involved a wide range of stakeholders, both in the Netherlands and in a selection of six countries where the Addressing Root Causes (ARC) programme is being implemented. Ecorys would like to acknowledge the support provided for the realization of this Mid-Term Review (MTR).

We want to thank the Department of Stabilisation and Humanitarian Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Netherlands for facilitating the conduction of the review. Staff from both the Ecorys Security and Justice Unit and the International Development Unit have been involved in different stages of the review. In particular, we recognize the important in-house support provided by Federica Genna, Suzan Sidal, Gabrielle op 't Hoog and Hannah Fazio. Rafi Popal, Afnan Al Wahsh and Massaran Traoré supported in the conduction of fieldwork in Afghanistan, Jordan and Mali, respectively. Anneke Slob played an invaluable role as quality assurer throughout implementation of the review as well as on the draft and final report. Finally, Ecorys would like to thank all staff from ARC implementing partners, Embassies and other development partners who have been interviewed within the scope of the MTR for their critical insights.

The final report has been authored by Rens Twijnstra, Valentijn Wortelboer and Marije Balt.

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# Abbreviations

ARC	Addressing Root Causes
BEMO	Project assessment forms
BU	Policy Implementation Unit
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDE	Department of Sustainable Economic Development
DGIS	Directorate-General for International Cooperation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSH	Department of Stabilization and Humanitarian Aid
DQA	Data Quality Assessment
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluations Department
JRP	Jordan Response Plan
KPSRL	Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law
MACS	Multi Annual Country Strategy
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RF	Results Framework
SRoL	Security and Rule of Law
SPCC	Strategic Partnerships in Chronic Crisis Programme
TA	Technical Assistance
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TPM	Third-Party Monitoring

# Executive Summary

Armed conflicts and irregular (forced) migration continue to constitute major obstacles to sustainable development. Armed and violent conflicts lead to human suffering in terms of loss of lives, displacement and increased levels of poverty, and for affected societies, the opportunities to escape poverty are severely impacted. Amidst the global uncertainty and destabilising consequences of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the OECD estimates that without action, 80% of the world's poorest will be living in contexts affected by conflict and fragility by 2030.<sup>1</sup> For the past decade, addressing root causes of conflict and irregular migration through “bottom up” civil society engagement in fragile states has been a priority for the Netherlands’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The Addressing Root Causes, or “ARC” fund (2016-2021) is the latest centrally-managed tender programme that the MFA’s department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid (DSH) has launched to this effect.

This Mid-Term Review (MTR) focusses on the extent to which the ARC programme is on the right track to achieve its intended objectives. The ARC programme is implemented by 21 consortia comprised of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local civil society organisations (CSOs) in 12 fragile and conflict-affected countries, namely Afghanistan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Syria. In these countries, ARC-funded projects contribute to 1) Human Security; 2) Rule of Law; 3) Peace processes and Political Governance; and 4) Social and Economic Reconstruction.

Through a mix of extensive desk review of programme and project documentation, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and field visits to three of the ARC programme countries (Afghanistan, Jordan and Mali), the MTR team set out to assess the programme’s relevance, coherence and efficiency of the programme, in relation to overall progress made so far. The MTR’s findings, conclusions and recommendations will provide the MFA with an evidence-base to make adjustments to the ARC programme for the remainder of the implementation period, as well as inform the design of future programmes.

The MTR found that while the ARC programme has overall improved coherence in relation to similar previous centrally-managed tender programmes, alignment and coordination with similar projects implemented in the local contexts was still insufficient. Both the implementing consortia themselves and the Netherlands embassies in the ARC countries, which were given a pivotal coordinating role during the programme design phase, were too passive to ensure adequate country-level coherence. The ARC “global” learning agenda, one of its flagship components as a centrally-managed programme, has not yet delivered fully on its potential to optimise learning between consortia. With regards to relevance, the MTR found that while individual ARC projects were overall well designed to respond to the needs identified at the local level of end-beneficiary communities, the programme’s responsiveness to institutional needs and policy priorities tended to favour upward accountability. With regards to efficiency, the MTR found that the current Results Framework and associated monitoring and reporting regimes are too ambitious and not context-specific enough to accurately capture and aggregate the programme’s progress and impact.

When assessing “whether the ARC programme is on the right track”, it is found that ARC-funded activities are at most able to support or catalyse longer term processes that address root causes of conflict and irregular migration. Even through ARC-funded activities are well aligned to the local

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/>

contexts of end-beneficiary communities, the programme's responsiveness to country, or regional conflict dynamics is often lacking. While the ARC programme has provided the space for consortia to develop more equal and effective partnerships, the tender modality favours upward accountability and is inherently less sensitive to the needs of local CSO's in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). External country-level coherence with other donor-funded civil society projects, programmes, platforms, fora or coordination mechanisms was found to be insufficiently prioritised.

The MTR recommends that reporting focus on capturing context-specific results at the regional level in order to improve measurement of the programme's progress and impact. Alignment with country-level civil society frameworks, programmes, fora and mechanisms by consortia should be enhanced to strengthen the programme's internal and external coherence. And finally, the MFA should strengthen the strategic use of centrally-managed programmes through close engagement with embassies to decide on local funding opportunities and implementing partners.

A woman wearing a red headscarf and a patterned dress is holding a white cup. She is standing in a rocky, arid landscape with mountains in the background. A tank is visible on the left side of the image. The sky is blue with some clouds.

# CHAPTER 1:

## Introduction

# 1 Introduction

Since the commencement of the Addressing Root Causes of Conflict, Instability and Irregular Migration (in short ARC) programme in 2016, there has been a growing divergence between countries trapped in a toxic blend of conflict and state fragility, and the rest of the world. The mix of fragility, conflict, and migration is a major disrupter to the traditional development paradigm and impedes progress on development objectives. The 2019 Development Disrupted report<sup>2</sup> by Brookings based on interviews with 93 leaders working in development, states that a two-tiered world is emerging, comprised of countries that are prospering on the one hand, and fragile countries beset by conflict, complex emergencies, and, sometimes extremist ideologies, on the other hand. Fragility is expanding the gap between rich and poor countries, the latter at risk of being left behind as the rest of the world advances rapidly. To break the cycle of poor governance and rule-of-law takes generations to support the change. Trends like climate change, global pandemics, migration, rising nationalism and populism, state fragility, and closing space for civil society present development leaders with formidable challenges.

The Dutch government is among vanguard donors to take up the challenge of trying to address this toxic combination of fragility, conflict, and migration. In other European and North American donor countries, domestic political support for long-term development has weakened and led to more focus on development as an instrument of foreign policy and national interest. The dramatic increase in irregular migration is creating a political backlash in donor countries, resulting in diverting Official Development Assistance to addressing the needs of refugee inflows. With a view to the most recent crisis as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic financial demands in donor countries might lead to donor fatigue while fragility in the Global South is likely to grow further<sup>3</sup>.

In general, donors have been demanding more accountability and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) have to keep up with the compliance requirements of various donors, many of whom have different requirements. There is a tension between compliance versus results. The increased focus on compliance has led to more risk avoidance and a failure to take chances. There are concerns about compliance taking precedence over humanitarian principles in conflict zones such as Syria and Yemen. At the same time, donor governments deal with a reduced level of staff relative to funds. Once the funds are disbursed, there is a lack of capacity and interest among donor government staff for programme implementation.

It is against this backdrop, and on the eve of the global COVID-19 crisis in early 2020 that the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has commissioned a Mid-Term Review (MTR) of this ambitious ARC programme that seeks to Address Root Causes of Conflict, Instability and Irregular Migration in 12 countries, namely Afghanistan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Syria. This report presents its key findings and summative conclusions, alongside a series of short and long-term recommendations to support the effective delivery of the remainder of the ARC programme, and support policy decisions about new funding decisions for similar programmes.

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<sup>2</sup> Global development disrupted: Findings from a survey of 93 leaders. Available at

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/global-development-disrupted-findings-from-a-survey-of-93-leaders/>

<sup>3</sup> See Fragile States Index Annual Report 2019. Available at <https://fundforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/9511904-fragilestatesindex.pdf>

## 1.1 Programme description

The MFA developed the ARC programme with the objective to support international and national civil society organisations<sup>4</sup> within fragile and conflict-affected countries<sup>5</sup> (FCAS) in addressing the underlying causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration.<sup>6</sup> This is in line with the Dutch Development Policy “Investing in Global Prospects” (2018), which seeks to intensify efforts to address conflict and insecurity in relation to migration. The ARC programme is an important vehicle for the MFA to implement its Policy on Security and Rule of Law.<sup>7</sup> The programme is implemented in 12 countries.<sup>8</sup> These projects cover the thematic areas of:

- (I) Human Security;
- (II) Rule of Law;
- (III) Peace Processes and Political Governance;
- (IV) Socio and Economic Reconstruction.

The programme has a duration of 5 years (2016-2021). A total of EUR 126 million has been allocated to the programme.

The ministry's thematic Department of Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid (DSH) is responsible for managing the ARC programme at central-level. With the revision of DSH's thematic Theory of Change (ToC) on Security and Rule of Law in 2018, the ARC programme's thematic component on socio-economic reconstruction was placed under the policy direction of the Department of Sustainable Economic Development (DDE), although the responsibility for managing these related projects, including quality assurance and oversight, have remained with DSH.

The tender process for the ARC programme initiated in early 2016. After completion of phase 1 of the tender process and review of the submitted project notes, 21 consortia representing 60 organisations (international and national) were invited to submit a project proposal for funding. The ministry awarded funding to all 21 shortlisted proposals. Project implementation began at the start of 2017. See Annex IV for a summary overview of the projects funded through the ARC programme.

The ARC programme has been set-up as a thematic fund, which allocates and delivers its resources through projects at the country-level. The programme was established through a Ministerial Order in 2016,<sup>9</sup> which laid down the administrative rules and ceilings for grants to be awarded under the MFA's Grant Regulations 2006 for phase I of the programme (January–June 2016). The MFA/DSH designed a set of tailored Guidelines for Programme Development<sup>10</sup> for the project design during phase II (July–December 2016).

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<sup>4</sup> International and national NGOs were invited in 2016 to respond to the ARC programme's Call for Proposal by submitting proposals in the form of consortia.

<sup>5</sup> The MFA selected the target countries of the ARC programme due to them experiencing major migration-related challenges, oftentimes also simultaneously suffering from situations of armed conflict and instability. In the MFA's policy approval of the ARC programme (see Ministerial Order no. DSH\_2016.18114), the term Fragile States is used. However, Ecorys will use the term 'fragile and conflict-affected settings, countries or situations, as this is commonly employed by the United Nations (UN), World Bank or the European Union.

<sup>6</sup> See Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Mid-Term Review of the ARC programme.

<sup>7</sup> The ARC programme was developed based on and in alignment with the Theory of Change (ToC) on Security and Rule of Law (2016) and the Logic Model on Security and Rule of Law (2017).

<sup>8</sup> The countries are Afghanistan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Syria. It is to be noted that implementation in Syria was discontinued in 2018. The project in Syria was therefore not included in the scope of the MTR.

<sup>9</sup> This document outlined the policy framework of the programme (based on the ToC on Security and Rule of Law) and the procedure for the Tendering process, requirements for application and submission of proposals (consisting of a track-record and concept note in this phase) and the assessment criteria to be used. See Order of the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of 8 January, no. DHS\_2016.18114.

<sup>10</sup> Guidelines Programme Development. Addressing Root Causes Fund (2018).

The ToC and the logical model on Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) presented organisations with well-defined guidance on the policy and programmatic framework of the ARC programme to steer the organisations through the project design process.

The goal behind the ARC programme is ambitious. While the programme implements projects as part of a diverse project portfolio<sup>11</sup> across multiple country settings<sup>12</sup> and within kinetic political-institutions settings, it needs to retain thematic and programmatic coherence to be able to deliver on the ministry's policy objectives and priorities. The related challenges resulting from managing a central programme implemented in such complex and volatile settings are explored in the following sections covering the MTR's findings.

## 1.2 Objectives

The MTR's objective is to answer the overall question of "Whether the ARC programme is on the right track to achieve its intended objectives." The ToR for the MTR highlighted the 'special design of the ARC programme,' which encompass a number of key aspects.<sup>13</sup> These aspects can be seen to collectively represent a set of "processes" through which the ARC programme ought to be delivered. The MTR thus focused at the programmatic-level to understand how these processes, following their (intended) design, have been put into practice. This is in line with the ToR for the MTR, which requested to "Review if the new approach as stated above (special design of the ARC programme) has worked and how we can improve the above mentioned practices."<sup>14</sup>

The MTR was mainly driven by a purpose to *learn* what has worked and not worked within the ARC programme. However, the MTR also had the purpose to contribute to an understanding of the accountability of the ARC programme.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, the MTR provides the MFA in this report with a number of recommendations aimed to improve the performance of the ARC programme for the remainder of its current implementation (2020-2021). In addition, the MTR outlines a number of recommendations for improving similar centrally-managed programmes such as ARC in the future.

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<sup>11</sup> Out of the total of 21 projects, 5 (22%) focus on Human Security, 4 (17%) on Rule of Law, 7 (30%) on Peace Processes and Political Governance and 7 (30%) on Socio and Economic Reconstruction.

<sup>12</sup> Some countries included in the ARC programme face currently ongoing and active conflict (e.g. Afghanistan, Mali, Somalia and Syria), whereas other countries deal with legacies of violence (e.g. Burundi, DRC, Sudan and South Sudan), or are under significant internal and external pressure (e.g. Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon and Pakistan).

<sup>13</sup> These include: (1) Results Framework ARC; (2) Design of the final project; (3) Learning agenda; (4) Adaptive programming; (5) Cooperation with consortium partners, the Ministry and Embassies; (6) Cross-cutting themes; (7) Thematic Helpdesks; and (8) Reporting. See ToR, p.4-5.

<sup>14</sup> See ToR, p.5.

<sup>15</sup> The MTR will focus at the programme-level and will not focus on the results achieved on the ground through the projects funded under the ARC programme.

## 1.3 Policy Context

The recent publication of the Ministry's Policy and Operations Evaluations Department (IOB) evaluation report "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" has clearly raised the level of scrutiny on the ARC programme. The report issued clear warnings regarding the risks of thematic and geographic fragmentation and for the creation of 'paper realities' within the portfolio. This would spread programme resources too broad and thinly, with little assurance for obtaining tangible effects and impact at the overall programme-level. And in effect, little contribution to achievement of DSH's policy goals and objectives. The findings and recommendations<sup>16</sup> were principally drawn from the evaluation on the implementation of the Reconstruction programme (2012-2015) and the Strategic Partnerships in Chronic Crisis (SPCC) programme (2014-2016), but may be considered possibly symptomatic for the challenges facing centrally-managed thematic programmes or funds in general. The MTR will reflect, where relevant, on how the IOB recommendations can be retrospectively assessed in relation to the ARC programme<sup>17</sup>

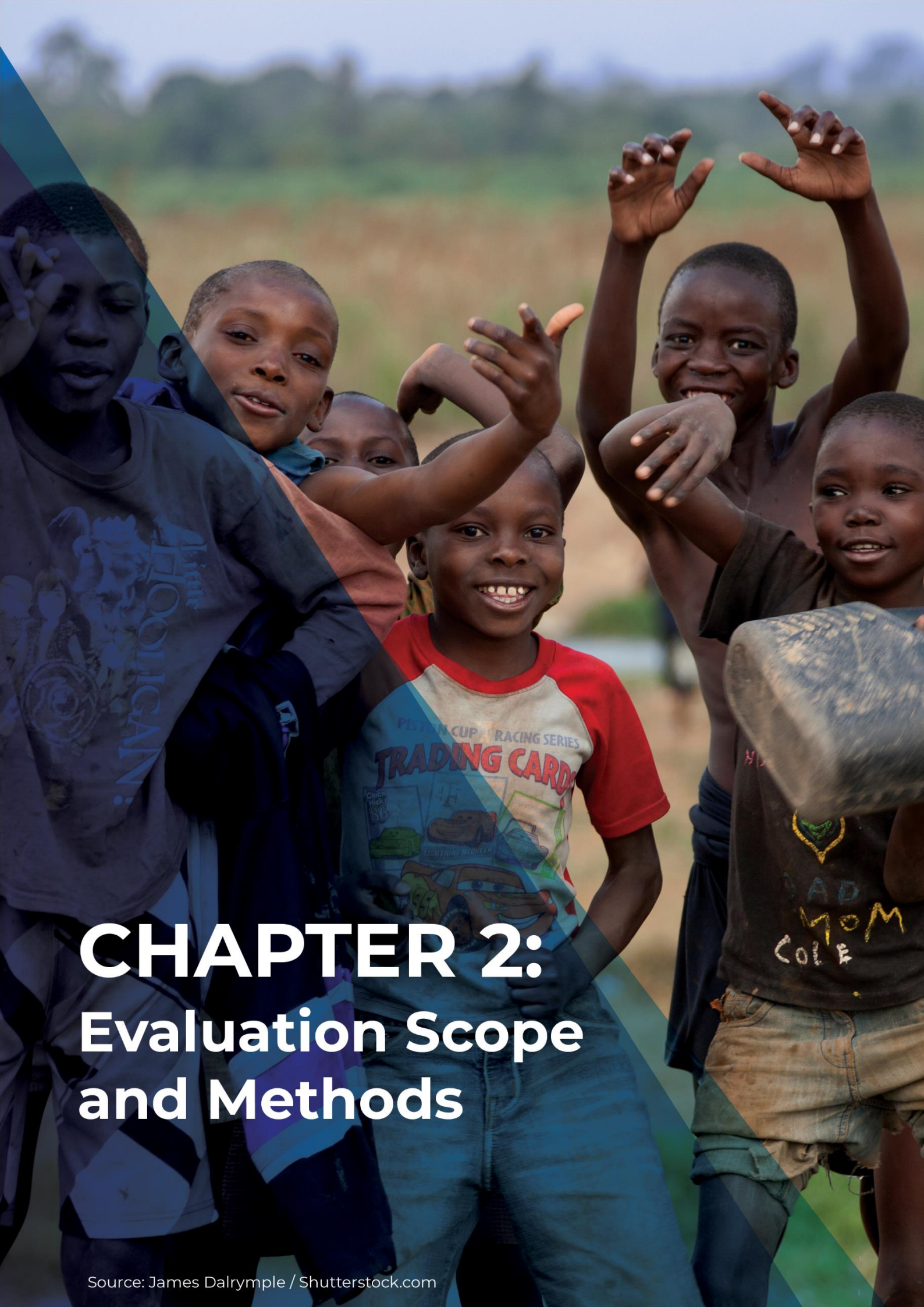
Secondly, a further discussion is on the horizon whether centrally-managed programmes such as the ARC programme are the most suitable modalities to allocate and deliver resources in support of local/regional SRoL initiatives on the ground, compared to a delegated modality whereby funds are managed and delivered through the embassies at the country-level as a formal part of country project portfolios. The MFA/DSH is already considering a reduction in activities to further ensure thematic and geographic focus in its activities.<sup>18</sup> Although the MTR considers that this question falls largely outside of the scope of the current assignment, the recommendations do point to improvements on how to optimise centrally-managed programmes such as ARC in order to inform future programming.

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<sup>16</sup> The 2019 IOB report "Less Pretension, More Realism" recommended the MFA within its Security and Rule of Law portfolio to further: 1) reduce fragmentation; 2) set clear and realistic goals; 3) strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) for learning; and 4) ensure evidence-based programme and project design.

<sup>17</sup> Since the IOB report was only recently published in July 2019, it is not realistic to assess the extent to which the ARC programme has tangibly responded to its recommendations. Notwithstanding, many of the key findings and recommendations from the IOB evaluation report are in line with the earlier 2016 internal evaluation of the Reconstruction Programme (See: "Evaluatie Wederopbouwtennder 2016").")

<sup>18</sup> The IOB report cites a possible reduction of 30% in the activities of DSH. MFA/IOB (2019). Less Pretension, More Realism, p. 10.



# CHAPTER 2:

## Evaluation Scope and Methods

## 2 Evaluation Scope and Methods

### 2.1 Evaluation Questions and Criteria

The overarching question for this MTR is whether the ARC programme is on the right track to achieving its objectives, namely addressing root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration. Since this review is conducted as a mid-term, the evaluation approach to answering this question is mainly predicated on an assessment of the programme's **coherence**, **relevance** and **efficiency**. Other evaluation criteria including effectiveness, impact and sustainability feature to a lesser extent in the evaluation methodology, and have mainly been integrated into the relevance criteria.

The ToR contained 29 sub-questions clustered into 9 different topics. In order to structure these according to the evaluation criteria and overarching question outlined above, six evaluation questions were developed that framed the corresponding interview guides, as well as the structure of this final report. The table overleaf shows how the overarching question cascaded into 6 different evaluation questions, and how these correspond with the topics outlined in the ToR. A more detailed Evaluation Matrix where evaluation criteria and overarching questions are linked to evaluation questions, topics, indicators and data sources can be found in Annex I.

**Table 1 Evaluation Matrix**

Overarching question:	Is the ARC programme on the right track to “Addressing Root Causes of Conflict, Instability and Irregular Migration”?					
Evaluation criteria	Relevance		Coherence		Efficiency	
Evaluation Questions	How responsive are the ARC programme's objectives and design to the context in which it is being implemented?	How responsive is the ARC programme to other needs, policies, and priorities (partners, embassies, country-level stakeholders, DSH)?	Does country-level coordination between the ARC programme partners, embassies and other partners enhance coherence?	Does the ARC programme's approach to learning enhance coherence?	Does the ARC programme's Results Framework (RF) and its approach to results reporting enhance efficiency?	Does the ARC programme's approach to “adaptive programming” enhance efficiency?
Topics (from ToR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design of the final project</li> <li>Cross cutting themes (gender and conflict sensitivity)</li> <li>IOB report: project design based on evidence</li> <li>IOB report: realistic goals</li> <li>Sustainability</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cooperation with the consortium partners, the Ministry and embassies</li> <li>IOB report: reduced fragmentation</li> <li>External coherence: country coordination</li> <li>Learning agenda</li> <li>IOB report: Does M&amp;E facilitate learning?</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Results framework ARC</li> <li>Reporting</li> <li>IOB report: mechanisms to receive and report reliable project results</li> <li>IOB report: monitoring role of the embassies</li> <li>Adaptive programming</li> </ul>	

## 2.2 Case Study Selection

In order to maintain a good balance between breadth and depth in the MTR, three categories of country emphasis were applied. These were:

- **Primary focus countries (3)** where primary data collection was conducted in person by members of the evaluation team among a wide range of stakeholders including partners, embassies, government, end-beneficiaries, other donors, etc. Field visits were conducted by teams of international and national researchers for this category of countries. (Afghanistan<sup>19</sup> Jordan, and Mali).
- **Secondary focus countries (3)** where primary data collection was conducted remotely through Skype interviews with a selection of key informants from international and national implementing partners and with Embassy staff. (Burundi, Ethiopia and Somalia).
- **Tertiary focus countries (6)** where no primary data collection activities were conducted. This category of focus countries was only covered in the MTR through desk review. (Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Pakistan, South Sudan, Sudan and Syria).<sup>20</sup>

While it must be acknowledged that a country selection process always introduces bias and can never be framed as 'representative', it is warranted in the context of this MTR given that the selection criteria are made explicit. The criteria that were applied to arrive at the abovementioned selection of primary, secondary and tertiary focus countries for the MTR included:

- Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS) focus country;
- Thematic coverage (including Human Security, Rule of Law, Peace Processes & Political Governance, and Socio and Economic Reconstruction);<sup>21</sup>
- Prospect of continued programming (future investments);
- Not included as case studies for in the IOB evaluation (only for primary focus countries)<sup>22</sup>
- Accessibility.

## 2.3 Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods for this MTR were qualitative, and consisted of the following:

- **Desk review (secondary data):** including all ARC programme and Project documentation<sup>23</sup> comprising over 1,700 documents, emails and attachments; policy documents, related policy and research publications from other sources. For an overview of all non-confidential sources that were referenced throughout this report, please refer to Annex II.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIs):** semi-structured interviews with 114 respondents, either in-person or via Skype. Respondent categories include MFA staff (DSH, embassy, IOB), international and national civil society implementing partners, end-beneficiaries, (local) government representatives, other international donor staff, etc. For a full list of respondents, please refer to Annex III.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** focus group discussions with 8 different groups of end-beneficiaries in 3 different countries were conducted to gain insight into the relevance of the project activities in the communities in which they operate.

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<sup>19</sup> Primary data collection in Afghanistan was done by a national consultant, with remote guidance and supervision of an international team member.

<sup>20</sup> ARC projects were discontinued in Syria in 2018. Preliminary results from projects in Syria were not included in this MTR.

<sup>21</sup> While responsibility for projects with a socio-economic reconstruction focus was reallocated to DDE, these activities are still an integral component of the ARC programme, and so thematic coverage was also considered to include this result area.

<sup>22</sup> It was advised not to include Burundi, Ethiopia or South Sudan as primary focus countries for fieldwork, since these countries were already included as case study countries in the IOB Evaluation of the Reconstruction Programme (2012 - 2015), the Strategic Partnerships in Chronic Crises Programme (2014 - 2016) and the Addressing Root Causes Tender Process.

<sup>23</sup> Including a repository of all "R" and "A" files from the ministry's internal knowledge management system.

- **Partner Feedback Workshop (The Hague):** a partner feedback workshop was organised at the start of the data collection phase whereby all implementing partners with a physical presence in The Hague were invited to attend a half day discussion about several key focus areas of the MTR.
- **Field Observations:** for the primary focus countries of Afghanistan, Jordan and Mali, field observation notes were kept by the international and national researchers collecting data in these locations.

For more details about what data collection methods and sources were utilised for what specific sub-questions, please refer to the evaluation matrix in Annex I.

## 2.4 Limitations

The following limitations should be considered for the process and outcome of delivering this MTR:

- **Compressed timeline for primary data collection and analysis:** The timeframe between the start of the inception phase in early January 2020 and the key findings presentation workshop in the Hague that marked the start of the synthesis phased comprised 10 weeks (4 weeks inception, 6 weeks data collection and analysis). This compressed timeline implies limitations on the relative depth and breadth of the MTR.
- **Non-exhaustive list of key informants:** while the MTR team is confident that the 114 respondents interviewed for this MTR provide a solid basis for the review, the list is non-exhaustive. Some key informants were unavailable or unresponsive to the requests by the MTR team. The limited timeframe for data collection meant that some interviews could effectively not be scheduled.
- **Limited focus on results:** since the focus of the MTR is principally at the programme-level (processes), relating to its coherence, relevance and efficiency, and less on the substantive progress (project-level results) relating to its effectiveness, impact and sustainability, the MTR cannot provide a definitive evidence-based judgement about the results achieved so far.
- **Absence of consolidated programme documentation:** the ARC programme does not have its own specific “Theory of Change” (ToC) explaining impact pathways and intervention logic, nor its own “Theory of Action” (ToA) explaining its delivery model and the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved. Both could be largely reconstructed based on desk review and preliminary stakeholder interviews during the inception phase, but due to the compressed timeframe this was not done as diligently and participatory as would have been desirable.
- **Delivering the draft and final reports amidst the COVID-19 crisis.** The COVID-19 crisis began in the Netherlands on 12 March 2020 when the Dutch government announced its first restrictive measures, including all non-essential professions to work from home. In the following weeks, restrictions were further intensified. This affected the pace at which the MTR team was able to finalise the MTR report.



# CHAPTER 3:

## Findings - Coherence

### 3 Findings - Coherence

This chapter assesses the ARC programme's internal and external coherence, defined as its compatibility with other interventions.<sup>24</sup> **Internal coherence** refers to synergies within and between ARC implementing consortia, between ARC countries, and with other centralised or decentralised Netherlands-funded programmes in the ARC countries. **External coherence** refers to the programme's consistency with other actors' interventions in the same context, at local, national or regional level. This includes complementarity, harmonisation and co-ordination with similar interventions aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration, and the extent to which the intervention is adding value while avoiding duplication of effort.

#### Key findings relating to the coherence of the ARC

- The ARC programme's design took into account the lessons learnt of the Reconstruction Tender and attempted to avoid fragmentation with regard to thematic scope, between countries, within countries and within projects.
- The programme managed to avoid fragmentation to a certain extent: it improved coherence and focus in thematic scope, and reduced fragmentation within projects in fewer countries.
- However ARC did not manage to address fragmentation<sup>25</sup> on the country level sufficiently. Embassies were expected to use their political leverage and take up crucial roles such as coordination, linking and embedding the ARC programme locally, but their engagement was too limited.
- This had various implications for the programme, such as few exchanges between consortia, hardly any monitoring on the part of the donor, and untapped synergies with other Netherlands-funded programmes. Most consortia occasionally lack access to key networks, with other donors and governments. Consortia that have cultivated local legitimacy and credibility successfully mostly achieved this on their own initiative.
- There is a lack of clarity about the specific objectives of the "global" learning agenda, and diverging expectations with regard to the KPSRL's role and mandate within the ARC learning agenda.
- The ARC Learning agenda is currently on the right track to respond to organisations' learning needs within the ARC programme.

<sup>24</sup> See: "Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use" OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, December 2019 (p8). Accessible at <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/revised-evaluation-criteria-dec-2019.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> The supporting documentation (memo 'Opzet NGO fonds as well as 'Interne Evaluatie Wederopbouwtennder') suggests that the rationale for the enhanced role of the embassies is to create more synergy and coherence (ie. less fragmentation)

## 3.1 Country-Level Coherence

### Lessons learnt from the Reconstruction programme

One of the key findings from the Reconstruction programme internal 2016 review,<sup>26</sup> as well as from the recent IOB evaluation report “Less Pretension, More Realism”,<sup>27</sup> is that fragmentation can occur at multiple levels:

- **Thematic scope:** the Reconstruction tender assumed that NGOs involved in the programme would translate global SROL policy objectives into concrete objectives and context-specific operational programmes. However implementing NGOs followed their own interpretations, with the result that different interpretations of the policy objectives arose within the Reconstruction Programme.
- **Between countries:** the Reconstruction programme funded 29 projects in 24 different countries, which resulted in a thinly spread portfolio. 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.
- **Within countries:** 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 and linked to local and national policies and frameworks. However there was very little alignment of the programme with other decentralised programmes, other development partners or local government interventions.
- **Within projects:** consortium partners would be active in different geographical areas in one country using their own thematic approach; since coordination was often limited, projects were in practice made up of a collection of smaller, relatively isolated activities.

Prior to the publication of the call for proposals for the ARC programme, DSH formulated several goals based on the lessons learnt from the Reconstruction programme:<sup>28</sup>

1. Establishing a clearer geographic and thematic focus;
2. More time for local needs assessments and involving local partners;
3. Arriving at fewer projects to reduce the management burden;
4. Better engaging embassies and other relevant departments in the MFA;
5. Creating synergy with the embassies' multiannual country strategies.

### Progress on Coherence

The ARC programme established a clearer geographic and thematic focus covering 12 countries, in which a Dutch embassy was present and in which civil society could operate with a certain degree of freedom,<sup>29</sup> with a total of 21 projects implemented across those countries. The ARC policy team attempted to integrate as well as possible the thematic priorities of the embassies and align these with their SROL goals and objectives.

ARC gave more time for local needs assessments. Local partners had been involved from the early stages of project design, and they acknowledge that their inputs have been taken on board in the process. This is where the added value of ARC compared to other programmes comes in: there was sufficient time and budget to genuinely involve local partners, so these local organisations had a sense of ownership. This helped promote coherent activity planning within the consortium as

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<sup>26</sup> See “Evaluatie Wederopbouwten 2012-2016”

<sup>27</sup> IOB evaluation 'Less Pretension, More Realism', 2019

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> The DSH Policy Framework mentioned that Syria and Somalia were eligible as well, since there were dedicated desks at embassies in neighbouring countries. Burundi, Sudan and South Sudan are eligible countries as well, in spite of the criteria 'NGOs operating with a certain degree of freedom'. Beleidskader Addressing Root Causes Fund <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/besluiten/2016/01/13/beleidskader-addressing-root-causes-fund> 13 January 2016

proposed in the project document. During implementation further involvement of local partners was supported through learning activities, primarily at the consortium, national and regional levels.

ARC arrived at fewer projects to reduce the management burden with the help of two factors: the consortium model and the Policy Implementation Unit (BU) within DSH. DSH explicitly encouraged applications from consortia and called them 'alliances': they would be given priority over applications from individual organisations.<sup>30</sup> The premise was that consortia, particularly through the involvement of local partners, would be better equipped to implement integrated approaches. In addition, it was believed that working through consortia would reduce fragmentation. With ARC, the average budget per project increased compared to the Reconstruction tender projects.

From the point of view of NGOs, the consortium model had both advantages and disadvantages. The model offered opportunities for international NGOs who had a methodology they wanted to replicate in other contexts, but had no local presence or offices yet in the country concerned and a limited track-record in the specific context. For these NGOs, consortia offered a vehicle to develop the much-needed track record. One consortium was even led by an NGO that had not operated in the country before: it regarded the ARC programme as *'a pilot, which brought ideas, visibility, credit, leverage, working with other partners, knowledge and experience, with room for experimenting, while building a track-record'*. Disadvantages of the consortium-model cited by NGOs were the differences in procedures, mainly voiced by large, decentralised NGOs who tend to work with standardised procedures allowing for quick decision-making. These are difficult to harmonise with consortium partners who need to first go through their headquarters' bureaucracy. In spite of such different organisational structures, many consortia managed to harmonise their decision-making procedures to a certain degree.

#### *DSH Policy Implementation Unit (BU)*

In the design phase, it was mostly the DSH policy level staff that was involved. During the implementation phase the day-to-day management was reassigned to the BU. Reporting and contract management of the ARC programme sits with BU. Partners indicated that BU is effective and responsive to requests, in spite of the high number of projects under their responsibility.

Partners' perception of DSH programme management performance was mostly positive. However, ARC organisations felt that the DSH policy level staff gradually disengaged from the ARC programme to leave it almost entirely to the BU. The BU has a feedback loop with the DSH policy level which is intended to ensure thematic and technical complementarity, but interviews with key respondents<sup>31</sup> informed that the BU receives little response from policy level staff to its analytical and other reports prepared for that purpose. This feedback loop is not formalised or standardised within DSH. Furthermore, the division of roles and responsibilities between DSH and embassies remained unclear for many of the partners. One consortium in Ethiopia asked the embassy how to proceed with adaptive programming: the guidance was unconvincing and they were referred back to the MFA.

#### **The crucial role of embassies**

The lessons learnt from the Reconstruction programme pointed clearly in the direction of the need for a better engagement with embassies in a centrally-funded programme like ARC. There were several roles that DSH foresaw for embassies, as distilled from the Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), project assessment forms (BEMOs) and minutes from country-level kick-off meetings.

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

<sup>31</sup> See interviews with key respondents from the MFA.

During the start-up phase of the ARC programme, there was a great level of commitment to involving the embassies. The policy team at DSH made great efforts to engage the embassies concerned. The assumption was that if DSH would engage embassies at an early stage, this would raise their involvement and enhance country-level ownership. DSH would involve the embassies in appraisals of proposals of those consortia after they had passed the first round in the tendering process. The DSH policy team also started to organise in-country kick-off meetings co-led by the embassies, to engage them and show joint commitment. The kick-off meetings took place mid-2016. By then the contracts with the consortia had not been signed yet; this only happened in November 2016. The minutes of the kick-off meetings reflect a high level of ambition from the consortia. In the MoUs that were subsequently signed between the consortia, DSH and the embassies, this high level of ambition on behalf of consortia to collaborate with other ARC projects in-country is clearly evidenced. For Somalia, the MoU indicates that both consortia agreed to develop an overarching ToC for both projects, jointly develop baseline studies, develop a joint gender analysis, to develop a joint M&E framework and a Learning Agenda, etc.

There was also ambition from the side of embassies. Among the six case studies (Afghanistan, Burundi, Ethiopia, Jordan, Mali, and Somalia) reviewed in-depth for this MTR, the Dutch embassy in Kabul was the most ambitious at the outset. It invited the consortia for quarterly meetings at the embassy with a dedicated focal point staff. These meetings involving both consortia in-country did not only discuss issues influencing program implementation, but also commonalities between both of the projects and how the consortia could strengthen each other and provide mutual support to maximise programme results. Consortia were even invited to flag issues with the Dutch Ambassador in Kabul to be brought up at specific fora or with Afghan government authorities. Lastly, at the request of the consortia, yearly networking meetings were organised that could take place at the embassy to discuss specific themes, as mentioned in the minutes of the kick-off meeting held in August 2016. However, interviews with embassy staff conducted by the MTR team in February 2020 emphasised that the embassy currently had very little involvement in the ARC programme.

In Addis Ababa, the embassy saw lots of opportunities in learning together as well as complementarity and mutual leverage: *'We all want to learn what works and what does not. Consortia have grassroots-level access and the embassy has access to higher levels.'* A Memorandum of Understanding was signed a few weeks after the meeting, but the language was much more conservative than during the kick-off meeting. It states, as most MoUs do, that *'the embassy will inform ARC partners on relevant issues that may affect their programme implementation'* but ended with more legal language: *'the MoU is not a commitment to funding, more so a declaration of intent. Further extension or adaptation of the MoU is possible following future review'*.<sup>32</sup> Lastly, none of the MoUs mention a role for the embassy in monitoring the programme.

While the specific articulation of the roles and responsibilities of the Embassies varied between the different ARC countries, the following broadly featured in most of the MoUs and kick-off minutes<sup>33</sup> reviewed for this MTR:

- Connecting ARC partners with other country-level stakeholders, including donors, multilateral aid organisations and national/sub-national government authorities;
- Facilitating country-specific exchange sessions between ARC consortia, including quarterly or biannual progress meetings;
- Sharing relevant country-specific information with ARC consortia;

<sup>32</sup> This can be explained by the fact that in parallel the embassy was involved in the assessment of the proposals and did not want to raise the impression with the consortia that the MoU was in any way related to the assessment outcomes.

<sup>33</sup> 6 MoUs were available for Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. 8 kick-off meeting minutes were available for Afghanistan, Burundi, DRC, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan and Sudan.

- Contribute to program reporting with a view to country specific developments and needs;
- “Quality control” and cooperation on M&E.<sup>34</sup>

### *Embassy engagement varied over time and per country*

The initial enthusiasm with the embassies dissipated fairly quickly. The ARC programme saw a gradual disengagement by the majority of embassies, as they did not have or could not make sufficient capacity available for the ARC programme. The Nairobi embassy division responsible for Somalia, as well as the Addis Ababa and Kabul embassies mentioned all confirm to this trend. The MTR team interviewed staff from six different embassies, in two cases at the level of the ambassador. The MTR team heard a variety of different reasons why embassies disengaged. An important disclaimer with these reasons (below) is that these often go far beyond the ARC programme itself and should be seen in the light of a decade of severe budget cuts which affected the capacity of embassies, even to effectively fulfil their tasks in relation to centrally managed programmes.<sup>35</sup>

There were a number of factors that had an impact on the embassies' engagement. The main factor was capacity, both in quantity, quality and experience. The factors are clustered below.

### *Assist Consortia*

A standard role of the embassies is to help in facilitating contacts with local authorities and assist as 'last resort'.<sup>36</sup> This type of support was much needed by implementing partners operating in high-risk areas and working on sensitive issues which might antagonise certain stakeholders in the country with vested interests. The ARC kick-off meeting minutes from Jordan for example note that *“[the] embassy can play a coordinating role to connect the programmes with other initiatives in the country. The embassy can also play a role in the political dialogue with the Jordanian government.”* However problem solving can take up much time. Embassies indicated they preferred working with experienced consortia and those who don't have 'start-up' problems. One ambassador had reservations about the partner choice within ARC, in particular those with a limited track record in the country<sup>37</sup> and refused to have his staff assess final programme proposals, thus having no say in partner choice and the 'vetting' of partners.

### *Updating the consortia about relevant issues*

Embassies have critical knowledge of the territorial, political and societal context in a country. That puts them in a position to ensure that consortium projects fit the local context. As such, they can provide knowledge on the local context and contribute with development expertise in certain sectors. This role was quickly neglected by embassies, as it takes much time and staff time thus had to be prioritised. The embassies did not live up to many of the initial commitments, certainly those made during the kick-off meetings. One staff commented: *‘We become actively involved if a project is in line with our strategic interest. There are so many projects which we don't get involved with, unless we have to, and then we try to bring it in line with our priorities’*. This corresponds with one of the key lessons learnt from the Reconstruction programme, which was to ensure alignment with

<sup>34</sup> Only mentioned in the MoUs and kick-off meeting minutes for Afghanistan, Burundi and South Sudan.

<sup>35</sup> In 2017, the Advisory Council on International Affairs for the Dutch government not only warned that the 2012 budget cuts had severely affected the capacity of the Dutch embassies and representations to perform core tasks, it also suggested that 70-80 mn Euro would be needed on an annual basis to address the main bottlenecks (AIV, 'De Vertegenwoordiging van Nederland in de Wereld' No. 32, May 2017). To date, 40 mn Euro has been made available to this end, and there are a number of bottlenecks that still need to be addressed (for the latest state of play, see also questions by the Dutch parliament 'Nederlandse Diplomatie', 32 734, Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2019-202, 32 734, nr. 40, 25 februari 2020).)

<sup>36</sup> From: 'Modernisering Nederlandse Diplomatie', letter by the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2012–2013, 32 734, nr. 15, 28 June 2013 (p. 13)

<sup>37</sup> DSH staff admitted that some organisations presented a trackrecord that was 'too rosy' but due to the rigidity of the tender process could not consider other sources (or knowledge) than the proposal itself.

the embassies Multi Annual Country Strategies<sup>38</sup> (MACS).<sup>39</sup> If priorities matched and embassies regarded the consortia as interesting sparring partners, they were more eager to exchange on issues with the consortia. However, even if projects are well aligned with an embassy's MACS, priorities at an embassy can shift abruptly, limiting space for constructive engagement. The embassy in Addis Ababa put the task in perspective, saying: *'Even if I wanted, we could no longer do this due to the sudden political crisis that erupted here.'*<sup>40</sup> *That was my priority before anything else'.* In the day-to-day reality of the embassy, not much capacity was left for ARC programme-related tasks.

#### *Coordinating ARC consortia together*

DSH had taken into account the latest insights of partnership literature and asked embassies to play a role in bringing consortia 'into the tent' as a vital practice in the establishment of consortia as a community of practice.<sup>41</sup> Embassies are aware of their convening power, but it required the necessary capacity to use that power. In Nairobi, they chose not to organise the consortia due to lack of capacity, and took this up only when capacity for the Somalia team was expanded in 2019. NGOs that benefited from coordination, such as in Burundi (see box 1 below 'Burundi, a positive outlier'), clearly saw the strategic added value, but consortia often lacked initiative without embassy facilitation.

#### *Finding synergies with embassy projects and other decentralised programmes*

A determinant factor for embassies' motivation to find synergies with their own projects was their (strategic) interest in a certain policy areas. The MTR team saw lots of potential synergies - which had not been explored actively - in countries such as Jordan and Ethiopia. If there were links with Netherlands-funded projects, they were mostly ad-hoc.

#### **Box 1: Synergies with embassy projects in Mali**

The ARC consortium, consisting of Norwegian Church Aid, ICCO and the Human Security Collective works with religious leaders, women and youth on social cohesion. The consortium achieved interesting synergies with ICCO's own embassy-funded project called 'Programme for Accountable Local Governance' (PGLR), when it comes to engagement of youth. This project mobilises and strengthens young leaders (men and women) with a view to improve the management of local public affairs and contribute to the development of basic social services. Local partner 'Association Pour la Survie dans le Sahel' (AMSS, working for both ARC and PGLR) works in northern Mali, including Timbouctou, and helps young people implement initiatives and projects in the key areas of local development - focused on the citizen's practice of governance, accountability, cultural mediation, socio-economic integration of young people (girls, boys) and the alleviation of conflicts. The PGLR's activities help strengthen youth's engagement in the ARC project.

#### *Consulting consortia to create synergies with embassies' Multi Annual Country Strategies*

DSH wanted to promote thematic alignment, but back in 2016 various embassies had not included their SROL priorities in the embassy MACS yet. The embassy in Amman had had no prior involvement in the agricultural sector and livelihoods, but recognised the importance of the ARC

<sup>38</sup> See also "Consulting consortia to create synergies with embassies' multiannual country strategies" section below

<sup>39</sup> See also "Consulting consortia to create synergies with embassies' multiannual country strategies" section below.

<sup>40</sup> Referring to the political unrest in Ethiopia starting in September 2016, which directly affected the position of many Dutch entrepreneurs active in the floral industry in Ethiopia.

<sup>41</sup> Gonsalves, A. (2014). *Lessons learnt on consortium-based research in climate change and development*. CARIAA Working Paper no. 1. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre and London: UK Aid.  
<https://www.idrc.ca/en/article/lessons-consortium-based-research-climate-change-and-development>

projects. The embassy reached out to both consortia and followed their progress to understand how the embassy development aid could contribute to these sectors. The embassy described the ARC projects as 'frontrunners' and 'pilots' for future embassy engagement. Whereas individual projects usually do not get mentioned in MACS, their themes are part of the MACS. This was the case for more projects, but did not always lead to more integration between the ARC project and embassy projects.

#### *Aligning and linking with local or national policies and stakeholders*

DSH were aware that embassies have crucial networks and bargaining power, in particular with governments. They can use their political leverage with governments, as the Kabul embassy had initially offered. However many embassy staff interviewed feel that in general<sup>42</sup> centrally-managed programmes have a high risk of formulating interventions which are not fit to the context and lack the necessary alignment to and coherence with local strategies, policies and plans. Embassies do see the need for brokerage and linkage with authorities or other important stakeholders. Embassies can play a central role in this, as well as partners selected on the basis of having a presence in the country or area with the necessary linkages to other actors and initiatives. One embassy staff interviewed by the MTR team added that this whole process of aligning and linking with local or national policies and stakeholders requires much extra work for them.

#### *Aligning with similar initiatives in the sector*

Connecting the project with similar initiatives in the sector is important to find complementarities and - more important for the donor - avoid duplication. It also helps embedding the project in the wider sector, linking it to other organisations and other donors, important for continuity. There are some good experiences in this regard, for example a consortium in Ethiopia that was linked to the International Organisation for Migration. The embassy in Nairobi also had good intentions, as evidenced by one commitment in the MoU: *'The embassy will also connect the ARC partners with other NGOs working on the same topics in Somalia, to enhance collaboration and connectivity of programmes.'* However due to a lack of capacity, the embassy only started doing so in 2019, in the end-phase of the projects. In Burundi and Somalia (since 2019), embassies have organised 'Partner Days' for all Dutch-funded initiatives. This is not ARC-specific, but such events are benefiting the organizations engaged in the ARC programme.

#### *Monitoring by the embassies*

Although none of the MoUs or kick-off minutes include an explicit reference to the embassies' responsibility of monitoring ARC projects, it was assumed by DSH in some of the project assessment forms that embassies would take up this role. Even though the responsibility to effectively monitor projects funded by centrally managed programmes normally lies with the responsible directorate in The Hague, the ARC programme design team noted that during the initial consultations<sup>43</sup> with the ARC country embassies there was a permissive attitude for embassies to appropriate this responsibility.<sup>44</sup> However, the kick-off meeting minutes and MoUs are effectively void of any mention regarding the monitoring role of the embassies. The Afghanistan MoU mentions *"monitoring & reporting" as one of six broad thematic areas in which "cooperation can be further developed"*, and the South Sudan MoU states that *"The Embassy will cooperate in [...] mid-term review and evaluation"*, which ostensibly refers more to their cooperation with DSH-driven programme-level evaluations (such as this MTR).

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<sup>42</sup> Few of those interviewed witnessed the start of ARC, and did from the outside not see much difference with other centrally-managed programmes.

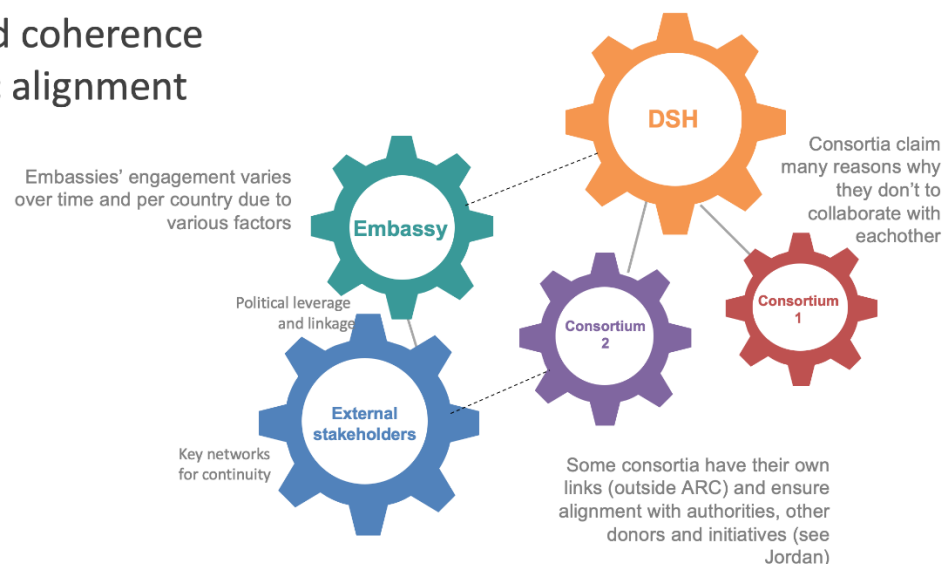
<sup>43</sup> This refers to the consultations that took place at the very start of the ARC programme design phase, before the tendering process had started.

<sup>44</sup> This was confirmed by all 4 former members of the ARC programme design team interviewed for this MTR.

In short, DSH assumed that embassies would take up certain roles and responsibilities in delivering the ARC programme. The kick-off meetings and MoUs were meant to formalise this joint commitment. DSH had assumed that by taking upon itself the administrative and financial burden of the projects (managed by the BU), the embassies would take up roles such as monitoring, technical/thematic oversight, and country-level information exchange and coordination. However this construction was not perceived by the embassies as an 'all gain, no pain' arrangement. The roles that DSH had thought out for the embassies in the ARC programme did not materialise. This was due to many different factors, but two emerge as common patterns from interviews with embassies. Over the years of implementation, between 2016 and 2019, there were serious capacity constraints at embassies, resulting from the staff cuts in preceding years. There were many staff changes at embassies (or even a vacancy of 1,5 years in Bamako). The initial commitments towards the ARC programme did not always feature in the briefings for new staff, both at the Ministry and at the embassy. In addition, the ARC team had made a tremendous efforts to nurture ownership for the programme at embassies, and had MoUs signed, although these are expressions of interest rather than binding documents with formal commitments. However in some cases attention for ARC was overtaken by events, as is often the case in volatile environments and as a result of that also other (political) priorities. Meanwhile the consortia themselves were not always actively pursuing what they had promised to do in the MoUs.

Figure 1 Infographic: limited Coherence and Ad-Hoc Alignment

## Limited coherence Ad hoc alignment



### Implication I: few exchanges between consortia

Consortia would claim in their proposals that they would collaborate between themselves once operational. However after their contracts were signed, cooperation in-country between consortia was hardly followed up. Consortia had to be triggered to find operational synergies. If exchange happened at embassy- and/or learning events, they did not extend to collaboration modalities. Where there was limited embassy involvement, there was limited interaction between consortia, and often vice-versa.

There were many reasons mentioned in the interviews why consortia would not coordinate: different geographies, different themes, different organisational structures and methodologies, even different views of the same problem. One big NGO, that had co-signed an MoU, commented: *'How can you expect us to collaborate when you first make us compete over funds?'*

### Box 2: Inter-consortium coordination in Burundi: a positive outlier

In the extremely complex context of Burundi, with a repressive government and a closed society, consortia have been collaborating in a unique way. They have had a strong collaboration since the kick-off meeting in 2016 and address the many challenges of working in Burundi together. The two consortia don't only meet regularly at the embassy. They also share and update their Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) tools together and triangulate their data, which helps validating data (see also chapter on RF and reporting). This collaboration has been facilitated by the Dutch embassy in Bujumbura. The responsible staff commented: 'It is our job to help Dutch-funded programmes which operate in the difficult context of Burundi'. The consortia have enjoyed a good coordination and cooperation, which they both claim has contributed to the quality and effectiveness of their projects. This in spite of the fact that they had not signed an MoU.

### Implication II: only ad-hoc alignment and limited legitimacy and credibility

The ARC programme's coordination mechanisms at country-level, if any, did not contribute to improved coherence with other donors, partners and stakeholders. Operational alignment of ARC projects with key external stakeholders working in the same arena at local, country and regional level was not sufficiently elaborated during the design phase. The fact that various projects actually managed to align quite well with country-level civil society coordination frameworks cannot be attributed to the programme. These are organisations that already work within national frameworks and thus implicitly included this in their approach. Alignment with external stakeholders was insufficiently prioritised in both stages of the project approval process.<sup>45</sup>

### Box 3: Aligning ARC projects to national development frameworks: the case of the Jordan Response Plan

In Jordan, both ARC projects, namely the "Access to Justice and Jobs in Jordan" project, implemented by Mercy Corps and the International Rescue Committee, and the "Access to Justice and Basic Services" project, implemented by the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Justice Centre for Legal Aid, operate within the framework of the Jordan Response Plan (JRP), owned and led by the Jordan Government under the leadership of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC). The JRP addresses the needs and priorities of Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanian communities in the Northern Governorates of Jordan and seeks to strengthen livelihoods and contribute to social cohesion.<sup>46</sup> All partners operating under the JRP thus implement activities building on the same evidence-base of identified needs and priorities. MOPIC and leading Line Ministries ensure that different projects, initiatives and efforts are operationally coordinated, where needed, to address current and emerging needs of beneficiary groups. Interviews with representatives from involved Government partners and International Organisations, as well as Focus Group Discussions conducted with beneficiaries, found that the ARC projects' activities were deemed to be very relevant and coherent with other initiatives within the framework of the JRP. The MTR considers it important that ARC projects are understood, seen and planned as part of broader strategies and initiatives within the national context collectively contribute to addressing root cause, rather than being conceived as isolated activities.

<sup>45</sup> There is a specific question about this in the assessment form (BEMO), but findings suggest that this is approached more as a compliance requirement rather than as a formative element of the assessment.

<sup>46</sup> For more information, see <http://www.jrp.gov.jo/>. According to MOPIC: "The Jordan Response Plan 2018-2020 consolidates all required efforts to respond to and mitigate the impact of the Syria crisis on the Kingdom and the people living in it. It incorporates the latest policy decisions taken by the Government of Jordan on livelihoods and education, thereby becoming the only comprehensive Plan within which international grants for the Syria crisis should be provided to Jordan." MOPIC (2018). *Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2018-2020. Executive Summary*. To be found at: <http://www.jrp.gov.jo/Files/JRPExecutiveSummaryFinal.pdf>.

## 3.2 Internal Coherence and Learning

Learning was a central component of the ARC programme, as the MFA placed great emphasis on the capacity of individual organisations to reflect on the practice of implementing their interventions, draw insights, lessons and best practices from this and socialise these – within their own consortium, between consortia and with the MFA – to build up a body of knowledge on how to best deliver results in FCAS. This would, in time, also establish a knowledge- and practice-base within the MFA, which would help the ministry to optimise the use of centrally-managed programmes as a delivery model for supporting interventions similar to ARC.

The Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL) was established by the MFA in 2012 to support the ministry in knowledge generation, research and network with experts and practitioners to improve the application of evidence in policy and programmes in the area of Security and Rule of Law.<sup>47</sup> As part of its overall mandate, the KPSRL took on the responsibilities for facilitating the ARC global learning agenda in 2016.<sup>48</sup> However, this role was at the time not based on any specific ToR for the role and responsibilities that the KPSRL would take vis-à-vis the other involved partners (i.e. the MFA and ARC implementing partners) in developing and implementing the ARC global learning agenda.

The global learning agenda started tentatively. The first global ARC learning event in May 2017 brought together the MFA, KPSRL and ARC organisations to jointly revise the ARC M&E framework. Additionally, the 5 learning groups for ARC were defined.<sup>49</sup> During 2017 and 2018 little progress was recorded on the global learning activities, primarily due to the fact that ARC projects were in their inception phase and starting up their activities. This left little time and opportunity for learning at this particular stage of project implementation.<sup>50</sup> During a working meeting on the ARC global learning in September 2018, a first reflection took place on the functioning of the learning agenda, regarding what was working and not and what needed to be done in order to operationalise and revitalise the model for learning within ARC. As a result, a ToR for the learning agenda was discussed and agreed between all involved partners, where roles and responsibilities between the different partners were clarified.<sup>51</sup> The possibility for ARC organisations to apply for the Knowledge Management Funds (KMF), managed by the KPSRL, was also discussed in order to provide an additional incentive to ARC partners' involvement in the global learning agenda's activities. After this meeting, the learning events took on a more regional approach with regional events and workshops held in various locations and moments.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The KPSRL is presented by a consortium of Clingendael, IDLO and Saferworld. See <https://www.kpsrl.org/about-us>.

<sup>48</sup> Although funding for KPSRL's facilitation of the ARC global learning agenda was provided through the MFA's core-funding to KPSRL and thereby reflected in KPSRL's Annual Work Plans (AWP), these plans did not provide a level of detail on specific activities related to the ARC global learning agenda.

<sup>49</sup> These groups are: (1) Income generating activities for peace and social cohesion; (2) Gender transformation; (3) Conflict sensitivity; (4) Securitised environments; and (5) Adaptive programming.

<sup>50</sup> Interviews with respondents from the MFA and KPSRL stated that ARC projects only started their implementation in 2017 and that therefore there was still little ground for learning in this first year. Although various ARC organisations invested significantly in additional assessments, surveys and studies to inform the evidence-base of the projects, this body of learning was not taken up in the ARC global learning agenda in 2017 to inform learning activities around these.

<sup>51</sup> The use of KMF funds was also discussed in order to provide an additional incentive to ARC partners' involvement in the global learning agenda's activities. See also KPSRL's ARC Learning Group's Assessment meeting notes, September 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Amongst others, the following regional workshops/events have been organised: Workshop on ARC programming in the Horn of Africa, held in Nairobi, Kenya, in July 2019, led by Saferworld and Conflict Dynamics International; Workshop on Community Peacebuilding approaches in Central and East Africa, held in Entebbe, Uganda, in August 2019, led by ZOA, Sudia and Saferworld; Workshop on ARC lessons learnt, held in Juba, South Sudan, in October 2019, led by CARE; Workshop on Applying tools for adaptive programming and development effectiveness, held in The Hague, the Netherlands, in October 2019, led by CARE; ARC Regional learning event, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in March

### Lack of clarity about what constitutes a learning agenda

A significant challenge for both the MFA and the KPSRL was the absence of an available model<sup>53</sup> on which to mould the ARC global learning agenda.<sup>54</sup> Interviews with respondents from the MFA and KPSRL affirmed that both the MFA and KPSRL struggled with this question as, illustratively, it took until October 2018 for a ToR for the ARC global learning agenda to be defined, clarifying its objectives, roles and responsibilities and working structure.<sup>55</sup> Even so, it was difficult to “activate” ARC organisations within the ARC global learning agenda as the stated learning objectives were oftentimes seen by ARC organisations as not sufficiently reflecting the realities of project implementation on the ground or the practical, needs-based focus for learning the organisations required.<sup>56</sup> This has led the KPSRL to reflect on how to overcome the challenge of motivating organisations to operate within a global learning agenda, where limited incentives and accountability measures exist to do so.<sup>57</sup>

### Diverging expectations regarding KPSRL’s role within the ARC global learning agenda

While the MFA and KPSRL have a good working relationship – which extends beyond the activities related to the ARC global learning agenda – it is clear that both have different expectations as to what the KPSRL can and should do to effectively fulfil its role within the ARC programme. The MFA expected the KPSRL to take on the full responsibility for developing and implementing an ARC learning agenda, including proposing the model and methodology to make this work.<sup>58</sup> The KPSRL, on the other hand, saw its role primarily as being a facilitator to “keep an ongoing learning conversation” between ARC organisations and the MFA and to providing structure and technical support in response to the learning objectives communicated through the MFA and ARC organisations.<sup>59</sup> The MFA also expressed its expectation that the KPSRL would analyse the learning emerging from the ARC global learning agenda and synthesise those relevant for policy-uptake by the Ministry.<sup>60</sup> Fundamentally, the questions of why all involved partners need to learn, based on which learning needs and how to apply this knowledge were therefore not jointly addressed, agreed and understood. This also became clear when talking to ARC implementing organisation staff, who sometimes only had very limited awareness of the ARC global learning agenda, what their role in this is and why they should be investing resources to be more involved.<sup>61</sup> This would indicate a lack of direct communication from the MFA and KPSRL towards local ARC organizations on the ground regarding the intention of the ARC global learning agenda.<sup>62</sup>

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2020, led by Oxfam Novib and KPSRL. In addition, consortia have organised an unspecified number of learning events at the national level. .

<sup>53</sup> The interview with a respondent from KPSRL confirmed that the KPSRL could not base the ARC global learning agenda on an available model for managing a global learning agenda, which would provide an industry standard for organizing and facilitating the learning agenda, including a proposed methodology for capturing lessons learnt and consolidating, disseminating and applying these.

<sup>54</sup> In effect, even though individual organisations have developed their own organisational learning approaches and have institutionalised these within their organisations, there is no clear and available model how learning should take place between organisations (and facilitated by a third-party, such as the KPSRL). This was affirmed by interviews with respondents from KPSRL.

<sup>55</sup> See ToR, ARC Global Learning Agenda, October 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Interviews with respondents from ARC organisations in the field forwarded the view that the ARC global learning objectives seemed ‘abstract’ and appeared to them to be detached from the realities of project implementation on the ground.

<sup>57</sup> This reflection and related challenges are further described in the KPSRL’s Situational Update, April 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Following interviews with MFA personnel.

<sup>59</sup> Following interviews with KPSRL personnel.

<sup>60</sup> Following interview with MFA personnel. The MFA considered that the KPSRL has not yet performed this function.

<sup>61</sup> As stated by MFA/DSH personnel interviewed, the learning agenda has mostly involved organisations who already have an organisational culture open to learning. It comes as no surprise that these organisations have been mostly involved in global events.

<sup>62</sup> Although the ARC organizations leading the different consortia were well informed about the global learning agenda and its activities, this information did not always flow down to the partner organizations on the ground.

A complicating factor in this regard has been the absence of any contractual relationship between the KPSRL and the ARC organisations which would have required organisations to demonstrate accountability on stated/agreed learning objectives. The KPSRL was effectively left without a 'stick' as well as few 'carrots' beyond the potential access to the KMF.<sup>63</sup> This is however not a challenge unique to the ARC global learning agenda. Organisations themselves are changing their culture and approaches to incorporate MEAL more fully into policy and programming. Some NGO's working in FCAS in general, including ARC organisations, are more ahead in this and can clearly be considered **frontrunners or learning champions** in this regard.

The KPSRL is also clear that ARC organisations should be the owners of the learning agenda and therefore they should be the first actors to show interest, commitment and motivation towards partaking in the ARC global learning agenda. ARC organisations should be proactive in articulating their learning needs and seeking collaboration with KPSRL and other ARC organisations to achieve these within the opportunities provided through the ARC global learning agenda. Due to the lack of clarity of what the KPSRL was intended to achieve, what success would look like and the KPSRL's own experience on how best to facilitate this, the KPSRL started with a weak mandate on the ARC global learning agenda. Nonetheless, the KPSRL has recently produced relevant learning events, in line with ARC organisations' learning needs and expectations.

### **The ARC learning agenda is on the right track to respond to organisations' learning needs**

The MFA has played an important role in steering the development of the ARC global learning agenda since its inception and in energizing the involved ARC organizations to take part in it. After an initial period of little activity on the ARC global learning agenda, by mid-2018 the KPSRL also began to take on a more focused role and started to actively reach out to ARC organisations to understand their learning needs, what type of support they needed and how the ARC global learning agenda would support this.<sup>64</sup> The MFA supported the KPSRL to bring a change in approach in 2019 which favoured regional events over global events as this enabled learning between ARC organisations based on these organisations' comparative experiences within the region. This coincided with organisations coming forward with learning topics, instead of following those outlined in the global learning agenda.<sup>65</sup> In this regard, the ARC organizations themselves merit credit for having demonstrated ownership of the ARC global learning agenda by exercising leadership in identifying learning needs and opportunities, proposing (regional) learning events and organizing and facilitating these, with the technical and financial support from the KPSRL. The new approach also inspired collaboration and kept learning closer to perceived needs and challenges faced by organisations in project implementation. This promoted cooperation and coordination between ARC organisations around these learning events and topics, as well as sharing information, insights, lessons learnt and best practices from their own organisational experiences.<sup>66</sup> How this regional approach has caught on is shown in the number of regional workshops/events organised since then.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> ARC organisations would still need to apply competitively to the KMF in order to access these funds.

<sup>64</sup> Following interviews with KPSRL personnel.

<sup>65</sup> Even though the global learning agenda and its learning objectives and topics were also formulated with the support of the ARC organisations, the new approach at the regional level allowed organisations to bring forward topics more *contextualised* to their regional context, thereby making them more relevant and appealing for (regional) learning.

<sup>66</sup> The extent to which ARC organisations made adaptations to the project designs based on learning will be treated in subsection 3.3.2. on Adaptive Programming.

<sup>67</sup> In addition to the regional workshops/events, also Learning Papers have been developed within the Learning Groups. So far, the Learning Group on Adaptive Programming has produced a Learning Paper on Enabling Factors of Adaptive Programming (December 2019) and the Learning Group on Securitised Environments is producing a Learning Paper on Sustainable Community Approaches to Peacebuilding in Securitised Environments: Case Study of Somalia (forthcoming in 2020).

This approach clearly resonates with ARC organisations,<sup>68</sup> even with those who have (so far) not participated in any ARC related learning events facilitated by KPSRL.<sup>69</sup> ARC organisations overall had little awareness of KPSRL and the ARC global learning agenda, which is a sign that ARC learning has been given insufficient visibility towards ARC organisations implementing projects at the local level. However, seen against the progress made since Mid-2018, which is showing clear improvements,<sup>70</sup> as well as the limited capacities available at the KPSRL-Secretariat,<sup>71</sup> the MFA should feel confident that the KPSRL is now on the 'right track' to learn [how to learn](#) and should be considered an effective partner for the remainder of the ARC programme (until 2021). Also, the KPSRL recently conducted a MTR on all KPSRL activities which confirmed its overall progress and performance.<sup>72</sup> Learning is now being facilitated at a regional rather than at a central level. This regional approach is considered more feasible, as it remains challenging to centrally identify a set of commonalities between diverse and disperse learning needs and addressing these within a global learning agenda. The ARC global learning agenda for the remainder of the ARC programme will focus on consolidating the available evidence-base on learning amongst ARC organizations, synthesise this at the global level and socialise the most relevant knowledge with ARC organizations at the national and local levels.<sup>73</sup>

Almost all organisations commonly follow a (semi-)formal process for learning or actively facilitate this through more formal procedures that ensure that insights from M&E and other evidence-base (i.e. assessments, surveys and studies) are systematically captured and analysed to inform subsequent planning and programming.<sup>74</sup> All ARC organisations interviewed as part of the MTR evidenced that they have an (in)formal process whereby M&E data feeds into programming. However, there is a difference in the level of sophistication and intent through which this happens. Any learning component should therefore clearly demonstrate 'added value' to project implementation, in order to not be felt as imposed and competing for scarce resources and staff availability.

<sup>68</sup> MFA cited that they now see ARC organisations proposing topics for learning events, are actively involved in agenda-setting for these meetings and organise the events, demonstrating now clear ownership.

<sup>69</sup> ARC organisations interviewed clearly preferred learning based on their practical needs on the ground, linked to actual challenges they face, so that learning is directly relevant to their realities on the ground and can be applied in practice.

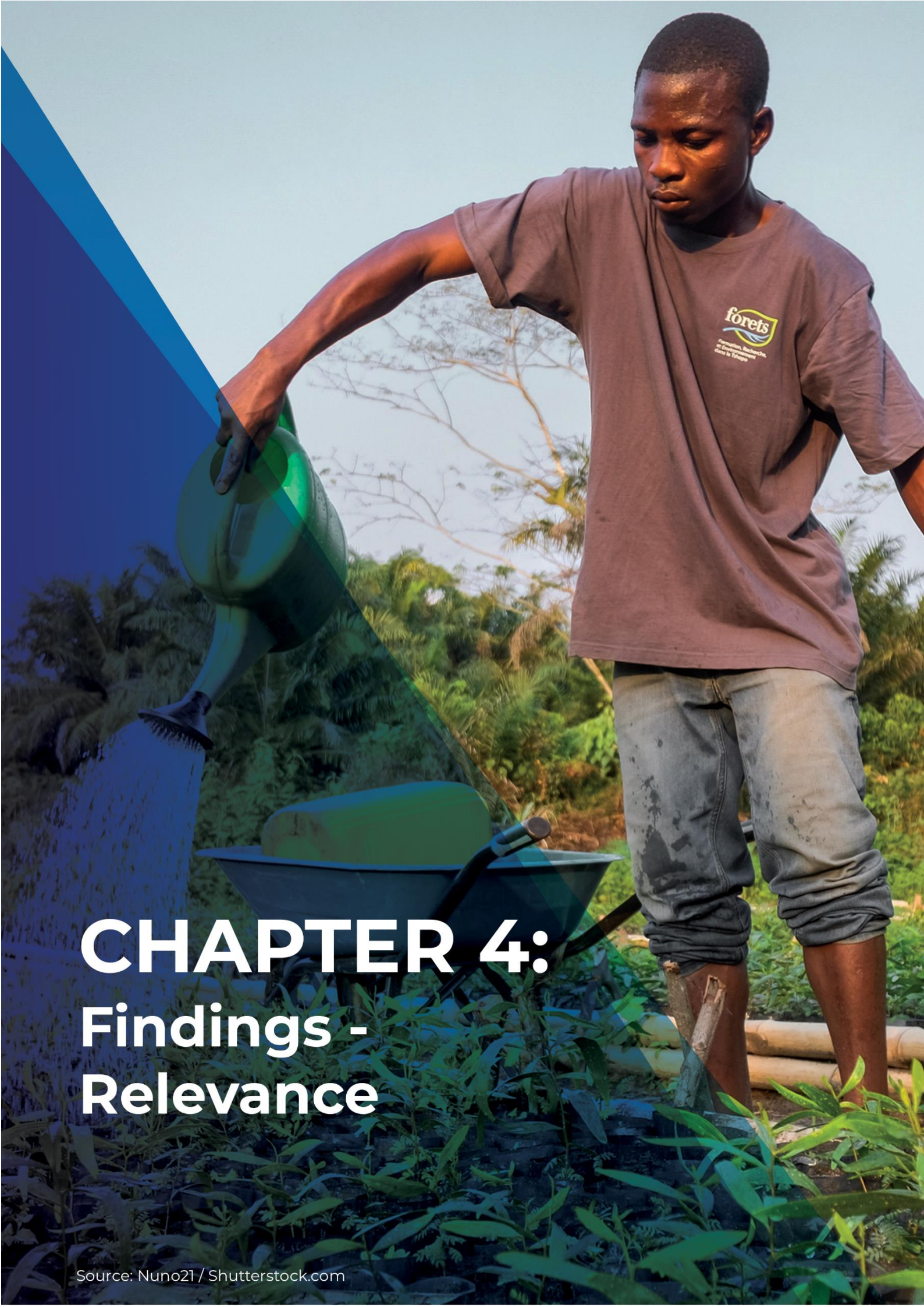
<sup>70</sup> As affirmed by interviews with respondents from the MFA And KPSRL.

<sup>71</sup> Following an interview with a respondent from the KPRS, the KPSRL has one dedicated staff who is able to commit about 40% of her time to the ARC global learning agenda.

<sup>72</sup> The MTR of the KPSRL cites that "(...) the KPSRL has been effective in re-activating the five ARC learning groups, and partially effective in prompting them to progress towards meaningful knowledge exchange and tangible learning results." See MTR of the KPSRL, August 2019.

<sup>73</sup> During a meeting between ARC learning partners and the MFA on 9 October 2019, as a way forward, it was documented that "(...) ARC learning groups stakeholders agreed that it will be crucial to consolidate the evidence base that has been generated through 'learning by doing' at the local and national level. Efforts to take learning to the global level should be increased, with a feedback loop that feeds information back to the local and national level. (...) While they all agreed that not all learning results need to be synthesized at the global level, pertinent learning results should be shared more widely across the network of grantees."

<sup>74</sup> MFA cited evidence in learning from M&E data through the annual reporting cycle, which shows ARC organisations actively reflecting on strengths/weaknesses in implementation and drawing implications and lessons for subsequent planning (and revision) of activities for the following year.



# CHAPTER 4:

## Findings - Relevance

## 4 Findings – Relevance

This chapter presents an assessment of how relevant the overall programme and its projects' objectives and design were to the needs that were identified, and whether they continued to do so where circumstances changed. In reference to the programme's overall objective of (contributing to) addressing root causes of conflict and irregular migration, needs refer first of all to the end-beneficiary communities in the 12 ARC countries. Notwithstanding, needs, policies, and priorities at implementing partner level, country level, regional and ministerial level are also understood as legitimate "needs" to which the programme's responsiveness and flexibility is to be assessed. Institutional needs, policies and priorities along the intervention chain are relevant for assessing whether the programme's delivery model (or 'theory of action') is suitable for achieving its objectives. It is also critical to assess the extent to which adjustments in programme design and implementation were evidence-based, and whether the apparent needs were adequately analysed and understood.

### Key findings relating to the relevance of the ARC programme

- ARC project documents are of good professional quality
- Involving local partners within the consortia was key for contextualisation of the projects
- Projects designs made good use of evidence-base to ground their interventions
- Consortia needs were well understood and addressed, although ARC project budgets and timeframes are too limited to warrant long-term engagement.
- Country-level needs were included to come extent during the programme's design phase, but focus during implementation declined.
- The ARC programme was highly responsive to the needs of DSH to learn from previous programmes

### 4.1 Responsiveness to Local Contexts

Interventions should always be clearly contextualised and grounded in local realities. To support ARC organisations in this regard, the MFA provided them with clear guidance<sup>75</sup> for the project design and development phase. This required partners to invest the necessary time and resources to form a comprehensive understanding of the local implementation context and establish a robust evidence-base on the key needs and priorities to be addressed through the intervention.

The ARC programme gave due attention to the project design and development phase.<sup>76</sup> The MFA used a tender process to solicit proposals from international and national NGOs. The MFA encouraged organisations to submit proposals as part of a consortium, as these would be given priority over proposal submitted by individual organisations. This followed a two-step process. The first step involved the submission of a Concept Note together with an explanation of the consortium's track-record in the country, which would demonstrate their experience and suitability to develop and implement the proposed intervention on the prioritised areas by the

<sup>75</sup> See MFA (2016). Guidance Programme Development. Addressing Root Causes Fund. This guidance was developed for the so-called Phase 2 of the design process.

<sup>76</sup> The tendering process of the ARC programme has been evaluated as part of the IOB evaluation. This established that the ARC programme's tendering process showed clear improvements with respect to the Reconstruction programme's tender process, incorporating key lessons learnt from this experience. The MTR concurs with this assessment.

ARC programme.<sup>77</sup> Only shortlisted consortia were invited to continue to the next stage.<sup>78</sup> The second step entailed the submission of a full project proposal. Project documents were developed based on a set template proposed by the MFA.<sup>79</sup> All project proposals (both in Concept Note and full project document stages) were reviewed and approved by DSH personnel before awarding ARC funding to the consortia for implementation of the projects.<sup>80</sup>

The ARC programme was intended to give organisations a level of flexibility in proposing the appropriate intervention strategy and design within the local context, while ensuring observance and compliance with the proper application of Conflict- and Gender analysis and the use of evidence-base to inform the project's ToC and baselines.

### **ARC project documents are of good professional quality**

With little exception, the ARC organisations (on behalf of the consortia they represented) submitted project proposals of a high quality standard regarding the level of analysis (e.g. situation analysis), detail (e.g. needs and priorities within the local context) and elaboration (e.g. conflict- and gender analysis). Although many organisations have solid project development and proposal drafting capacity in-house,<sup>81</sup> it was understood that external consultants were involved (in a number of cases) to support the consortia in developing the project documentation.<sup>82</sup> The project documents, as these were approved by the MFA, demonstrated an adequate articulation of the Situation Analysis, ToC, Conflict- and Gender analysis, as well as other relevant sections of the proposal. It is to be noted that most proposals show a sufficient use of evidence-base to inform the context analysis (in determining needs and priorities to be addressed) and the design of the proposed ToC. The guidance tools provided by the MFA in this regard were considered useful by the organisations.

### **Involving local partners within the consortia was key for contextualisation of the projects**

The consortium-model enabled the participation of local organisations.<sup>83</sup> This provided consortia with important resources, as local partners enable consortia to develop a sound understanding of the local context (including its actors, relationships and dynamics) and support consortia in developing a conflict-sensitive approach for the project.<sup>84</sup> Local partners also give the consortium a local presence on the ground and access to potential beneficiary groups. The ARC programme did well to stimulate the involvement of these local organisations. All organisations also testified to the 'collaborative approach' between consortia partners and within consortia during the project design phase. Interviews with respondents from ARC organisations attested to the importance of the collaborative approach by involving particularly local partners in the project design process, which benefitted the contextualisation of the intervention strategy and design. Collaboration between consortia within the same country context occurred during the project design phase and

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<sup>77</sup> For the areas of ARC programme, see chapter 2.

<sup>78</sup> The shortlisting considered the adequacy of the Concept Note and track-record, but also considered thematic/country/regional coverage, as well as the total resource requirements of the projects combined within the overall budget ceiling of the programme.

<sup>79</sup> The project proposals did not all follow a strict template, but covered the following sections: i) Context Analysis; ii) Theory of Change; iii) Gender Sensitivity; iv) Synergies and Complementarities; v) Sustainability; vi) Risk Management; vii) MEAL; and viii) Budget. This provided organisations with a comprehensive outline to explain and articulate the projects' intervention strategy and design.

<sup>80</sup> DSH was supported by a number of consultant to assist them in review of the proposals

<sup>81</sup> Particularly the larger NGO's.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with respondent from MFA and organisation in the field affirmed this.

<sup>83</sup> This was important as the high thresholds set for organisations to partake in the tender process would not have allowed smaller, local organisations to participate on their own.

<sup>84</sup> Conflict-sensitivity approach is commonly defined as: (1) Understanding the context in which it is operating, particularly intergroup relations; (2) Understanding the interactions between its interventions and the context/group relations; and (3) Acting upon the understanding of these interactions, in order to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts. Herbert, S. (2017). *Conflict analysis: Topic guide*. See <https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ConflictAnalysis.pdf>. Some organisations conducted a specific conflict analysis as part of the project's preparation, others made use of available evidence and data, whereas others relied directly on the local knowledge of partners. The MTR considers that the project proposals demonstrate an adequate understanding and application of a conflict-sensitive approach.

at the start of the projects' implementation, but further engagement throughout implementation depended on a number of factors, including whether the consortia were able to identify complementarities and synergies between projects (e.g. type of intervention, beneficiaries, geographical areas), and the extent to which the embassies were able to facilitate events whereby synergies could be explored.

In the interviews with the respondents no negative experiences were cited, although the MTR noted that in the course of implementation some asymmetries in power balance had occurred within consortia. The MTR considers that the engagement of local partners has been key to ensure that the different project documents demonstrated a good articulation of the intervention strategy and design, in response to the realities on the ground.

#### **Box 4: Conflict-sensitive approaches in extremely volatile regions in Mali**

One of the problems in the focus areas of the ARC project, Mopti, Gao and Timbouctou, is the continuous recruitment of Malian youth by armed groups, including terrorists. Poor socio-economic circumstances and other root causes contribute to a situation of despair for many people, particularly for youth. The consortium (Norwegian Church Aid, ICCO and the Human Security Collective) actively engages young people and tries to keep them from looking for alternatives such as joining armed groups by working closely with communities. As part of the conflict transformation process, the consortium takes a very careful approach towards including opponents and spoilers that are needed to find local solutions. This differs per region, even per village. In the northern Gao region, cercle Gourma Rarhous for example, there is a great tension between working with authorities versus working with extremist groups. Since this is such a delicate process, the committees of the ARC-project called EPR (équipe de personnes ressources - EPR) are being selected by the communities themselves. Albeit lengthy, such bottom up process helps create ownership and better prevent and transform local conflicts. Local partners also need to be agile, such as NGO Éveil which works in four 'cercles' in the Mopti region including Djenné, Bankass and Douentza, which are all extremely volatile. Organising activities requires constant monitoring and adjustment, especially when movement is being restricted due to the presence of very mobile armed groups. Réveil's activities are being reviewed on a daily basis, to ensure that the beneficiaries are not being put in danger. This project's very flexible and conflict-sensitive approach helped it succeed in places where few would expect any success.

#### **Projects designs made good use of evidence-base to ground their interventions**

The MTR found that the projects overall had made good use of evidence to substantiate the selection of the type of activities, beneficiary groups, geographic areas, etc. The MTR considers this was a key factor in ensuring that the projects designs were well grounded in the realities on the ground. Organisations also made good use of the long (1 year) inception phase<sup>85</sup> to conduct additional assessments, surveys and studies - if needed - to inform the articulation of the intervention strategy and design as presented in the projects' Inception Reports. The investments into establishing this evidence-base also enabled the consortia to better reflect on whether the implementation of the intervention followed the changes foreseen in the ToC. Some consortia included specialised research partner organisations that were primarily responsible for conducting ongoing research about the relevance and effectiveness of the project activities in the contexts in which they operate. The MTR found that the Annual Reports and Plans showed that organisations actively reflected on the changes and developments in the local context, explaining how this affected the assumptions<sup>86</sup> underlying the ToC and adjust project activities, if and where needed.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Following the awarding of project funding.

<sup>86</sup> Determined as part of the development of the ToC.

<sup>87</sup> The extent to which adjustments were made based on evidence is described in Subsection 3.3.2 on Adaptive Programming.

### Box 5: Investing in an evidence-base. An example from Jordan

The consortium consisting of Mercy Corps and the International Rescue Committee, implementing the 'Access to Justice and Jobs in Jordan' project, invested significantly in conducting the needed assessments during the project's Inception Phase (December 2016 – April 2017) in order to establish a robust evidence-base for their activities under the Socio and Economic Reconstruction component of the ARC programme. These assessments included: a rapid market assessment, a deep-dive market system assessment, stakeholder mappings,<sup>88</sup> a youth-led labour market assessment, a gender assessment and a baseline assessment. In order to complete these assessments, the consortium requested and the Ministry approved an extension of the Inception Phase for an additional two months until April 2017. The comprehensiveness and quality of the evidence-base was acknowledged by DSH in their approval of the project's Inception Report.

## 4.2 Responsiveness to other Relevant Needs, Policies and Priorities

An assessment of a programme's relevance involves looking at differences and trade-offs between different priorities or needs, also including the needs, policies and priorities of government (national, regional, local), CSOs, private entities and international bodies involved in funding, implementing and/or overseeing the intervention.<sup>89</sup>

In consultation with key stakeholders during the inception phase of the MTR, the following levels of needs were identified, in addition to the local needs of end-beneficiary communities:

1. Needs, policies and priorities of the [ARC implementing consortia partners](#) (international and national CSOs).
2. Needs, policies and priorities of the [Netherlands embassies](#) in the ARC countries.
3. Needs, policies and priorities of [national and subnational government authorities](#) in the ARC countries.
4. Needs, policies and priorities of [other donors and multilateral organisations](#) operating in the ARC countries.
5. Needs, policies and priorities of [DSH](#).

### ARC Implementing Consortia Partner Needs

Although a distinction needs to be made between the needs, policies and priorities of international NGOs and national (local) CSOs, the overall underlying need for these types of organisations working on addressing root causes in FCAS is the need for continuity and long-term support. Research<sup>90</sup> overwhelmingly demonstrates that effectuating change through civil society engagement at the level of root causes of conflict and irregular migration requires a long-term concerted effort. This often contrasts with short(er) timeframes (i.e. 3-5 years) offered by funding opportunities to implement projects. Donor funding to both INGOs and local CSOs often lacks this commitment to continuous funding over various funding cycles. Short funding windows, limited core funding, and changing donor conditionalities enforced through strict tendering procedures

<sup>88</sup> These were conducted on the sectors targeted by the project, namely the dairy sector, the olive oil sector, the labour market and the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

<sup>89</sup> See: OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation (2019) "Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use", p7.

<sup>90</sup> For a recent Netherlands MFA-funded volume of academic research on this topic, see Thea Hilhorst et.al. (2017) "Facing Fragilities: People, Aid and Institutions in Socio-Economic Recovery" Routledge, London <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781315690759>

are all factors<sup>91</sup> that limit the extent to which civil society actors can effectively and conflict sensitively operate in FCAS.

There are many existing civil society partnerships between INGOs and local CSOs operating in FCAS that thrive on being specialised in a certain niche. Partnerships often have a track-record in a certain sector, or topic, where relationships with communities, local authorities and other non-state actors have been cultivated over time.<sup>92</sup> Many organisations also have their own approaches to collaborating, monitoring, learning and adapting in FCAS, which they have developed over the course of various projects.

Finally, relationships between INGOs and local CSOs are also of critical importance. INGOs rely on local partners for context, access, expertise and legitimacy, while local CSOs rely on INGOs for access to funding, technical expertise and lobby & advocacy.

#### *How the ARC programme responded to these needs*

It is clear that some of the ARC programme's mechanisms do respond to these organisational needs of CSOs working in FCAS. For example, the ARC programme's approach to tendering through consortia rather than individual organisations enables local CSOs to directly access MFA donor funding, which they would have otherwise not been able to access at this scale. This was confirmed overwhelmingly by international and local ARC partners, who also attested to the advantage of involving local partners so extensively at such an early stage of project design.

Overall, ARC partner organisation staff indicate that compared to other donor-funded tenders, the ARC programme enables them to do what they do best in the context in which they work. Relationships between national and international partners are valued as being more balanced, and consortia are given sufficient autonomy to tailor their projects to align with their larger body of ongoing work. Notwithstanding, ARC funding is project-specific and for a period of 3 to 5 years maximum, with budgets ranging between 3,5 and 9,5 million EUR. Combined with a lack of prospects for follow-up funding, the ARC programme is suitable to support or catalyse longer-term ongoing work, but it does not significantly address the needs of partners for long-term (core) funding<sup>93</sup>. Clear guidance and advance communication towards partners about prospects for follow-up funding does help mitigate uncertainties regarding the feasibility of longer-term objectives (see recommendations).

#### *Relative prioritisation*

When assessing the extent to which ARC partner needs, policies and priorities were prioritised, it is clear that the ARC design team heeded the lessons from the Reconstruction programme well<sup>94</sup>. Overall, the ARC programme gave more priority to the needs of (local) partner organisations compared to previous tenders. At a more fundamental level, the ARC programme partner selection model is not drastically different from how international donor-funded tenders operate, in the sense that they offer limited long-term continuity. Sustainability is jeopardised when implementing organisations are continuously asked to revise their activities, approach and consortia compositions to better align with the newest donor priorities that shift every few years. The ARC programme is not immune to this, as some national partner organisations interviewed for this MTR with an explicit focus and track-record on addressing the socio-economic root causes

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<sup>91</sup> Selection of factors cited by ARC partner organisations interviewed for this MTR.

<sup>92</sup> See: "Policy Brief – Building Civil Society Capacity In Fragile And Conflict Affected States", British Council (2017), available at [https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/British-Council-Mobaderoon-Policy-Brief\\_Building-Civil-Society.pdf](https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/British-Council-Mobaderoon-Policy-Brief_Building-Civil-Society.pdf) and "Strengthening Civil Society? Reflections on International Engagement in Fragile States" ECDPM Discussion Paper 135 (2012), available at <https://ecdpm.org/publications/strengthening-civil-society-reflections-international-engagement-fragile-states/>

<sup>93</sup> Many partners operating in FCAS have long standing (10yr+) networks and relationships there. 3 to 5 years of project-based funding at between 1 to 2 million EUR per year (average) thus has the potential to support longer-term programming, but it does not meet the needs of long-term institutional funding and support.

<sup>94</sup> See "Evaluatie Wederopbouw tender 2012-2016"

of conflict and irregular migration, have already been informed that there is no prospect for possible ARC II funding, since this will almost certainly exclude the socio-economic reconstruction result area. This example demonstrates how the fundamental needs of implementing partner organisations regarding continuity of support are insufficiently prioritised.

### Embassy Needs

It is difficult to capture the needs of different embassies in such a wide range of country contexts. Overall, embassies indicated that in general they struggle with limited capacity in order to be significantly involved in centrally-managed thematic programme implemented (in part) within the country context under the responsibility of the embassy. Interviews with senior DSH staff indicated that on average, the ratio of funding through centralised programmes managed from The Hague to decentralised funding through embassy-managed programmes is 5:1<sup>95</sup>. At the same time, embassies also voiced their dissatisfaction with how the previous Reconstruction programme projects were implemented largely outside of their control<sup>96</sup>. This combination of limited capacity for programme management on the one hand, and a dissatisfaction about the lack of technical/thematic involvement on the other hand, characterises the general assessment of needs at the level of the embassies at the time when the ARC programme was designed.

More generally, Netherlands' embassies in FCAS often rely on NGO partners for context-specific information and sometimes access to communities and other non-governmental stakeholders. Alignment between what trusted NGO partners (national and international) are doing and their own specific priorities as enshrined in the MACS obviously enhances symbiosis between the two.<sup>97</sup> The latter is often based on an assessment of the specific added value that The Netherlands can bring to the country in question, based on track-record in a specific niche (such as water management, gender mainstreaming, or agricultural extension).

Relationships between embassies and NGO partners in FCAS that are (partially) based on these two aspects - access to networks and information, and alignment with MACS priorities - tend to be quite strong, regardless of whether funding is through centralised or decentralised funding modalities.<sup>98</sup>

### *How the ARC programme responded to these needs*

The embassies' needs were taken very seriously during the design phases of the ARC programme. The programme was envisioned as a 'hybrid programme', whereby programme management responsibilities were allocated to the policy implementation unit (BU) within DSH<sup>99</sup> while technical/thematic oversight and monitoring responsibilities were expected to be fulfilled by the embassies,<sup>100</sup> though this was not sufficiently clarified in the MoUs or kick-off minutes.<sup>101</sup> The IOB evaluation report "Less Pretension, More Realism" confirms that the ARC tender placed emphasis on "creating synergy with the multiannual country strategies (MACS) and better engaging embassies and other relevant departments in the MFA".<sup>102</sup> Subsequently, during the second-stage proposal design meetings with partners, applicants met with DSH and embassy focal points to 'establish complementarity and synergy between the ARC projects and between ARC-funded and

<sup>95</sup> The specific figure cited was 17%, although other interviews also cited ratios up to 3:1 (33%).

<sup>96</sup> Findings from interviews with senior DSH policy officers and Embassy staff, confirming similar findings by the IOB evaluation team in the report "Less Pretension, More Realism"

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Addis Ababa Embassy staff indicated that this was clearly the case for the ARC projects in Ethiopia during the early project design phase. After the violent protests in mid-2016 that directly affected the interests of Dutch SMEs in Ethiopia, the Embassy's focus shifted away from the ARC projects' thematic priorities of employment creation.

<sup>98</sup> Many DSH and Embassy staff interviewed for this MTR emphasised that the issue of centralised vs decentralised funding is not as relevant to them, but that relationships and thematic alignment are more important.

<sup>99</sup> The DSH Policy Implementation Unit, or "BU"

<sup>100</sup> Confirmed through interviews with 4 out of 4 members of the ARC design team in 2016, as well as Embassy staff that were involved in the start-up phase of the programme later on in the same year. Also evident from country-level MoUs and kick-off meeting minutes.

<sup>101</sup> A review of all 6 MoUs and 8 kick-off meeting minutes that were available indicates that the roles and responsibilities of the embassies with regard to technical/thematic oversight and monitoring was unclear (in all cases).

<sup>102</sup> IOB evaluation report "Less Pretension, More Realism", p29

similar donor-funded programmes'.<sup>103</sup> This initial buoyancy was confirmed in stakeholder interviews, and is clear from the country MoUs and kick-off meeting minutes.

In practice, this operational accommodation of the embassies to be less burdened by project management tasks, and more in control at a strategic/thematic level, did not materialise in more involvement and ownership by the embassies. For an overview of the different factors contributing to this trend, please refer back to chapter 3.1 of this MTR about country-level coherence.

### *Relative prioritisation*

The institutional needs, policies and priorities of the Netherlands' embassies in ARC programme countries were diligently assessed and considered in the design of the ARC programme. Members of the ARC programme design team all agreed that the role of the embassies in this programme was critical. As a result, a lot of time and resources were invested to calibrate the ARC programme in such a way that it responded to the needs of the embassies to the greatest extent possible for a centrally managed thematic programme. Desk review and interviews suggest that the operational needs of the embassies (i.e. minimum project management responsibilities and more elaborate strategic/thematic oversight) were prioritised. The strategic and thematic needs of the embassies specifically, expressed as alignment with MACS and other external donor and multilateral intervention frameworks, were given less explicit priority.

### **Other Country-level Stakeholder Needs**

This residual category of needs includes a wide range of external stakeholders that are relevant to the country-level contexts. Principles of country-level coherence and ownership witnessed a huge momentum in the wake of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008). This was subsequently reinvigorated specifically in the context of FCAS during the 4<sup>th</sup> High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in 2011, which became known as the "New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States". Notwithstanding, the second half of the 2010s witnessed a sharp decline in policy debates around the core principle of ownership.<sup>104</sup> The majority of ARC programme countries can be qualified as FCAS.<sup>105</sup> In some of the countries where the ARC programme operates, there are strong national development frameworks in place with a high degree of government control and ownership (Jordan for example). In other ARC countries, state legitimacy and capacity is weak and development frameworks are driven more by multilateral aid organisations (South Sudan, Afghanistan and Somalia for example). In all ARC countries however, irrespective of how different the context is, there are a myriad of national and subnational development frameworks, platforms, policies, coordination clusters, etc. Evidence from the past decade of working through NGO partners in FCAS<sup>106</sup> shows that alignment and coherence with civil society programmes, platforms or frameworks working on similar topics is essential for achieving results in the long run.

### *How the ARC programme responded to these needs*

From the outset of the ARC programme design phase, the ambition to reduce the level of fragmentation was prevalent. While the Reconstruction programme funded 29 projects in 24

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p30

<sup>104</sup> See Keijzer, Klingebiel and Scholtes (2019) "Promoting ownership in a 'post aid-effectiveness' world. Evidence from Rwanda and Liberia." Accessible at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/dpr.12469>

<sup>105</sup> The 2019 Fragile States Index (see <https://fundforpeace.org/2019/04/10/fragile-states-index-2019/>) qualifies 4 of the ARC countries as "Very High Alert", 2 more as "High Alert", and another 4 under "Alert". Only Lebanon (High Warning) and Jordan (Warning) fall outside of the top 8 percentiles of the Fragile States index.

<sup>106</sup> The Netherlands MFA-funded "IS Academy on Human Security in Fragile States" (2009-2014), coordinated by the ministry's Peacebuilding and Stabilisation Unit (EFV) and the Wageningen UR Special Chair for Humanitarian Aid and Reconstruction, has accumulated a body of research and literature on this topic. Two relevant publications include its first occasional paper "Human Security and Capacity in Fragile States" (Christoplos & Hilhorst, 2009) available at <https://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/wurpubs/fulltext/144525>, and its 10<sup>th</sup> occasional paper "Policy Review: International and Dutch policies in the field of socio-economic development in fragile settings" (Hoffman, 2014) available at <https://www.kpsrl.org/publication/policy-review-international-and-dutch-policies-in-the-field-of-socio-economic-development-in-fragile-settings>

countries, ARC supported 21 projects in 12 countries. The guiding assumption was that fewer projects in fewer countries would positively contribute to more coherence at programme-level.<sup>107</sup> Country-level coherence was further stimulated by carving out a much more substantial role for the embassies, to ensure alignment with their priorities.<sup>108</sup> However, the needs of other stakeholders at country-level that are also trying to contribute to addressing root causes of conflict were not clearly addressed, directly or explicitly. Interviews and review of kick-off meeting minutes and MoUs indicate that synergies with similar donor funded programmes featured to some extent during the start-up phase of the ARC programme as agenda items, but there is little evidence to suggest that this was prioritised subsequently.

### *Relative prioritisation*

Compared to the ARC programme's responsiveness to other levels of needs, policies and priorities, the prioritisation of external national and subnational stakeholder needs in the ARC countries themselves was arguably the lowest.

### **Department of Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid (DSH) Needs**

One of the key needs of DSH at the time when the ARC programme was being designed in early 2016 was to respond to emerging lessons learnt from the Reconstruction programme.<sup>109</sup> The thematic department DSH was looking for ways to innovate in its engagement with CSOs in FCAS, and the ARC programme was seen as an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to do so. Various DSH policy officers also confirmed that 2016 was a period where there was a strong motivation for programming in FCAS to become more focussed. This translated to a need to have fewer projects in fewer countries, focussing on fewer thematic priorities.<sup>110</sup> Members of the core team responsible for the ARC programme design also cited an imminent need to improve relationships with the embassies, which the Reconstruction programme had not sufficiently invested in. Finally, from a strategic policy perspective, there was a growing need to respond to addressing the push factors of irregular migration to Europe, which in the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis had taken centre stage in the Netherlands' political debate after more than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015.<sup>111</sup> There was no such explicit focus in any previous NGO tender, and so the ARC programme had to align its Results Framework to the SROL ToC that DSH was revising at the time to incorporate addressing root causes of irregular migration and being interlinked with the root causes of conflict.

### *How the ARC programme responded to these needs*

The ARC programme responded relatively well to the DSH needs, policies and priorities at the time of its inception. One of the key lessons learnt from the Reconstruction programme, was to create a fund that was more focussed in terms of geographic and thematic scope. Interviews with policy officers involved during the design stages of the programme all indicated a more drastic reduction was originally envisioned for the ARC programme regarding the number of countries, consortia and projects, but that for political reasons more countries and projects were added as the design process continued. Similarly, the revised role of the embassies in the ARC programme, as opposed to how this was organised in the Reconstruction programme, is clearly in line with what DSH as a thematic department needed at the time to re-establish its legitimacy vis-à-vis the embassies. In some cases this has yielded positive results in terms of strengthening relationships between DSH and the embassies, while in others it has not (see previous chapter 3.1 about country-level coherence).

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<sup>107</sup> Confirmed by 3 out of 4 members of the core team responsible for designing the ARC programme in 2016

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. Also confirmed in the IOB report "Less Pretension, More Realism"

<sup>109</sup> Indicated by members of the core team responsible for ARC programme design, as well as by senior DSH management. See also "Evaluatie Wederopbouwtennder 2012-2016"

<sup>110</sup> Ultimately, the need to focus on fewer thematic priorities resulted in the decision to 'migrate' the results of the ARC programme's result area on socio-economic reconstruction (RA4) to the thematic department of Sustainable Economic Development (DDE) in 2017.

<sup>111</sup> See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/nl/policies/migratory-pressures/history-migratory-pressures/> (in Dutch)

Finally, the ARC programme's responsiveness to the policies and priorities of DSH at the time regarding addressing the root causes of irregular migration to Europe is complex and not completely evident. The ARC programme does not have a theory of change in itself, since the ARC RF is built on the same logic model as the SRoL ToC. This ToC also includes this impact pathway of addressing root causes of irregular migration through, amongst other things, socio-economic reconstruction interventions. The ARC RF responded to this trend by formulating the socio-economic reconstruction result area as 'Income generating and livelihoods opportunities (4.1), and Sustainable basic services (4.2), to prevent the (re)occurrence of conflicts, instability or irregular migration'. This is linked to the compulsory impact indicator [IL.MI.P.2] '*Number and % of programme beneficiaries' who report that they have real plans to emigrate within the next year*'.<sup>112</sup>

A review of the literature on this subject, including the 2018 IOB "Study on Development and Migration",<sup>113</sup> indicates that the causal pathway of socio-economic reconstruction activities to addressing the root causes of irregular migration is quite ambiguous, especially considering the budgets and timeframes of ARC project activities. Nonetheless, desk review of available programme documentation and broader MFA policy documents do indicate that the primary impact pathway through which the ARC programme proposes to address root causes of irregular migration is mainly through (self) employment-related interventions. It is also noteworthy to recount that this specific result area of socio-economic reconstruction was shifted to the Sustainable Economic Development Department (DDE), effectively placing it outside the thematic scope of DSH. It is notable that many of the DSH policy officers interviewed for this MTR were quite vocal about their dissatisfaction with this claim that the ARC programme would contribute to addressing root causes of irregular migration. Many of the implementing consortia partners working on socio-economic reconstruction activities on the other hand, do retain their stance on the importance of socio-economic reconstruction activities to mitigate push factors of irregular migration.

### *Relative prioritisation*

Findings show that the needs, policies and priorities of DSH were highly prioritised during the design phase of the ARC programme. The programme was originally envisioned as a lean and 'agile' programme that would meet both the institutional needs of DSH vis-à-vis other components of the MFA (most notably the embassies), as well as the thematically strategic needs of addressing root causes of irregular migration (in addition to the root causes of conflict and instability). Ultimately, its ambitions to be substantially more focussed than the Reconstruction programme, to improve relationships with the embassies, and to convincingly show results that the programme has contributed to mitigating irregular migration to Europe, were not entirely realistic. Notwithstanding, if contributing to addressing root causes of conflict and irregular migration in the countries where the programme operates is the overall objective, was this relatively high prioritisation of the ministry's needs during the design phase warranted? When reviewing policy and subsequent programme documents, it is clear that the ARC programme's aim is to support the "bottom up" drivers of stability and development in FCAS. This suggests the programme's responsiveness to the needs, policies and priorities in the selected countries should ostensibly trump its relevance to the ministry's own internal policies and priorities, which was not always the case.

<sup>112</sup> See Guidance note ARC common results monitoring framework (Updated version of 23 JAN 2017) and Methodological Note OA.6

<sup>113</sup> See: <https://english.iob-evaluatie.nl/publications/publications/2018/10/01/427-%E2%80%93-job-%E2%80%93-development-and-migration-%E2%80%93-literature-study>



# **CHAPTER 5:**

## **Findings - Efficiency**

## 5 Findings - Efficiency

This chapter assesses the extent to which the ARC programme delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way. The guiding question is whether the ARC programme is on the right track to Addressing Root Causes efficiently, and is this being monitored effectively? The two subsections below review two different aspects that speak to how resources are most efficiently utilised to reach the objectives of the ARC programme. The first section reviews the ARC programme's M&E system; its results framework (RF), reporting modalities, and monitoring regime, all aimed to provide insight into how efficiently inputs are converted to activities, outputs, outcomes, etc. The second sub-section reviews the programme's adaptive programming modality, which aims to efficiently convert dynamic inputs, activities and outputs to a more static prescribed series of outcome and impact indicators.

### Key findings relating to the efficiency of the ARC programme

- The ARC programme Results Framework (RF) is very ambitious, but does not sufficiently capture project-level results.
- Outcome-based reporting was not operationalised consistently by implementing consortia, and so data cannot be aggregated effectively.
- Monitoring (field visits and data quality assessments) is infrequent, ad hoc, and appropriate tools and templates for monitoring are lacking.
- Consortia have used adaptive programming mostly to ensure quality delivery against stated objectives without changing/revising the goals themselves
- Consortia may have little incentive to drastically restructure project designs

### 5.1 ARC Results Framework (RF), Reporting and Monitoring

Results reporting and monitoring are the two principal mechanisms through which a donor can continually assess the extent to which a programme is on the right track to achieving its objectives. A well-designed and functioning M&E system provides reliable performance data that helps to assess progress (effectiveness), and provide insight into the validity of the working assumptions of the programme's Theory of Change (relevance and effectiveness).<sup>114</sup> It is also a management tool to measure and evaluate outcomes, providing information for governance and decision making<sup>115</sup>. In the case of the ARC programme, the M&E system was largely designed to respond to certain earlier systemic flaws identified in the Reconstruction programme.<sup>116</sup> These included, among others:

- Accountability on key result areas was lacking in the absence of a well-designed Results Framework (RF);
- Output-based reporting was too prescriptive, and led to 'straightjacketing' of projects by stimulating the same activities in radically different contexts. There was also limited evidence to suggest that results 'trickled up';<sup>117</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Assumptions can relate to factors of relevance (are you doing the right things), but also e.g. effectiveness (do the things that you do bring about the expected changes?).

<sup>115</sup> Making Monitoring and Evaluation Systems Work: A CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2702>

<sup>116</sup> Confirmed by key DSH staff interviews. Also see: "Evaluatie Wederopbouwtennder 2012-2016"

<sup>117</sup> As formulated in the IOB evaluation report "Less Pretension, More Realism", p7.

- Centrally-formulated ToCs at the programme-level and (compulsory) standardised indicators led to ‘paper realities’ and undermined programme effectiveness.<sup>118</sup>

Interviews with respondents that were part of the ARC programme design team in 2016 all indicated that the ARC RF was at the time (early 2016) seen as an opportunity to address some of these prior design flaws and reinvigorate confidence in the capacity of centrally-managed programme to steer interventions supporting civil society in FCAS. Concretely, this translated into the following ambitions:

1. The ARC RF should be closely aligned with the DSH thematic ToC for SRoL at the time.
2. The indicators should be developed in close collaboration with the implementing partners and embassies to generate more ownership and buy-in from all stakeholders involved.
3. The RF should be designed using outcome-based reporting modalities, leaving partners with more room and flexibility to adapt their project activities to the context in which they operate.

### The ARC Results Framework (RF)

The Guidance note ARC common results monitoring framework<sup>119</sup> explains that the purpose of the ARC RF is threefold:

1. Facilitate [effective accountability](#) reporting to the Dutch parliament by DSH on progress and results of the ARC programme (and other programmes funded by DSH).
2. Facilitate [effective steering and learning](#) by DSH and the ARC programme partners, so that for instance adjustments can be made when needed on the basis of lessons learnt during the implementation of the programme.
3. Facilitate [cooperation and dialogue](#) between ARC partners.

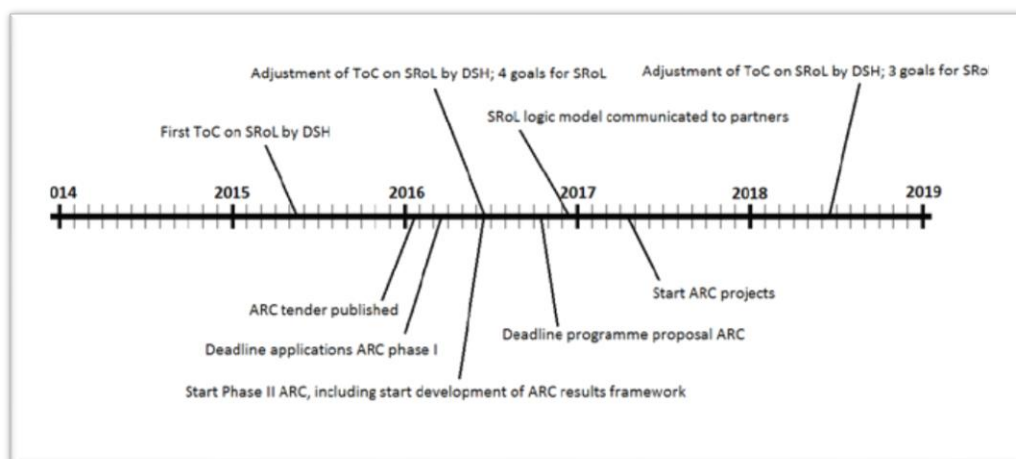
With regard to [effective accountability](#) reporting to Dutch parliament, alignment with the SRoL ToC was complicated by the fact that this ToC was itself being revised during the design and inception phase of the ARC programme (see timeline below). DSH respondents confirmed that a sequential design process would have been preferable over a parallel one, as this would have enabled more compliance between the ARC RF and the SRoL RF. The most striking mismatch between the two is the inclusion of the socio-economic reconstruction component into the ARC RF (ARC Result Area 4), which was later removed from the DSH ToC and “shifted” to the Sustainable Economic Development Department (DDE) in 2017. Even though this did not directly affect implementation of the corresponding ARC project activities, it significantly reduced the contribution of ARC programme results to the thematic DSH RF, as activities related to this component represented more than a third of all ARC-funded activities. Furthermore, migrating socio-economic reconstruction results to DDE also has implications for ARC projects that opted for an integrated approach of combining activities under different Result Areas. Many partners working on socio-economic reconstruction activities see this shift as significantly affecting their prospects to secure follow-up funding under a possible ARC II programme.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Ibid

<sup>119</sup> Updated version of 23 JAN 2017

<sup>120</sup> Several INGO partner staff interviewed for this MTR expressed dissatisfaction with DSH’s lack of communication around this decision to migrate socio-economic reconstruction results to DDE. It was unclear to these partners whether this shift signified a substantial revision in the ToC, or rather the outcome of an internal institutional review process.

Figure 2 ARC programme timeline (source: MTR Terms of Reference, page 4)



Another factor that challenged effective (upward) accountability is the use of outcome-based reporting modalities. Calibrating the RF to capture impact and the outcomes of interventions at Result Area (i.e. long term) and Sub Goal (i.e. intermediate) level did provide ample flexibility for partners to contextualise their choice of activities and outputs. However, it also assumed that these higher-level results could be aggregated and/or compared between different country contexts. Considering how vastly different the context is between for example South Sudan and Jordan, it is arbitrary to try and aggregate the “number and % of programme beneficiaries who report trust and cooperation within the community”,<sup>121</sup> without an understanding of the underlying drivers of conflict and fragility. This was echoed by many of the partner representatives interviewed for this MTR (both INGO staff and local partner staff<sup>122</sup>), who indicated that they felt the RF indicators did not accurately capture the contextual significance of the results achieved by their interventions.

Furthermore, the guidance notes developed by the ministry instructing partners how to effectively report against the compulsory RF indicators, although very detailed and hands’ on,<sup>123</sup> allowed for a great degree of flexibility for partners to tailor the indicator definitions to their respective contexts. This introduces structural inconsistencies between data reported by different partners, which when aggregated together is like adding up apples and oranges.<sup>124</sup> Instead, many partners cited the narrative sections in the analytical report template as being the most appropriate method to communicate results to the Ministry. In a similar vein, DSH policymakers interviewed for this MTR also questioned the added value of a ‘global’ RF that aims to capture such a wide range of results in so many different sectors and different countries. This is confirmed by other external sources<sup>125</sup> that suggest enforcing thematic coherence in a global FCAS programme covering multiple sectors and countries often comes at the expense of local or country-level (external) coherence and conflict sensitivity.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>121</sup> ARC RF, compulsory indicator 3.1.b.

<sup>122</sup> This was clear from both KIIs with INGO and national (local) consortia member staff, as well as from the ARC Partner discussions held in The Hague on Thursday the 6<sup>th</sup> of February.

<sup>123</sup> Partner staff interviewed for this MTR were unanimously positive about the quality, usefulness and clarity of the methodological notes.

<sup>124</sup> This phrase was used by various interview respondents, including DSH and implementing partner staff.

<sup>125</sup> See for example the IDS WORKING PAPER “Theories of Change for Promoting Empowerment and Accountability in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings (Volume 2017 No 499), the 2017 ODI report “Supporting accountability in fragile settings A review for the Somalia Implementation and Analysis in Action of Accountability Programme”, or the DFID “How To Note: Results in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States and Situations”

<sup>126</sup> This also coincides with the IOB evaluation report “Less Pretension, More Realism” findings, section 5.2 about the WO tender’s Substandard monitoring and evaluation.

With regard to the RF purpose of facilitating **learning and steering**, the ARC programme design team opted for a flexible and adaptive programming model, which is theoretically well suited to enable learning and steering. However, adaptive programming is intended to respond to project-specific needs that are identified through various channels<sup>127</sup> including results reporting. This requires reporting against output, or at most intermediate outcome level indicators that are 'lean'<sup>128</sup> and SMART,<sup>129</sup> so that reporting data can be used to assess if what the partners are doing is actually working or not. The ARC RF compulsory indicators are not well suited for this purpose, primarily because they do not sufficiently capture the specific contribution of the project activities to the documented outcome and impact level results. One ARC partner staff noted that *'we report on outcomes that we have limited control over [...] this data helps us understand the context in which we operate, but it tells us very little about if what we're doing is actually working or not.'*<sup>130</sup> Another common critique by partners is the required frequency of reporting on higher level impact and outcome RF indicators. Annual reporting on both the common ARC compulsory indicators and the intervention-specific indicators is indeed a demanding requirement (long term outcome and impact indicators are normally reported on three times during the projects' baseline, mid-term and end line assessments.)

The ARC RF did facilitate **cooperation and dialogue** between ARC partners, DSH and the embassies in the early design stages of the programme. Respondents from embassies, international and local partners in all ARC countries covered by this MTR noted that the early phase of the RF design was inclusive and participatory. In this respect, the ARC design team responded to lessons learnt from the Reconstruction programme successfully. As the process continued however, more (compulsory) indicators were added to the RF without adequate consultation with partners. Ultimately, the ARC RF is characterised by many respondents interviewed for this MTR<sup>131</sup> as being overly ambitious, with too many generic high-level indicators that were not sufficiently operationalised. Despite the fact that the initial phases were widely commended for being so collaborative, and despite the fact that the design team drafted a series of very comprehensive methodological guidance notes for the ARC partners, the RF's utility remains limited to what many partners refer to as a donor requirement. As a result, while there were different consortia reporting on the same outcome indicators in the same geographic localities (such as in Somalia), there was little to no collaboration and exchange.

<sup>127</sup> Project-specific needs are also identified through results, context, timing, analysis and planning. Results reporting is one of the more structured channels.

<sup>128</sup> 'Lean' in this context refers to simple and quick data collection and analysis requirements for partners.

<sup>129</sup> Specific, Measurable, Attributable, Realistic, and Timely.

<sup>130</sup> This corresponds with the IOB evaluation report "Less Pretension, More Realism" covering the WO tender in stating that *"The overarching result frameworks that have been developed [to communicate results to parliament] 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."* (p11)

<sup>131</sup> Including respondents from DSH, embassies, international and national NGO partners

## Box 6: Outcome-Based Reporting and Joint Monitoring in FCAS

Data collection in fragile and insecure contexts can be both logistically and methodologically challenging. Where it concerns the collection of data to report against indicators that measure changes at outcome and impact levels in areas where multiple interventions are being implemented simultaneously, some donors have tried to explore opportunities for collaborative or “joint” monitoring.<sup>132</sup> Studies<sup>133</sup> have shown that joint monitoring on outcome indicators, if managed well and in combination with significant technical training and oversight,<sup>134</sup> can offer higher quality data<sup>135</sup> at a better value for money.<sup>136</sup> A common understanding of outcome/impact level changes at community level evidently also enhances closer alignment between interventions. Joint monitoring is hereby commonly understood as “The adoption of a joint and cooperative approach to the targeted and systematic collection of information and data for the purpose of informing the structured assessment of progress on a project or projects. This may include (but not necessarily be limited to) the pooling of human or technical resources to: identify requirements and opportunities, and to gather, store, share, assess, and/or share information and data relating to programmes and projects”.<sup>137</sup> In the context of the ARC programme, there are several country cases whereby different consortia report against the same compulsory outcome indicators in the same geographic areas<sup>138</sup>. In such cases, there is a strong business case for joint monitoring to reduce fragmentation, enhance cooperation and dialogue, and building the M&E capacity of local partners collecting the data.

In summary, the ARC RF and other corresponding elements of the programme’s M&E system were well conceived in response to the shortcomings of the Reconstruction programme’s M&S system. However the lack of a clear regional or country-specific approach to results reporting was flagged by partners in an early stage as problematic for aggregating results.<sup>139</sup>

### Consortia M&E Capacities

It is important to note that the quality of reporting against the ARC RF indicators is contingent on the monitoring capacities of the ARC implementing consortia. Since M&E capacity and track-record were included as criteria for the ARC tendering process, the assumption is that the consortia and their lead organisations have sufficiently robust systems in place to be able to report against the RF indicators. In practice, it is evident that M&E capacities vary greatly between consortia and within consortia between international and national partners.<sup>140</sup> Some INGOs that function as lead organisations in ARC consortia have a well-institutionalised MEL culture with corresponding well-developed M&E systems, processes and procedures, and are used to working with local partners that require a certain level of support with ensuring monitoring data is of sufficient quality. In other cases, consortia rely almost exclusively on local partner organisations to collect RF indicator data, without robust data quality control mechanisms in place.

<sup>132</sup> See “Third Party And Collaborative Monitoring: Findings, Opportunities and Recommendations”, United Nations in Afghanistan, Risk Management Unit (2015). Available at <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/third-party-and-collaborative-monitoring>

<sup>133</sup> See for instance the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme. Research publications available at <https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/save-interactive/>

<sup>134</sup> This role is delegated to a specialised third party monitoring (TPM) agent/contractor

<sup>135</sup> Indicator definitions and data collection methods are harmonised to ensure data is comparable and can be aggregated.

<sup>136</sup> Joint monitoring implies pooling of resources to collect data just once, which would otherwise have had to be collected twice.

<sup>137</sup> “Third Party And Collaborative Monitoring: Findings, Opportunities and Recommendations” p23

<sup>138</sup> Most notably Somalia where both consortia worked in at least two of the same districts.

<sup>139</sup> Although the methodological notes did provide guidance on how the MFA wanted partners to collect, analyse and report outcome data, it did not address the fundamental concern of aggregating results that are so context-specific.

<sup>140</sup> This can be easily deduced from the varying quality of annual reports and annual plans of the ARC implementing consortia.

Outcome-based reporting, as it is presented in the ARC RF methodological notes, requires a high level of consistency and diligence on the part of the stakeholder that is collecting and analysing the data. One problem in this regard is that the type of data that is being collected is very subjective (especially for the perception-based indicators), and thus prone to bias<sup>141</sup> on the part of the individual and the organisation that is collecting the data. In some cases, this can lead to drastically different values being reported by different consortia reporting against the same indicators in the same geographic locations among the same communities.<sup>142</sup> Another problem is the complexity associated with disaggregating (or “isolating”) the contribution of the project activities from other factors that influence indicator values. When RF outcome data is collected among end-beneficiaries by members of the same local organisation that carried out the project activities, there is an implicit bias<sup>143</sup> that is very difficult to mitigate, especially in a context where it is not possible for the consortium lead partner to verify the data. As such, RF outcome indicator data quality is influenced by many factors, including:

- M&E capacity of consortium lead organisation;
- M&E capacity of consortium partner responsible for collecting the data;
- Relationships between consortium members;
- Availability of bespoke M&E capacity building resources for partners responsible for collecting data (i.e. training);
- Institutionalisation of internal and external data quality control mechanisms;
- Accessibility to end-beneficiary communities;
- Socio-political context during data collection process.

These factors all constitute different levels of risk to RF data quality, which can be mitigated to some extent by putting in place sufficient mechanisms to assess the quality of reported data.

### Quality and Added Value of Monitoring

When it comes to routine contract management reporting, DSH assess the quality and reliability of the reports as they do for any other programme. A well developed and institutionalised system<sup>144</sup> ensures accountability of the use of taxpayer resources at the level of inputs and activities.<sup>145</sup> Audits are regularly conducted, and following instalments of funding are contingent upon the approval of the reports. When it comes to the data that partners report against the compulsory RF indicators however, the project controllers have limited tools available to check the quality (accuracy, reliability, validity) of the data, beyond routine data validation (assessing if the results are in line with anticipated targets, and if not, why?). The significance of monitoring<sup>146</sup> thus becomes pivotally important to ensure that the RF facilitates (upward) accountability.

In most DGIS centrally-managed thematic programmes, the responsibility to monitor projects through field visits is allocated to the responsible policy officer in The Hague. For programmes under decentralised management, this role is allocated to the embassies. In the case of the ARC programme, even though the responsibility of field monitoring institutionally resides with DSH, this role was assumed to be appropriated by the embassies, since the BU did not have sufficient capacity to monitor all ARC projects, and since the embassies themselves accepted this role during

<sup>141</sup> Biases that can easily influence responses include assumptions about the enumerator’s affiliation with certain political or (local) government actors. This is especially true for FCAS settings where many of the ARC projects take place.

<sup>142</sup> In Burundi, the two implementing consortia collaborated to exchange RF outcome indicator data and found very different values. Some of this could be explained by differences in data collection methods.

<sup>143</sup> Where an organisation introduces new people, resources and/or ideas into a community, and members of that same organisation ask community members how they feel about their lives in relation to this assistance, responses are likely going to be biased by assumptions about how those responses will influence access to these new resources.

<sup>144</sup> Digitaal archiefsysteem Sophia

<sup>145</sup> All transactions, inputs, activities and outputs are reported in IATI (see <https://iatistandard.org/en/>) by the implementing partners. Partners indicated that training on IATI reporting was sufficient, and a rapid review of ARC data reported in IATI show that partners have been complying with the DGIS IATI standards.

<sup>146</sup> We hereby make a distinction between reporting, which is the activity whereby implementing consortia report their own (first party) monitoring data to DSH, and all the systems in place with the ministry to assess these reports, and monitoring done by the ministry themselves (second-party) or by an external contractor (third-party).

the early start-up phase consultations of the programme.<sup>147</sup> In practice, embassies had insufficient capacity, time or interest to monitor projects funded under a centrally-managed programme like ARC. The BU has conducted a number of project field visits, and there were infrequent ad-hoc visits conducted by the embassies, but overall monitoring was entirely insufficient to adequately assess the quality of data reported against RF indicators. No tools, templates or guidelines were developed to conduct any type of structured data quality assessment,<sup>148</sup> and no clear monitoring regime was conceptualised during the project design phase. In countries where access to project locations is restricted, such as in Afghanistan, Somalia, Mali, etc. second-party field monitoring is often not possible, but there is a growing body of literature on third-party monitoring in FCAS with ample best practices for assessing the quality of outcome-based reporting data. (see textbox below).

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<sup>147</sup> Expectations with regard to the embassies' monitoring role in the ARC programme are very clearly articulated in the country level MoUs (where available) and the accompanying kick-off meeting minutes.

<sup>148</sup> Many other donors do provide such tools/guidelines, for instance the USAID Data Quality Assessment Checklist. See: <https://www.usaid.gov/project-starter/program-cycle/implementing-monitor-evaluation-commitments/monitoring-performance/data-quality-assessment-checklist>

## Box 7: Third Party Monitoring (TPM) and Data Quality Assessment (DQA) in FCAS

Many donors struggle with the question: how can one effectively assess the quality of reported data coming out of insecure environments that donor staff cannot access themselves? The past decade has provided a wealth of information on how different donors have tried to address this problem, which can roughly be divided into two main strategies:

- **Data verification by a third-party monitoring (TPM) agent/contractor.** In most fragile and hard-to-reach contexts, there are alternatives to second party (donor) field monitoring in the form of locally registered firms or organisations that specialise in data collection. These organisations are often embedded in the local context, and can leverage networks of local researchers to access project sites that most (international) donor staff and international consultants cannot access. In recent years TPM contractors have also explored avenues to corroborate such findings through new technological applications such as using satellite imagery to verify certain community characteristics.<sup>149</sup> There are methodological and ethical concerns associated with TPM however.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, TPM is mainly used to gather output data: it has limited ability to measure outcomes or impacts or to determine why or how a project can achieve better results.<sup>151</sup> TPM is thus advised only as a complementary monitoring mechanism for exceptional areas with constrained access, and should not come at the expense of more intensive data-analysis methods (including quasi-experimental impact evaluations).
- **Data quality assessments (DQA) conducted either a TPM contractor, or through direct technical assistance (TA).** DQA as formalised by the US Agency for International Development (USAID)<sup>152</sup> involves a comprehensive assessment of the M&E systems that guide the collection and analysis of data reported against a specific indicator. It is less concerned with the physical verification of (a sample of) units of reported data, and more about whether the practices and procedures in place sufficiently safeguard the validity, integrity, precision, reliability and timeliness of the data. Other donors have applied a less rigid approach,<sup>153</sup> but one major benefit of this “M&E systems audit” approach is that direct access to end-beneficiaries themselves is less pertinent. DQAs are also applicable to outcome and impact indicators.

<sup>149</sup> See Dette (2018) “Do No Digital Harm: Mitigating Technology Risks in Humanitarian Contexts” in Hostettler, Besson & Bolay eds. “Technologies for Development: From Innovation to Social Impact” Springer Open.

<sup>150</sup> See Kelly & Gaarder (2018) “Third Party Monitoring in Volatile Environments – Do the Benefits Outweigh the Risks?” Institute for Human Security, Tufts University (accessible at <https://sites.tufts.edu/mythemes/uncategorized/third-party-monitoring-volatile-environments-benefits-outweigh-risks/>) and SAVE Briefing Note (December 2015) “The Use of Third-Party Monitoring in Insecure Contexts: Lessons From Afghanistan and Somalia”, accessible at <http://www.acbar.org/upload/1476355726630.pdf>

<sup>151</sup> Kelly & Gaarder (2018) *ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> See “How-To Note: Conduct a Data Quality Assessment (DQA)” available at <https://usaidelearninglab.org/library/how-note-conducting-data-quality-assessment-dqa>

<sup>153</sup> The EC’s Technical Assistance (TA) to Support Monitoring of Actions funded under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (SUMAF), implemented by Ecorys Netherlands in consortia with the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) and Maastricht University, has adopted a less rigid and bespoke DQA module for assessing Facility Results Framework data. For more information, please refer to the “Facility Results Framework Monitoring Report: Output Achievement Progress. June 2019” Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/facility\\_results\\_framework\\_monitoring\\_report.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/facility_results_framework_monitoring_report.pdf)

### Revisiting the Three-Fold Purpose of the ARC RF

At the top of this section, the intended purpose of the ARC RF was described as three-fold, including (1) to facilitate effective accountability (2) to facilitate effective steering and learning, and (3) to facilitate cooperation and dialogue between ARC partners. It is clear that there is an implicit tension between purpose 1 on the one hand, and purpose 2 and 3 on the other hand, when considering the RF at (global) programme level. Upwards accountability at programme level requires aggregation of results, which compromises the context-specificity that is required for purposes 2 and 3. If the RF was more context specific at a regional level this would mitigate some of this tension, since intermediate outcome level results may be aggregated more coherently at regional level, without jeopardising the context-specificity needed for learning and steering. Improved dialogue and cooperation between partners could be more easily achieved when outcome indicators are specific to the regional context too, although this would ostensibly have to be complemented with additional M&E resources (funding and capacity building support).

## 5.2 Adaptive Programming

A central precept of the ARC programme has been ‘adaptive programming,’ which provided the projects with a degree of flexibility to revise the project’s intervention strategy and design. This supported ARC organisations to respond in an agile way to changes and developments within the national context and maintain the projects’ relevance and feasibility for achieving its intended results. The ARC programme was the first programme to formally launch adaptive programming, and its mechanisms for adaptive programming were therefore still in a fairly experimental stage.

### Box 8: Adaptive Programming: a new programming paradigm

The development community has coined the term Adaptive programming to denote a new programming approach that recognises the need for flexibility and iterative planning over more linear programming models. According to the think tank Overseas Development Institute (ODI): “Adaptive programming suggests, at a minimum, that development actors react and respond to changes in the political and socio-economic operating environment. It emphasises learning and the development practitioner is encouraged to adjust their actions to find workable solutions to problems that they may face.”<sup>154</sup> Several donors are starting to apply and experiment with adaptive programming principles within their development portfolio. Other efforts, such as the Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM) initiative, funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), aims to “actively identify, operationalise and promote rigorous evidence-based approaches to adaptive management.”<sup>155</sup>

Adaptive programming is not yet a commonplace practice in many organisations, as this requires organisations to take on a different approach to how interventions are programmed and managed. This forces organisations to manage their projects with a high level of flexibility. Organisations may not be comfortable with this, as their organisational programme and operations processes and procedures may not accommodate the flexibility required to react to the rapid pace of change in local realities. Other organisations and donors have clearly embraced adaptive programming and have incorporated this into their organisational “DNA” and in the way they operate, particularly in FCAS.

The flexibility offered by the Ministry to ARC organisations in the development and implementation of projects has been a linchpin in the programme’s design and execution. This is reflected in the design of ARC projects through the emphasis placed on the implementation context,<sup>156</sup> the ToC and MEAL framework. Although the MFA did not prescribe a specific process and corresponding procedures through which adaptive programming should take place, in practice the annual reporting and planning cycle prodded ARC organisations to actively reflect on changes within the implementation context,<sup>157</sup> implications for the validity and feasibility of the proposed ToC and any subsequent revision of planned activities. There was an assumption that embassies would help flagging issues that would require project revisions, as some MoUs between consortia, DSH and embassies mention that *“the embassy will inform the ARC partners on relevant issues that may affect their program implementation.”*<sup>158</sup> However in spite of this intention, this was not always done. Embassy engagement during implementation varied over time and across countries. Any revisions (whether structural or operational) were routinely discussed beforehand (informally) with DSH personnel, after which these were presented within the Annual Reports and Annual Plans and reflected in the revised MEAL plan. Interviews with respondents from DSH explained that

<sup>154</sup> ODI (2016). *Putting Learning at the Centre. Adaptive Development Programming in Practice*. See <https://www.odi.org/publications/10367-putting-learning-centre-adaptive-development-programming-practice>

<sup>155</sup> See <https://www.odi.org/projects/2918-global-learning-adaptive-management-initiative-glam>

<sup>156</sup> Reflected in the project design through the Situational Analysis and the Conflict- and Gender sensitivity assessments.

<sup>157</sup> In its economic, social and political dimensions

<sup>158</sup> Following desk research on available country-level MoU’s between the MFA, embassies and ARC organisations.

approvals were commonly provided as part of approving these Annual Reports and Plans. The ARC organisations experienced this process as adequate and easy to use and found the MFA to be open and responsive to discuss needed revisions to the project design. Interviews with respondents from DSH and ARC partners in the field demonstrated that organisations had different levels of understanding of what adaptive programming entails, which determined in a significant way the extent to which organisations applied this within their projects.

#### **Box 10: MEAL for Adaptive Programming**

Any adaptive programming approach relies strongly on the use of a robust M&E system and timely data (both quantitative and qualitative) on progress and impact to inform decision-making on the required adjustments to the intervention strategy and design of a given programme or project. Put quite simply, adaptive programming and management is not viable without a well-developed and applied MEAL practice in place. The cyclical process of measurement (M&E) – Reflection (learning) – Revision (adaptation) can rightfully be considered the “motor” of any adaptive programming and highlights the role played by MEAL approaches in the development practice this field.<sup>159</sup>

#### **Consortia have used adaptive programming mostly to ensure quality delivery against stated objectives without changing/revising the goals themselves**

Almost without exception, ARC organisations have proposed revisions to the project design throughout the implementation period. Most of the changes involved ‘operational’ changes where, for example, ARC organisations observed a need to revise the planning or sequence of activities, adjust targets groups or areas, include additional indicators for improved measurement or suggest eliminating certain Outcome-level indicators due to their limited capacity to measure change. These types of changes can be considered minor as these do not fundamentally affect the project’s ToC or intervention strategy. More ‘structural’ or fundamental changes, whereby revisions to the ToC of intervention strategy are proposed, were observed only to a limited extent within the ARC projects.<sup>160</sup> The proposed revisions to the project design described above originated and were prepared by the ARC organisations. However, the approval process of the Annual Report and Plans<sup>161</sup> evidenced that DSH was at times critical of the (perceived lack of) progress achieved by certain projects<sup>162</sup> and thereby questioned the continuing adequacy of the projects’ ToC. This however did not lead DSH to request a more thorough reflection of ARC organisations on the ongoing relevance and validity of the ToC, even though DSH felt that there were grounds to prompt such a reflection or potential revision. The MTR did not find evidence that ARC organisations failed to propose revisions where these were otherwise warranted.<sup>163</sup> One consortium focusing on Human Security considered proposing a structural revision to include a socio-economic component into their project. However, since this would require revising the ToC and extra budget, the consortium chose not to do so and instead integrated this into another funding proposal.

#### **Consortia may have little incentive to drastically restructure project designs**

<sup>159</sup> See for example the following ODI publications: Valters, C., Cummings, C., Nixon, H. (2016). Putting learning at the centre. Adaptive development programming in practice. And Hernandez, K., Ramalingam, B., Wild, L. (2019). Towards evidence-informed adaptive management. A roadmap for development and humanitarian organisations.

<sup>160</sup> E.g. in Burundi, a project component was taken out as this was not seen as feasible anymore within the national context.

<sup>161</sup> This also includes the approval letters sent by the MFA to the ARC organisations and the internal approval documentation provided by the MFA.

<sup>162</sup> Particularly those projects which had interventions under Results Area 4.

<sup>163</sup> It should be noted, however, that the MTR was not assigned to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of ARC projects’ performance. Therefore, this evidence is based on desk research of the project documents, Annual Reports and Annual Plans and cannot be taken as conclusive in this regard. Particularly, end-beneficiaries were only interviewed in selected cases (Focus Group Discussions conducted within the framework of the case studies), which provides anecdotal evidence that the project activities were relevant to the beneficiaries’ needs and priorities and have remained to be so.

The limited instances of structural changes to projects' intervention strategies and design would point towards the robustness of the initial design of the ToC's, the continuing validity of its underlying assumptions and the ongoing strategic/political/operational feasibility of the ToC within the dynamic implementation context. However, this could also point to the possibility that implementing partners are less willing to restructure a project's design and corresponding activities in the face of little progress, tangible results and an adversarial political and operating environment. Restructuring projects will also potentially affect partners' stake within the consortium (with respect to the activities under their control), their share in the project's budget and, subsequently, their position and relationship vis-à-vis other partners within the consortium. This might therefore diminish the incentive for organisations to propose drastic changes to the project's design with severe (budget) implications for involved partners. From the desk research, the interviews and case studies conducted, there were no grounds to believe that ARC organisations failed to propose revisions evidently warranted by the (changed) implementation context.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> The MTR furthermore also did not provide the framework to critically assess ARC projects' progress and results against the defined project design and thereby determine the adequacy of the proposed revisions (both in their scope as in their application).

A young girl with dark skin and braided hair is smiling and raising her right hand, pointing her index finger upwards. She is wearing a colorful patterned shirt with green, blue, and orange designs. A blue diagonal graphic overlay covers the left side of the image. The background is a light-colored, textured wall.

# CHAPTER 6:

## Conclusions

## 6 Conclusions

The overarching question that guided this evaluation was formulated as *'Is the ARC programme on the right track to addressing the root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration?'*. Due to the nature of this evaluation as a mid-term review with a clear focus on process, the evaluation questions were calibrated around the assessment criteria of relevance, coherence and efficiency.<sup>165</sup> The following six evaluation questions were operationalised to include all sub-questions and topics from the ToR.

### Coherence

1. Does country-level coordination between the ARC programme partners, embassies and other partners enhance coherence?
2. Does the ARC programme's approach to learning enhance coherence?

### Relevance

3. How responsive are the ARC programme's objectives and design to the context in which it is being implemented?
4. How responsive is the ARC programme to other needs, policies and priorities (partners, embassies, country-level stakeholders, DSH)?

### Efficiency

5. Does the ARC programme's Results Framework (RF) and its approach to results reporting enhance efficiency?
6. Does the ARC programme's approach to "adaptive programming" enhance efficiency?

## 6.1 Specific Conclusions

### 6.1.1 Conclusions about the ARC programme's Coherence

#### Evaluation Questions:

- Does country-level coordination between the ARC programme partners, embassies and other partners enhance coherence?
- Does the ARC programme's approach to learning enhance coherence?

**The ARC programme managed to reduce fragmentation, but country-coordination remains limited.** The ARC programme has reduced fragmentation between countries and within consortia, compared to the Reconstruction programme. However the reduction of fragmentation within countries did not materialise due to limited country-level coordination between consortia and limited capacity or insufficient prioritisation of roles and responsibilities by the embassies related to their involvement in the ARC programme. Internal coherence at country level is insufficient, and compromises the programme's ambition to contribute to root causes.

**Alignment and coordination between ARC projects and similar projects has remained weak.** The programme did not sufficiently stimulate coordination with other embassy projects, other decentralised programmes, other development partners and local stakeholders (including government where feasible and desirable). The collaborative process that the ARC programme promoted was evident in the design phase, but did not fully materialise in the implementation

<sup>165</sup> Effectiveness, Impact and Sustainability featured to a limited extent. The few sub-questions from the ToR about these criteria were ultimately included under relevance.

phase. Embassies were unable to fulfil the coordinating and “sparring partner” role that had been anticipated for them. The reasons for this vary between countries, and include (1) insufficient capacity, with too little thematic expertise available (2) high turnover of staff, (3) insufficient alignment between ARC project designs and embassy MACS, (4) changing (political) priorities at the embassies due to external factors, and (5) too little interest and initiative among consortia to utilise the role of the embassies. Only few consortia showed initiative to promote complementarity and synergies themselves. Consortia were mostly too passive at avoiding fragmentation and duplication at the country-level, and embassies did not have the capacity to do so. In effect, the limited internal and external coherence affected the delivery of the programme both in terms of relationships, effectiveness and sustainability.

### **Learning takes place actively within and between ARC organisations**

Despite a slow start to the ARC global learning agenda due to the start-up of the ARC projects, relationships and knowledge exchanges between ARC programme stakeholders were enhanced in 2019 through clear deliverables, such as events and knowledge products. These outcomes are valued by most ARC implementing organisations. A global learning agenda is however still a new concept for the MFA and KPSRL and the appropriate learning model will need to mature in-time through practice.

### **The ARC global learning agenda has not (yet) delivered on its potential**

Despite significant progress and tangible deliverables to date, it is not yet clear to many (local) ARC organizations what the added value of the ARC programme’s global learning agenda is. Although learning takes place continuously within organisations, within consortia and sometimes between consortia at country or regional level, this is less so at the global level. To many (local) ARC organizations it is not yet clear what the ARC global learning agenda intends to achieve, what is required from them in terms of investments and commitment and what return the organisations can expect from their invested time and resources and how this will benefit them in the long-term for the management and implementation of their projects.

## **6.1.2 Conclusions about the ARC programme’s Relevance**

### **Evaluation Questions:**

- *How responsive are the ARC programme’s objectives and design to the context in which it is being implemented?*
- *How responsive is the ARC programme to other needs, policies and priorities (partners, embassies, country-level stakeholders, DSH)?*

### **Project designs were able to demonstrate their relevance within the local context**

The ARC programme produced overall good quality project designs. The involvement of local partners and the time given to consortia during the inception phase further strengthened the evidence-base of the design. Needs and priorities of end-beneficiaries living in situations of conflict and instability were addressed well, although given the restrictive ARC project budgets and timeframes, outcome and impact objectives are often too ambitious. It should be noted that while the MTR found that the projects were of good quality, the added value of ARC projects are to be understood in support of longer-term processes. While an individual project cannot be expected to effectively address/resolve root causes within a limited timeframe and with a limited budget, it can effectively contribute in a significant way to a broader strategic response to addressing these. The projects could have been more realistic and clear in what they were able to achieve in terms of contributions to these long-term processes.

### **The ARC programme responded well to the institutional needs and priorities of implementing partners**

As a tender, the programme has understood the needs of civil society partners addressing root causes of conflict and instability relatively well. Local partner organisations are involved during the project design and implementation, and implementing partners are granted a large degree of flexibility. Prospects for long-term continued funding are lacking, which affects the potential impact and sustainability of the ARC-funded projects. This could be better mitigated by ensuring that projects are embedded within the national/local development framework, which will increase the opportunity that activities are continued by other actors through other projects or that the project secures funding from other sources.

### **The link between responsiveness to ministerial priorities and upward accountability, and addressing root causes is not clear**

Internal lessons from the Reconstruction tender were translated into an innovative 'hybrid' programme design that was relevant to both the institutional<sup>166</sup> and strategic<sup>167</sup> needs of the MFA at the time. However, the "added value" of the programme's responsiveness to changing policies and priorities at ministerial level is not evident for it to (contribute to) addressing root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration in the ARC countries.

## *6.1.3 Conclusions about the ARC programme's Efficiency*

#### **Evaluation Questions:**

- *Does the ARC programme's Results Framework (RF) and its approach to results reporting enhance efficiency?*
- *Does the ARC programme's approach to "adaptive programming" enhance efficiency?*

### **The ARC programme's Results Framework (RF) is too ambitious**

Indicators do not provide clear insight into the specific relevance or effectiveness of ARC-funded interventions, and outcome-level targets and timeframes are not always realistic.

### **Aggregating Results using an outcome-based reporting model is problematic**

What partners report against the compulsory RF indicators is not specific enough to capture results of the interventions funded by the programme. Country contexts vary so much that aggregating results is arbitrary. The added value of a 'global' results framework calibrated at Impact and Outcome level for a programme covering so many sectors and countries is not evident.

### **Monitoring by embassies and/or DSH is insufficient**

Monitoring visits by Embassies and/or DSH (second-party) to verify RF data is ad-hoc, infrequent, and lacks any significant mechanism to assess the quality of RF Outcome data. Accuracy, reliability and validity of reported Outcome data can therefore not be assessed.

### **Adaptive programming did not become commonplace within the ARC programme across the board**

A varied understanding amongst organisations of what adaptive programming entails led to different results in how consortia addressed implementation challenges on the ground. Project revisions have taken place, even if these did not present structural changes to the intervention

<sup>166</sup> More focussed country and project portfolio, closer collaboration with the embassies, a more advanced M&E system to enable better accountability, etc.

<sup>167</sup> Expanding the scope of the programme to address root causes of irregular migration to Europe.

strategy and design. The MTR considers that, looking at the type of revisions conducted by consortia, these may not be to the extent of what would be expected from projects operating in FCAS.

## 6.2 Overarching Conclusions: Is the ARC programme on the right track?

The overarching question that has guided the MTR was 'Is the ARC programme on the right track to addressing the root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration?'. Defining "the right track" in the context of conflict and fragility includes the following dimensions<sup>168</sup>:

**Temporal dimension (long term engagement):** root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration are complex problems to which solutions require long-term engagement. While the justification for the ARC programme's funding also recognises the need for results that are visible in the short run, sources unanimously confirm that tangible impact in FCAS requires a long-term approach that effectively builds on previously achieved results (by partners, not necessarily with ARC, or other MFA funding<sup>169</sup>). For project-specific funding with a limited budget and timeframe, which is how ARC-funded projects can generally be characterised, this implies striving for additionality to ongoing relationships, or spin-off activities for other longer-term investments<sup>170</sup>.

### **Conclusion 1:**

*ARC-funded activities are at most able to support or catalyse a longer term processes that address root causes* Even though the programme tries to build on previous track record and achieved results, the limited budgets and timeframes require the interventions to be well-embedded in a broader framework of civil society-engagement. This is not always the case.

- 9 out of the 12 ARC programme countries were included in the previous DSH tenders for NGO funding in FCAS, the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes. Only Jordan, Lebanon and Syria were added to this list, due to the surge of conflict, instability and irregular migration from (or around) these countries.
- At the level of partner selection the ARC programme utilised a relative priority of country-specific track-record of implementing partners in the tendering process, which also indicates an ambition to build on previous results, signifying a commitment to long-term engagement.
- Notwithstanding, with budgets of between 3.5 and 9.5 million EUR and timeframes between 3 to 5 years, ARC-funded activities are at most able to support or catalyse longer term processes.
- The sustainability of the ARC programme is thus contingent in the extent to which its results are connected and integrated with longer term context-specific processes of addressing root causes. Most individual ARC partners have tried to connect and integrate ARC-funded activities with their own longer-term strategies,<sup>171</sup> but at the level of consortia this is more challenging, as these specific partnerships are funded only within the context of the ARC programme. The embassies' roles in facilitating this integration at consortia level has also been inadequate, due to limited capacity and high staff turnover in embassies in ARC countries.
- Effectiveness and sustainability were not the primary focus of this MTR, but findings about the efficiency of the programme in relation to results reporting do suggest it will be very challenging to evaluate of the programme's contribution to addressing root causes in the

<sup>168</sup> A careful review of programme documentation and supporting policy literature, complemented by stakeholder interviews with the ARC programme design team as well as DSH management staff, has yielded the formulation of these key dimensions

<sup>169</sup> Previously achieved results at the level of in-country partners and partnerships, transcending individual projects

<sup>170</sup> Where the Netherlands contributes to larger country-wide reform programmes implemented by multilateral UN agencies for example, ARC partnerships can be funded to implement specific related lobby & advocacy activities to ensure the voice of CSOs is sufficiently heard in this process.

<sup>171</sup> This was one of the assessment criteria for awarding ARC funding.

different country contexts convincingly with how the ARC programme's M&E system is set currently up.

**Context specific dimension ("one size fits none"<sup>172</sup>):** root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration are context-specific. "Context" in this regard refers to a combination of drivers of conflict at local, country and regional level.

### **Conclusion 2:**

*The ARC-funded activities are well aligned to the local context of end-beneficiary communities, but responsiveness to country-level or regional conflict dynamics is lacking.*

- The ARC programme has clearly integrated lessons learnt from previous programmes in the way it has valued the contribution of local civil society partners in ensuring context-specificity. Most of the ARC projects showcase evidence-based theories of change that are well tailored to the local contexts, which can be attributed to the involvement of local partner organisations from the early stages of project design.
- ARC projects also have the nimble advantage of working through the programme's "adaptive programming" model, but this has not materialised in major adaptations that would perhaps have been anticipated more given the fluid and volatile contexts in some of the ARC countries.
- The role of the embassies in ensuring that projects are connected to the national and/or regional context was prioritised during the programme start-up phase, but has proven to be underwhelming in most countries.
- Regional context-specificity was only marginally addressed during some of the more recent regional learning events organised by the KPSRL, MFA and ARC organizations.

**'Bottom up' dimension (civil society engagement as delivery channel):** civil society in FCAS is understood as often having greater legitimacy vis-à-vis local communities than government or multilateral agencies, as often having an intimate understanding of local conflict dynamics, as being more lean and flexible than for example multilateral organisations, and thereby more responsive to local needs.<sup>173</sup>

### **Conclusion 3:**

*The ARC programme has provided the space for consortia to develop more equal and effective partnerships, but the tender modality favours upward accountability, and is inherently less sensitive to the needs of local CSOs in FCAS.*

- The ARC programme has performed well in cultivating effective civil society consortia. Relationships between INGOs and local CSOs within consortia are often referenced as being 'more equal' than in other partnership arrangements between INGOs and local CSOs.<sup>174</sup>
- The design of the ARC programme took into account the latest insights from research on development and working in partnerships and consortia, such as 'bring stakeholders and participants "into the tent" as a vital practice in the establishment of a consortia as a community of practice' (Gonsalves 2014). With its adaptive programming it recognised the need to 'have an adaptive and flexible management approach enabling the exploitation of windows of opportunity' (Culyer et al 2015; Ely and Marin 2016; Fowler and McMahon 2010), in spite of a tendency towards more rigid funding structures required by government and agencies. With its learning, it took into account the following suggestion for consortia: 'identify places for ongoing learning and review. Share responsibilities and build capacities for collaborative learning' (Jones et al 2016).
- Notwithstanding, the tendering instrument is not the most effective mechanism to select the organisations working in the most context-sensitive manner in FCAS. Whereas track records of INGOs require careful verification in the field, a tender process can only consider what a proposal states. Claims about local track record or about complementarity and synergy of its

<sup>172</sup> As stated in the "Memo: Opzet NGO-fonds gericht op de aanpak grondoorzaken conflict en migratie"

<sup>173</sup> All translated from "Memo: Opzet NGO-fonds gericht op de aanpak grondoorzaken conflict en migratie"

<sup>174</sup> More equal does not imply equal. Due to the nature of the tendering procedure, local CSOs do not qualify for funding independently and are therefore reliant on INGOs to include them on their proposals.

activities with other interventions cannot be double-checked locally hence the rigidity of the instrument. INGOs can compensate a poor fit of their methodologies through the involvement of local CSOs to ensure continuity for “bottom-up” civil society engagement. However, their context-specific inputs into the proposal for the partnership with INGOs might get lost in the quest by INGOs - who themselves compete over decreasing levels of funding - to respond best to the donor's requirements.<sup>175</sup>

- Tenders tend to favour upward accountability, and are inherently less sensitive to the needs of local CSOs, which was also the case in the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes.<sup>176</sup> The subsidy contracts signed would not include commitments on coordination and coherence, since DSH assumed consortia would follow up what they had stated in their proposals earlier and in their MoUs with embassies. Conversely, the consortium model of the ARC programme generally worked well and may be considered an exemplary case of prioritising the needs of local CSOs, within the confines of the selected funding modality.

The above also eludes to a fourth dimension that is not clearly articulated in any of the policy or programme documentation,<sup>177</sup> is the dimension of **coherence and coordination**. This involves not only coherence and coordination at the programme level, or within and between the ARC implementing consortia, but more generally coherence and coordination in the context in which they operate. The recent IOB evaluation report “Less Pretension, More Realism” does describe fragmentation at country level as a significant shortcoming of the Reconstruction and SPCC programmes, and commends the ARC programme for having “promoted a collaborative process with input from the ministry (both DSH and embassies), the implementing NGO, consortium partners and local CSOs”,<sup>178</sup> but there is no mention of the need to prioritise coherence and coordination with other projects or programmes that are not directly supported by funding from the Netherlands.

Especially in FCAS where donor funding to NGO partners constitutes a large share of the portfolio, there are often a myriad of civil society platforms, fora, and other coordination mechanisms. In places where state legitimacy is contested, and where governments (and the multilateral organisations working with governments) are sometimes more part of the problem than of the solution, donor funding to civil society programmes are often sprawling. As a result, there is an exponential risk of fragmentation and duplication that can only be mitigated by investing significantly in mapping out what other programmes and projects are already doing, and encouraging partners to seek out complementarity and synergies with like-minded organisations in the field.

#### **Conclusion 4:**

*External country-level coherence with other donor-funded civil society projects, programmes, platforms, fora or coordination mechanisms is insufficiently prioritised.*

- With regard to country-level coherence and coordination, the ARC programme has significantly improved on **internal** coherence within consortia compared to previous programmes.
- Internal coherence between consortia, or between ARC projects and other Netherlands-funded (centralised or decentralised) programmes and projects in the same countries was emphasised during the programme design phase as a primary contribution of the embassies, but this was not sustained.
- External country-level coherence with government policies or national development frameworks was only relevant (or desirable) in a limited number of ARC countries, notably Jordan. No evidence was found to suggest that external country-level coherence with other

<sup>175</sup> See also: Schulpen, 2016 “The NGO funding game: The case of the Netherlands” CIDIN, Radboud University

<sup>176</sup> IOB evaluation report “Less Pretension, More Realism”, Section 5.5 “High levels of fragmentation of funds and activities”, p.59.

<sup>177</sup> There is a specific question about this in the assessment form (BEMO), but findings suggest that this is approached more as a compliance requirement rather than as a formative element of the assessment.

<sup>178</sup> IOB evaluation report “Less Pretension, More Realism”, Section 5.5 “High levels of fragmentation of funds and activities”, p.59

donor-funded civil society projects, programmes, platforms, fora or coordination mechanisms was prioritised at any stage in the ARC programme to date.

- This does not imply that external country-level coherence was not pursued by the implementing consortia themselves, but rather that the ARC programme neglected to systematically prioritise this as a key dimension for addressing root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration.



# **CHAPTER 7:** **Recommendations**

## 7 Recommendations

### 7.1 Focus reporting on capturing context-specific results

Results reporting should strive to **monitor tangible progress at the local, country and regional-levels (if warranted)**. By “nesting” regional results frameworks into an overarching meta-framework and contextualising these using region-specific theories of change, centrally-managed programmes can still demonstrate upward accountability to parliament. Where feasible, this should already be done for the remainder of the current ARC programme. This should trump the current practice of reporting against prescribed outcome-level indicators in a “global” results framework. The MFA should ensure that for the remainder of the ARC programme, it is recommended to revise the reporting requirements<sup>179</sup> for consortia as follows:

1. Group ARC projects by 5 regions: **South Asia** (Afghanistan, Pakistan), **Greater Syria** (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria), **Sahel** (Mali), **Horn of Africa** (Ethiopia, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan), **Great Lakes** (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo).
2. For each region, have the KPSRL<sup>180</sup> facilitate a mapping of existing intermediate outcome indicators from all ARC-funded project logframes, and facilitate **regional theory of change sessions** with partners where a new layer of **region-specific intermediate outcome indicators** can be introduced.<sup>181</sup> Note that this layer should be lean (few indicators, and simple reporting/data collection requirements), and that indicators should resemble the existing logframe indicators as much as possible.
3. This new layer of intermediate outcome indicators would replace the reporting requirements for the compulsory indicators in the Global RF. DSH may decide to have partners report on compulsory Global ARC RF indicators once more at the end of the projects, in which case it is recommended to focus this last round of Global RF reporting on narrative reporting rather than submitting numeric values<sup>182</sup>.

This approach would reduce the burden on ARC partners to report against the compulsory Global ARC indicators, while increasing the opportunity to meaningfully aggregate data and comprehend change within a shared (regional) perspective.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, by ensuring that these new regional indicators are adequately aligned with intermediate outcome indicators from the project logframes, the contribution of specific ARC-funded project interventions to intermediate outcomes will be easier to evaluate later on.

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<sup>179</sup> To the extent that the MFA is able to substantively revise the existing ARC RF.

<sup>180</sup> Starting with existing logframe indicators, and enabling the KPSRL to facilitate the process of devising region-specific frameworks (in the regions, together with local partner organisations), is in line with the original participatory approach to developing a suitable ARC RF, and will hopefully contribute to increased ownership of consortia over ARC results and reporting.

<sup>181</sup> The use of **intermediate Outcome-level indicators** will enhance the ability of local organisations to report on significant changes and developments more directly tied to achieved progress and results on the ground. The MTR considers it more feasible for ARC organizations to contribute to tangible results at the Intermediate Outcome-level instead of at the Outcome-levels defined in the Global ARC RF.

<sup>182</sup> Narrative reporting by partners on intermediate and long-term outcome results is crucial for performing a contribution analysis for the programme’s final evaluation, but numeric indicator data that cannot reasonably be aggregated has limited added value.

<sup>183</sup> The possibility of aggregating results will logically depend on the type and level of interventions supported through ARC projects within a specific region, as well as the projects’ contributions to shared results’ areas.

For any prospective ARC successor programme, it is recommended that:

1. A percentage of the overall programme budget is allocated to **boost monitoring and reporting capacity at regional level by providing bespoke M&E technical assistance (TA) and capacity building services to partners and embassy staff**. Services could be provided from a regional base, and could be institutionally hosted by the embassies, with remote support from the KPSRL. Sufficient support should harmonise data collection practices for compulsory indicators, and where possible enable partners working in similar localities to experiment with joint reporting. Furthermore, services can be tailored to the needs of embassy staff responsible for monitoring projects to conduct data quality assessments (DQAs), or alternatively the TA contractor can be assigned to conduct DQAs. This form of TA is different from traditional third-party monitoring (TPM), which focusses more on output verification.<sup>184</sup>
2. As part of an overall living programme document that outlines in sufficient detail what the programme's delivery model is (including what stakeholders are specifically responsible for what tasks), **develop an M&E plan whereby roles, responsibilities and procedures for results reporting, monitoring, evaluation and learning are clearly explained and defined**. To facilitate monitoring by MFA or embassy staff, a clear monitoring regime with timelines, templates, and guidance notes would be advantageous. The initial investment required to articulate this well, and in congruence with all parties involved, will mitigate the risks associated with the type of ad-hoc monitoring activities<sup>185</sup> conducted for the current ARC programme.

## 7.2 Alignment with country-level frameworks and mechanisms by consortia

The effectiveness and sustainability of interventions supported through centrally-managed programmes require **strengthening the internal and external coherence**. Support to local processes must be **embedded in broad(er) civil society frameworks** at the local, country or regional-level in order to sustain progress and results over-time beyond the limited duration (3-5 years) of ARC-funded projects. For this, it is paramount for the consortia and embassies to increase their role.<sup>186</sup>

For **consortia**, it is recommended that:

1. Consortia should assume pro-active responsibility for the projects' coordination, coherence and complementarity, based on updated stakeholder mappings. Consortia should urgently intensify the collaboration and coordination between consortia. They should also link to projects and similar initiatives and efforts both within the embassies' project portfolio and with these supported through other actors.
2. Consortia should bolster the leadership of local partners, and integrate their understanding of the context, political dynamics and their networks. Local organisations should be empowered to articulate the proposed intervention strategy and design considered to be best fit to the local contexts. The project design stage should allow candidate consortia to develop a more systematic approach by mapping out what other partners are doing in the respective ARC countries, what possible synergies with other stakeholders exist, and how alignment with other

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<sup>184</sup> One approach to a more comprehensive form of TPM that could be learnt from for a successor programme is the Netherlands-MFA funded "Third Party Monitoring and Evaluation Agent (TPMEA) Civil Society Fund South Sudan" (TenderNed-kenmerk 84332). Although this specific contract did not deliver the expected results, how the mandate of the agent was conceived and how it was intended to be integrated into the rest of the CSF programme's M&E system is an appropriate format from which much can be learnt for a possible ARC successor programme.

<sup>185</sup> Monitoring activities are hereby understood as field visits performed by second party staff (DSH or embassy) to verify and validate data that is being reported by ARC implementing consortia.

<sup>186</sup> Consortia received funding based on a number of commitments. In most of the case studies included in this MTR, these commitments were not realised, whereas this was a condition for the programme to succeed. In the approval memo to the Minister in 2016, collaboration between consortia was mentioned as the first condition to the success of an NGO programme in the field of stability: '(...) Based on lessons learnt, DSH is convinced that a number of conditions are important for the success of NGO programs on this theme: 1) good interplay between NGOs (...)'

governmental and non-governmental national level frameworks and coordination mechanisms can be achieved.

3. Consortia, with technical support from the KPSRL, should continue identifying shared learning needs, priorities and objectives at regional level, where commonalities are easier to be identified and learning exchanges are more relevant considering the similarities in contexts and (regional) developments. The KPSRL should stay the course to develop and deepen their regional approach embarked on since 2018 for the ARC learning agenda.
4. Consortia should maintain their interventions' strategy and design specific, focused and coherent. If structural adjustments are to be conducted for the remainder of the ARC programme or for successor programmes,<sup>187</sup> consortia should take caution in ensuring that project revisions only structurally adjust the design when warranted by changed circumstances and conditions on the ground. Adaptive programming must preserve the project's coherence and not induce further fragmentation by allowing "mission creep" or be conducted to respond to newly imposed policy priorities. Consortia should take caution not to duplicate other in-country initiatives. The MFA should develop clear guidance and parameters to outline under which conditions substantive revisions can be undertaken.

For [embassies collaborating on the current ARC programme](#), it is recommended that:

1. If possible - given that embassies in FCAS are in many cases already understaffed - embassies should use their political leverage for ARC projects to maintain coherence and guarantee alignment with relevant country-level frameworks (wherever this is desirable and feasible).
2. The MFA should provide clear guidance and advance communication towards partners about prospects for follow-up funding (especially for socio-economic reconstruction activities), to help mitigate uncertainties regarding the feasibility of longer-term objectives.
3. For the remainder of the ARC programme, policymakers from DSH should become more involved in technical and thematic oversight and monitoring of the programme, which is currently fully performed by DSH's policy implementation unit. This will make the feedback loop between the BU and the policymakers more effective.

For [embassies collaborating on any follow-up ARC successor programme](#), it is recommended that:

1. Intentions and commitments identified during the early stages of follow-up programme design are discussed in more detail during kick-off meetings (including allocation of specific responsibilities), and are reflected more clearly in subsequent MoUs.
2. Possible ARC-successor project designs are evaluated more specifically to assess alignment with embassy MACS. More weight (higher score) could be associated with this criteria in the tendering process.
3. More capacity is designated to effectively deliver the role envisioned for the embassies with regard to technical/thematic oversight, information exchange, and coordination.
4. A combination of more designated embassy staff capacity to monitor projects, with additional monitoring capacity in the form of technical assistance (TA) and capacity building by a third party contractor, could be considered to ensure that results are more diligently verified and validated.

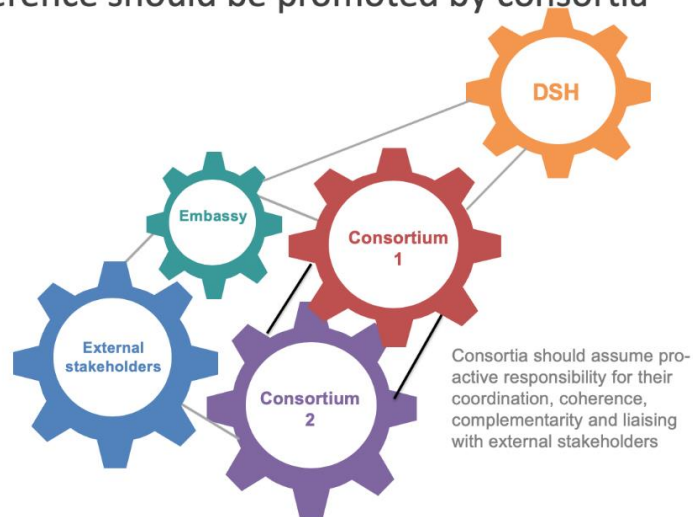
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<sup>187</sup> The MTR found that such substantive revisions had not taken place, although the MTR observes that this would be expected considering these projects operate in FCAS. The recommendation, however, is pertinent as substantive revisions, when inappropriately conducted, can contribute to further fragmentation by expanding the scope of activities beyond the original thematic and substantive remit of the project.

Figure 3

Infographic: Country-Level Coherence Promoted by Consortia

## Country-level coherence should be promoted by consortia themselves



### 7.3 Strategic use of central programmes

Central programmes should provide a **flexible funding mechanism** to make strategic and/or catalytic investments to support (local) processes within the thematic scope and parameters of the programme. The allocation and delivery of funding through centrally-managed programmes can thus be strategically used in contexts where critical local peace/development processes do not yet benefit from broad(er) support from national and international stakeholders. Providing funding to initiatives that support such processes in an early stage, if demonstrating relevance and tangible impact, can have a ‘catalytic’ effect to mobilise further resources. To achieve tangible impacts in FCAS, a long term approach is required. The MFA should ensure that:

1. For the remainder of the ARC I programme, it is clear that not all embassies in FCAS can help match and link consortia to other programmes, donors and multilateral organisations, for the sake of the continuity and sustainability of progress and results achieved so far. Therefore priority should be given to the consortia that are best at ensuring coherence at country-level (see previous recommendations) and facilitating local partners (and local actors) to assume leadership, in other words, those that have the best exit strategy. Embassies' endorsement generates trust, credibility and reputation in donor and other strategic networks.
2. Any future programming by DSH should be decided jointly, based on the country strategies (MACS). Embassies are to determine if and what would be the most suitable delivery mode to address local needs and priorities in FCAS. Embassies are closely involved in identifying the local needs, priorities and challenges and in identifying and selecting the local stakeholders most suitable and best placed to address these.
3. It is advisable to only select experienced consortia, having a track record of collaboration in the country context, given the start-up and other problems inexperienced consortia can cause. Organisations should be selected based on a proven and relevant track-record within the country context and based on the strength of existing partnerships with other local partners (in case of consortia) and (inter)national stakeholders with influence over the desired Outcome of the supported local processes. Experience and track-record (not only in the regional, but in the country context) should trump assessment criteria that reward innovative (or experimental) approaches of, for example, international NGOs that want to replicate their “best practices” from elsewhere in the world in that country.

**Box 11: Greater centralisation part of trend among likeminded donors**

Decentralised funding would help increase ownership with embassies, but is tied to strict criteria requiring the type of capacity which is generally not foreseen in the short term. The share of Dutch government funding going to decentralised (country-level) programmes fell compared to centralised funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A Dutch government representative estimates that decentralised funding now entails only 17% whereas a decade ago it was still double that percentage. This is not unique among donors: the 2019 DFID annual report on showed the share of DFID funding going to regional programmes from GBP fell from BP 4.5 billion in 2016-17 to GBP 4.3 bn in 2017-18, whereas the amount DFID spent on programmes and departments increased by more than GBP 325 mn. to 10.7 bn in 2018-19

(Source: Department for International Development, Annual Report and Accounts 2018-9, 11 July 2019 and Annual Report and Accounts 2016-7, 6 July 2017)



Answering  
tomorrow's  
challenges  
today

# Addressing Root Causes (ARC) Programme

## Annexes

# Annex I: Evaluation Matrix

## Part I: Evaluation Questions, Themes and Sub-Questions

Overarching Question	Evaluation Questions	Themes (from ToR)	Sub-Questions (from ToR)
<b>Coherence: synergies and interlinkages between interventions in the same context funded by the same institution</b>			
How does the ARC programme's institutional setup (governance) provide a coherent framework for effective cooperation?	Does country-level coordination between the ARC programme partners, embassies and other partners enhance coherence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cooperation with the consortium partners, the Ministry and embassies</li> <li>IOB report recommendation: reduced fragmentation</li> </ul>	Is the coordination within consortia effective (regular meetings, discussions concerning the activities, budgets and disbursements, are all (including local) partners participating etc.), and does it lead to optimal coherent activity planning/execution as proposed in the project document?
			Are the agreements made in the country MoUs being respected? If not, why not?
			Is the monitoring and sparring partner role of the embassies (field visits and regular contact) effective for the project partners?
			Is the coordination provided by the Ministry in The Hague effective for partners to implement the project?
			Are the ARC partners/projects consulted by the embassies in the formulation process of their Multi-Annual Country Strategies and did the consultation lead to more integration between the ARC project and other embassy projects?
			To what extent does the ARC programme respond to the lessons learnt from the Reconstruction tender (internal evaluation in 2016 and IOB evaluation report findings and recommendations in 2019) with regard to <b>reduced fragmentation</b> ;
	Does the ARC programme's approach to learning enhance coherence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning agenda</li> </ul>	To what extent did the MEAL/learning agenda fulfil its objective of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promoting cooperation and coordination between implementing organizations;</li> <li>Sharing information, lessons learnt and best practices (between ARC partners and Ministry); and</li> <li>Adaptation of the individual projects based on the findings?</li> </ol> What are lessons learnt in this regard?
			How can the learning agenda between ARC partners and KPSRL and Ministry be improved?
			Does the M&E of the programmes facilitate learning (within the program as to the global learning agenda)
			Does the KPSRL have the right mandate to monitor and to enforce/promote ARC learning in conformity with their annual plan 2018 (to create incentives for practitioner and policymaking partners to invest in learning, facilitate learning exchanges, create opportunities to form learning partnerships, and coordinate the sharing of ARC lessons with the wider Platform)? If not, what should be changed?

Overarching Question	Evaluation Questions	Themes (from ToR)	Sub-Questions (from ToR)
<b>Relevance: objectives and design respond to beneficiaries' needs, partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change</b>			
How responsive and flexible is the ARC programme to changing needs and priorities?	How responsive are the ARC programme's objectives and design to the context in which it is being implemented?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design of the final project</li> <li>• Adaptive programming</li> <li>• Cross cutting themes</li> <li>• IOB report recommendation: evidence-based project design</li> </ul>	What were the positive/negative effects of the 'collaborative approach' applied during the project design phase?
			What was the role of the local partners in the design phase of the project?
			Are the assumptions underlying the projects being tested and assessed by the partners? And do the results form the basis to adjust the activities?
			What measures were/are taken to implement activities in a conflict sensitive manner (e.g. did the MFA and the implementing agencies flexibly adapt to changing conditions and conflict situations)?
			What measures were/are taken to implement activities in a gender sensitive/transformational manner?
			To what extent does the ARC programme respond to the lessons learnt from the Reconstruction tender (internal evaluation in 2016 and IOB evaluation report findings and recommendations in 2019) with regard to <a href="#">evidence-based project design</a> ?
			To what extent does the ARC programme respond to the lessons learnt from the Reconstruction tender (internal evaluation in 2016 and IOB evaluation report findings and recommendations in 2019) with regard to <a href="#">setting realistic goals</a> ?
			<a href="#">Additional sub-question (not from ToR)</a> : Are the assumptions underlying the programme design being tested and assessed by DSH? And do the results form the basis to adjust the programme?
	How responsive is the ARC programme to other needs, policies and priorities (partners, embassies, country-level stakeholders, DSH)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptive programming</li> <li>• IOB report recommendation: realistic goals</li> <li>• Sustainability</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Additional sub-question (not from ToR)</a> : To what extent do the ARC programme's coordination mechanisms at country-level contribute to improved (external) coherence with other donors, partners and stakeholders?
			Is the exit strategy (sustainability) still valid for the projects and are the projects working towards the exit strategy?

Overarching Question	Evaluation Questions	Themes (from ToR)	Sub-Questions (from ToR)
<b>Efficiency: the intervention is well-managed and delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way</b>			
How likely is the programme going to deliver results in an economic and timely way?	Does the ARC programme's Results Framework (RF) and its approach to results reporting enhance efficiency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Results framework ARC</li> <li>Reporting</li> </ul>	What are the positive/negative experiences of establishing an ARC results framework?
			Did the ARC results framework contribute to accountability?
			Did the ARC results framework contribute to learning and steering?
			Did the ARC results framework contribute to dialogue and cooperation?
			To what extent were the partners able to report on the indicators of the ARC results framework in IATI and the annual analytical reports?
			How much of the results of the projects are lost (not reported on) because it is not directly related to an indicator of the ARC results framework?
			Which mechanisms are in place to receive and report reliable project results (for example: number of work visits Lead organizations or embassy, independent monitoring on project site etc.)
			Is the monitoring done by the embassies sufficient to justify the reduction of FTE at DSH on the ARC programme.
			Were the guidance tools developed by the MFA useful and did they lead to added value in the opinion of the ARC partners? And if so how?
			Are the ARC methodological notes consistent with the Security and Rule of Law logical notes
			Were the ARC methodological notes clear enough/easy to use? Did organizations apply the indicators in the same way? Is it therefore possible to aggregate the results?
			Do the reporting formats (annual reports/annuals plans) sufficiently reflect the reality of the result/ progress of the projects?
			To what extent are the achievements/results used by the Ministry for learning and policy influencing?
	Does the ARC programme's approach to 'adaptive programming' enhance efficiency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adaptive programming</li> </ul>	<p>To what extent do ARC implementing partners have a common understanding of adaptive programming (additional, not from ToR), and [t]o what extent did partners apply adaptive programming? And if so, what was the basis of adaptive programming and how did it contribute to flexibility and implementation strategies?</p> <p>To what extent did the Ministry react flexibly to adaptive programming by partners?</p>

## Part II: Indicators, Methods and Sources

Sub-Questions (from ToR)	Indicators	Data collection method	Sources	Data collection category <sup>188</sup>
<b>Coherence</b>				
Is the coordination within consortia effective (regular meetings, discussions concerning the activities, budgets and disbursements, are all (including local) partners participating etc.), and does it lead to optimal coherent activity planning/execution as proposed in the project document?	Consortia member level of satisfaction with coordination mechanisms	KIIs	IP staff, local partner staff, embassy staff, other consortia members	2
	Extent to which activity planning/execution modalities from project documents correspond with what is reported in project reports (monitoring reports, mid-term reviews, etc.)	Desk review	Country MoUs Project progress reports Project MTRs	2
	Extent to which intra-consortium coordination appears to function effectively during field visits	Observations	Project office and activity site visits	1
Are the agreements made in the country MoUs being respected? If not, why not?	Extent to which key stakeholders agree that MoUs are being respected; justifications for why not	KIIs	IP staff, local partner staff, embassy staff, other consortia members	2
	Extent to which agreements in MoUs correspond with what is reported in progress reports	Desk review	Country MoUs Project progress reports Project MTRs	3
	Extent to which agreements in MoUs are visibly institutionalised in practice (ie monthly meetings taking place and well attended)	Observations	Project office, embassies, activity site visits	1
Is the monitoring and sparring partner role of the embassies (field visits and regular contact) effective for the project partners?	Level of satisfaction by implementing partners and embassy staff regarding the monitoring and sparring role of the Embassies	KIIs	IP staff, local partner staff, embassy staff	2
	Quality and quantity of embassy monitoring reports	Desk review	Embassy monitoring reports	3

<sup>188</sup> See chapter 3.4 for further details

Sub-Questions (from ToR)	Indicators	Data collection method	Sources	Data collection category <sup>188</sup>
Is the coordination provided by the Ministry in The Hague effective for partners to implement the project?	Level of satisfaction among implementing partners, embassy staff and ministry staff regarding the coordination provided by the ministry in The Hague	KIIs	IP staff, embassy staff, coordinating ministry staff	2
Are the ARC partners/projects consulted by the embassies in the formulation process of their Multi-Annual Country Strategies and did the consultation lead to more integration between the ARC project and other embassy projects?	Level of consultation between partners and Embassies in reference to MACSS	KIIs	ARC partner staff Embassy staff	2
	Extent of alignment (geographic, thematic, etc.) between ARC projects and other (planned) projects in the MACS portfolio.	Desk review	Project design documents, MACS	2
To what extent does the ARC programme respond to the lessons learnt from the Reconstruction tender (internal evaluation in 2016 and IOB evaluation report findings and recommendations in 2019) with regard to <b>reduced fragmentation</b> ;	Extent to which action has been taken to mitigate country-level fragmentation in line with IOB report findings (since publication)	KIIs	List stakeholders (categories) DSH personnel	2
	Extent to which country-level reporting on MACS indicates (improved) alignment/coherence with ARC project activities	Desk review	ARC project portfolio review (monitoring reports, MTRs, etc.)	2
<i>Additional sub-question (not from ToR):</i> To what extent do the ARC programme's coordination mechanisms at country-level contribute to improved (external) coherence with other donors, partners and stakeholders?	Extent to which key internal and external stakeholders consider country-level ARC coordination mechanisms (MoUs, consortia, learning events, etc.) to be coherent with and bring added value to country-level sectoral coordination.	KIIs	IP staff, embassy staff, other donor staff, (local) authorities, UN cluster coordination staff, etc.	1
To what extent did the MEAL/learning agenda fulfil its objective of: 1. Promoting cooperation and coordination between implementing organizations; 2. Sharing information, lessons learnt and best practices (between ARC partners and Ministry); and 3. Adaptation of the individual projects based on the findings? What are lessons learnt in this regard?	Extent to which key informants indicate the learning agenda promoted cooperation and coordination	KIIs	IP staff, embassy staff, ministry staff, KPSRL staff	2
	Quantity and quality of "lessons learnt" documents shared between partners and ministry	Desk review	"lessons learnt" documents shared between partners and ministry	3
	Extent to which individual projects were adapted based on "lessons learnt" documents	Desk review	Project adaptation requests (contract addenda and supporting documentation)	2
How can the learning agenda between ARC partners and KPSRL and Ministry be improved?	Feedback and recommendations from key informants	KIIs	IP staff, embassy staff, ministry staff, KPSRL staff	2

Sub-Questions (from ToR)	Indicators	Data collection method	Sources	Data collection category <sup>188</sup>
	Assessment of recommendations made in other (internal) documents made so far	Desk review	ARC project MTRs Lessons learnt documents Country MoU reviews KPSRL documents	3
Does the M&E of the programmes facilitate learning (within the program as to the global learning agenda)	Extent to which M&E data informs strategic discussion and decision-making at project and programme-levels (regarding results, intervention design)	KIIs	IP staff, embassy staff, ministry staff, KPSRL staff	2
	Extent to which learning is an integrated component of programme M&E system	Desk review	Programme reports (annual/biannual)	3
Does the KPSRL have the right mandate to monitor and to enforce/promote ARC learning in conformity with their annual plan 2018 (to create incentives for practitioner and policymaking partners to invest in learning, facilitate learning exchanges, create opportunities to form learning partnerships, and coordinate the sharing of ARC lessons with the wider Platform)? If not, what should be changed?	Extent to which the KPSRL was empowered with a sufficient mandate by the MFA or seen by ARC implementing partners to have a position of influence that would allow it to monitor, enforce, promote learning.	KIIs	IP staff, embassy staff, ministry staff, KPSRL staff	2
	Extent to which learning activities from the KPSRL 2018 Annual Plan have been implemented	Desk review	KPSRL annual plan, planning communication (emails)	3
	Key informant assessments on the role of KPSRL and effectiveness of its performance	KIIs	IP staff, embassy staff, ministry staff, KPSRL staff	2
	Key informant assessments of the relevance and usefulness of learning activities within the ARC programme	KIIs	IP staff, embassy staff, ministry staff, KPSRL staff	2
<b>Relevance</b>				
What were the positive/negative effects of the 'collaborative approach' applied during the project design phase?	Level of satisfaction by stakeholders involved in the project design phase	KIIs	DSH staff, Embassy staff, IP staff, facilitators, other stakeholders	2
	Extent to which a "collaborative approach" (i.e. consultation with authorities, stakeholders, partners, beneficiaries) is evidenced throughout the project design	Desk review	Project design documents	2

Sub-Questions (from ToR)	Indicators	Data collection method	Sources	Data collection category <sup>188</sup>
What was the role of the local partners in the design phase of the project?	Extent to which local partners were involved <sup>189</sup> in the design process	KIs	IP staff, local partner staff, embassy staff, DSH contract manager.	2
	Extent to which inputs by local partners are cited in project design documents	Desk review	Project design documents	2
Are the assumptions underlying the projects being tested and assessed by the partners? And do the results form the basis to adjust the activities?	Extent to which key informants confirm that underlying assumptions are interrogated using (multiple) reliable sources.	KIs	IP staff, local partner staff, embassy staff, DSH contract manager.	2
	Extent to which project ToCs identify assumptions, and availability of testing evidence (commissioned pieces of research, etc.)	Desk review	Project ToCs (and supporting documents)	2
	Extent to which requests to adjust activities contain evidence that assumptions have been tested.	Desk review	Activity adjustment requests (formal requests, communication, etc.)	2
What measures were/are taken to implement activities in a conflict sensitive manner (e.g. did the MFA and the implementing agencies flexibly adapt to changing conditions and conflict situations)?	Degree to which intervention design and strategy are informed by up-to-date conflict analyses	KIs	Conflict analysts, IP staff, local partner staff, embassy staff, DSH contract manager.	2
	Quality of conflict assessments conducted (pluralism, reliability, verification, etc.)	Desk review	Conflict assessments (project, country level)	2
	Reliance on national staff inputs for executive decision-making procedures	KIs/observations	Project office and activity site visits	1

<sup>189</sup> What role did they play in the (i) evidence-based research, (ii) consultations, (iii) scoping, (iv) identifying results and intervention strategy and (v) drafting, as part of the project design process?

Sub-Questions (from ToR)	Indicators	Data collection method	Sources	Data collection category <sup>188</sup>
What measures were/are taken to implement activities in a gender sensitive/transformational manner?	Extent to which key stakeholders attribute importance to gender sensitivity and cite concrete examples of gender sensitive activity implementation	KIs	IP staff, local partner staff, embassy staff, DSH contract manager.	2
	Availability and quality of gender-specific conflict analyses cited or incorporated in project design	Desk review	Project design documents	2
	Extent to which project and programme results reporting is disaggregated by gender	Desk review	Project/programme results reporting data	3
	Extent to which gender sensitivity is institutionalised in practice	KIs/observations	Project office and activity site visits	1
To what extent does the ARC programme respond to the lessons learnt from the Reconstruction tender (internal evaluation in 2016 and IOB evaluation report findings and recommendations in 2019) with regard to <b>evidence-based project design</b> ?	Extent to which key informants cite changes in project design requirements with regard to evidence (in reference to IOB evaluation report)	KIs	IP staff, local partner staff, embassy staff, DSH contract manager.	2
	Availability and quality of evidence provided accompanying project design or adjustment requests (since publication of IOB report)	Desk review	ARC project portfolio review (monitoring reports, MTRs, etc.)	2
To what extent does the ARC programme respond to the lessons learnt from the Reconstruction tender (internal evaluation in 2016 and IOB evaluation report findings and recommendations in 2019) with regard to <b>setting realistic goals</b> ?	Extent to which key informants cite changes in setting realistic project goals (in reference to IOB evaluation report)	KIs	IP staff, local partner staff, embassy staff, DSH contract manager.	2
	Extent to which project adaptation requests address realistic goals (since IOB report publication)	Desk review	Project adaptation requests	2
<i>Additional sub-question (not from ToR):</i> Are the assumptions underlying the programme design being tested and assessed by DSH? And do the results form the basis to adjust the programme?	Extent to which key informants confirm that assumptions underpinning the ARC programme design are being tested, and that results are being used to adjust the programme.	KIs	DSH staff	3
	Extent to which assumptions underpinning the programme have been identified (in a ToC or elsewhere), and quality of evidence testing these assumptions.	Desk review	ARC programme documents (ToC, RF, etc.), pieces of commissioned research testing assumptions at programme level	3

Sub-Questions (from ToR)	Indicators	Data collection method	Sources	Data collection category <sup>188</sup>
<i>Additional sub-question (not from ToR):</i> To what extent do the ARC programme's coordination mechanisms at country-level contribute to improved (external) coherence with other donors, partners and stakeholders?	Extent to which key internal and external stakeholders consider country-level ARC coordination mechanisms (MoUs, consortia, learning events, etc.) to be coherent with and bring added value to country-level sectoral coordination.	KIs	IP staff, embassy staff, other donor staff, (local) authorities, UN cluster coordination staff, etc.	1
Is the exit strategy (sustainability) still valid for the projects and are the projects working towards the exit strategy?	Extent to which the exit strategy is used as a guiding principal for planning (multi)annual targets and assessing project progress (and success)	KIs	IP staff, DSH staff, Embassy staff	2
	Actionable and realistic exit strategies cited in annual reports/plans	Desk review	Annual project reports/plans	2
	Extent to which implementing partners rely on ARC funding for core organisational/administrative functions	KIs	IP staff, local partner staff	2
<b>Efficiency</b>				
What are the positive/negative experiences of establishing an ARC results framework?	Perceptions by respondents regarding the process of establishing the ARC results framework	KIs	DGIS staff involved with the formulation/revision of the ARC RF MDF staff Other stakeholders involved (embassies, etc.)	3
Did the ARC results framework contribute to accountability?	Extent to which respondents identify the RF as contributing to improved accountability towards Parliament	KIs	DGIS policy officers, controllers, senior BU staff	3
	Extent to which upward accountability stakeholders (steering committee members, parliamentarians, etc.) are satisfied with ARC results reporting	Desk review	Steering committee minutes, parliamentary proceedings, etc.	3
Did the ARC results framework contribute to learning and steering?	Number and significance of examples cited by key informants	KIs	IP staff, DSH staff, embassy staff, KPSRL staff, other learning agenda stakeholders	3

Sub-Questions (from ToR)	Indicators	Data collection method	Sources	Data collection category <sup>188</sup>
Did the ARC results framework contribute to dialogue and cooperation?	Number and significance of examples cited by key informants	KIs	IP staff, DSH staff, embassy staff, KPSRL staff, other learning agenda stakeholders	3
	Extent to which the RF is cited in documents (e.g. meeting minutes) containing evidence of dialogue and cooperation (or lack thereof)	Desk review (as part of portfolio analysis)	Meeting minutes, lessons learnt documents, etc.	2
To what extent were the partners able to report on the indicators of the ARC results framework in IATI and the annual analytical reports?	Level of satisfaction by partner staff reporting on ARC indicators in IATI	KIs	List stakeholders (categories) Partner organizations	2
	Completeness of IATI reporting by partners	Database review	<a href="https://d-portal.org/">https://d-portal.org/</a> Other IATI database portals	2
	Completeness of annual analytical reports by partners	Desk review	Analytical reports	2
How much of the results of the projects are lost (not reported on) because it is not directly related to an indicator of the ARC results framework?	Level of satisfaction by implementing partners with comprehensiveness of ARC results framework for capturing unintended consequences	KIs	IP staff, local partner staff, DSH staff, embassy staff	2
	Extent to which results are recorded, but not reported	Desk review	Project level results databases – to be obtained from partners?	2
Which mechanisms are in place to receive and report reliable project results (for example: number of work visits Lead organizations or embassy, independent monitoring on project site etc.)	Level of satisfaction by key stakeholders regarding results reporting mechanisms in place	KIs	DSH policy officers, contract managers (BU), embassy staff, IP staff	2
	Quality and reliability of reports generated by reporting mechanisms used by partners, embassy staff, external contractors, etc.	Desk review	M&E reports: project MTRs, monitoring reports, field visit reports, etc.	2
Is the monitoring done by the embassies sufficient to justify the reduction of FTE at DSH on the ARC programme.	Extent to which Embassy staff are capable to adequately execute their monitoring responsibilities of ARC projects	KIs	Embassy staff, DSH staff, IP staff	2
	Average number of hours per month spent by embassy staff monitoring ARC projects	KIs	Embassy staff (timesheets)	2
	Quality and quantity of embassy monitoring reports	Desk review	Embassy monitoring reports	3

Sub-Questions (from ToR)	Indicators	Data collection method	Sources	Data collection category <sup>188</sup>
Were the guidance tools developed by the MFA useful and did they lead to added value in the opinion of the ARC partners? And if so how?	Level of satisfaction by guidance tool users.	KIIs	IP staff	2
Are the ARC methodological notes consistent with the Security and Rule of Law logical notes	Extent to which the Security and Rule of Law logical notes were used in developing the ARC methodological notes	KIIs	Authors of ARC methodological notes (DSH staff), users of notes (IP staff)	2
	Extent to which ARC methodological notes are consistent with the Security and Rule of Law logical notes	Desk review	ARC methodological notes Security and Rule of Law logical notes	2
Were the ARC methodological notes clear enough/easy to use? Did organizations apply the indicators in the same way? Is it therefore possible to aggregate the results?	Level of satisfaction by users (IPs)	KIIs	IP staff, DSH staff	2
	Level of utilisation and uniformity of utilisation by users (IPs)	Desk review	Indicator reference sheets, project and programme level M&E guidance notes, project, country and programme level results reporting documents and databases	2
Do the reporting formats (annual reports/annuals plans) sufficiently reflect the reality of the result/ progress of the projects?	Level of satisfaction of reporting formats by end-users	KIIs	IPs and local partner staff	2
	Extent to which project reports report on most significant achievements/results as narrated by beneficiaries.	KIIs/ desk review	IPs and local partners staff Project reports (annual reports/plans)	2
	Quality of reporting formats (extent to which formats allow for additional reporting)	Desk review	Reporting formats (templates)	3
To what extent are the achievements/results used by the Ministry for learning and policy influencing?	Extent to which ARC results are taken up by personnel to inform policy and programming design	KIIs	MFA policy offers (DSH/DDE)	3

Sub-Questions (from ToR)	Indicators	Data collection method	Sources	Data collection category <sup>188</sup>
	Actionability of reported achievements/results	Desk review	RF reports (annual/biannual) submitted to steering committee	3
	Extent to which ARC achievements/results are referenced	Desk review	Learning and policy influencing documents	3
To what extent do ARC implementing partners have a common understanding of adaptive programming ( <i>additional, not from ToR</i> ),[t]o what extent did partners apply adaptive programming? And if so, what was the basis of adaptive programming and how did it contribute to flexibility and implementation strategies?	Extent to which partners claim to have applied adaptive programming, and extent to which this is cited to contribute to flexibility.	KIs	IP staff, local partner staff, embassy staff, DSH contract manager.	2
	Extent to which adaptive programming is cited in lessons learnt documents as contributing to flexibility	Desk review	ARC programme documents Lessons learnt documents	3
To what extent did the Ministry react flexibly to adaptive programming by partners?	Existence of clear Ministerial procedures, criteria and justification for the submission and approval of a revision request. Compliance by partner organization with the requirements for project revisions	KIs	DSH staff, IP staff	2
		Desk review	Administrative/contractual documents and communication records (optional)	2
	Timeliness and administrative complexity of adaptive programming procedures	KIs	DSH staff, IP staff	2
	Responsiveness by Ministry staff	Desk review	Communication records (optional)	2

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# Annex III: List of Key Informants

<b>Programme-level</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of the Netherlands (15 staff)</li> <li>Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law (2 staff)</li> <li>Saferworld (1 staff)</li> <li>ZOA (1 staff)</li> </ul>
<b>Project-level</b>
<b>Afghanistan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Netherlands Embassy in Kabul (2 staff)</li> <li>Cordaid (3 staff)</li> <li>Bayat Foundation (2 staff)</li> <li>ASARA (local partner of 1% Club) (2 staff)</li> <li>Civic (2 staff)</li> <li>Hamida Barmaki Organization for the Rule of Law (1 staff)</li> <li>Norwegian Refugee Council (2 staff)</li> <li>Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (2 staff)</li> <li>International Rescue Committee (2 staff)</li> <li>World Bank (2 staff)</li> <li>Ministry of Economy, Government of Afghanistan (2 staff)</li> <li>Focus Group Discussion (16 people)</li> </ul>
<b>Burundi</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oxfam (2 staff)</li> <li>Red een Kind (1 staff)</li> <li>Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of the Netherlands (1 staff)</li> <li>Focus Group Discussion (3 people)</li> </ul>
<b>Ethiopia</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Netherlands Embassy in Addis Ababa (1 staff)</li> <li>Woord en Daar (2 staff)</li> <li>Selam Children Village (2 staff)</li> <li>Sticthing ZOA (2 staff)</li> </ul>
<b>Jordan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Netherlands Embassy in Amman (2 staff)</li> <li>Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Government of Jordan (1 staff)</li> <li>Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Jordan (1 staff)</li> <li>Mercy Corps (3 staff)</li> <li>International Rescue Committee (5 staff)</li> <li>Norwegian Refugee Council (3 staff)</li> <li>Justice Centre for Legal Aid (2 staff)</li> <li>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1 staff)</li> <li>Focus Group Discussion (33 people)</li> </ul>
<b>Mali</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human Security Collective (2 staff)</li> <li>Netherlands Embassy in Bamako (2 staff)</li> <li>ICCO (4 staff)</li> <li>Norwegian Church Aid (3 staff)</li> <li>Association Malienne pour la Survie au Sahel (1 staff)</li> <li>Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, Government of Mali (1 staff)</li> </ul>

### Programme-level

- Réseau des Jeunes Femmes Leaders du MALI (1 staff)
- NGO Grat (1 staff)
- ONG Agence de Developpement communautaire (1 staff)
- Réseau Jeunes du G5 Sahel (1 staff)
- Alliance pour Refonder la Gouvernance en Afrique (1 staff)
- NGO Eveil (1 staff)
- Association Malienne pour la Survie au Sahel (2 staff)
- Collective Plus Jamais Ca (1 staff)
- WANEP Mali (2 staff)
- EUCAP Sahel Mali (2 staff)
- Institute for Security Studies (1 staff)
- Search for Common Ground (1 staff)
- Focus Group Discussions (22 people)

### Somalia

- Saferworld (2 staff)
- Conflict Dynamics International (2 staff)
- Netherlands Embassy in Nairobi (1 staff)

## Annex IV: Summary Overview of ARC-funded Projects

Countries	Title	Organizations	Duration (years)	Budget (EUR mil.)	Results areas*
Afghanistan	A Bright Future	Cordaid / The Bayat Foundation / 1% Club / The Hamida Barmki Organization For The Rule Of Law (HBORL)	5	€ 5.8	2 & 4
	Sustainable Livelihoods, Improved Governance, and Functioning Rule of Law in Afghanistan	Norwegian Refugee Council / Stichting Vluchteling (SV) / DACCAR	5	€ 8.1	2 & 4
Burundi	Nyubahiriza 'Respect me'	Oxfam novib / Stichting CARE Nederland; Stichting Impunity Watch*	4	€ 6.0	1 & 2
	Building Bridges in Burundi	Stichting red een kind / Stichting Mensen met een Missie; Cord (Christian Outreach); American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)	5	€ 8.1	1, 2 & 4
DRC	Tinawezekana (It is possible) Enabling Government, Civil Society and Communities Addressing Root Causes of Conflicts in the Hauts Plateau de Kalehe	ZOA / War Child	5	€ 8.2	3 & 4
	Hope and opportunities for people in Ethiopia	ZOA / International Medical Corps (IMC) / Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) / Plan	5	€ 9.5	4
Ethiopia	Employable Youth in Ethiopia - Moving Towards a Better Future	Woord en Daad / Dorcas Aid International / HOPE Enterprises / Hiwot Integrated Development / Selam Addis / Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT)	5	€ 6.1	3 & 4

Countries	Title	Organizations	Duration (years)	Budget (EUR mil.)	Results areas*
Jordan	A New Holistic Approach between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the International Community to deal with the Syrian Refugee Crisis	Mercy Corps Europe / Stichting Vluchteling	3	€ 4.7	2 & 4
	Improving access to justice and basic services for Syrian refugees and members of the Jordanian host community	Norwegian Refugee Council / Justice Center for Legal Aid	3	€ 3.5	2 & 4
Lebanon	Fostering Resilience by Strengthening Abilities (FORSA)	Mercy Corps Europe	3	€ 4.5	4
	Enhanced capacity of Vulnerable Youth affected by the Syrian Conflict to access educational and livelihoods opportunities	ACTED international / Concern International / Hivos / Cesvi Overseas	3	€ 5.0	4
Mali	Human Security Approach to Address the Root Causes of Conflict and Violence in Mali	NCA / ICCO / Human Security Collective	4	€ 4.5	1 & 3
Pakistan	Improved Access to Fair, Legitimate and Effective Justice in Pakistan	Oxfam Novib / Saferworld	5	€ 5.0	2
	Market and Employment for Peace and Stability (ME4PS)	Helvetas / ACTED / Plan International	5	€ 3.8	2 & 4
Somalia	Restoring Stable Communities in Somalia	Saferworld / Somali Women Development Centre (SWDC)	5	€ 7.9	1 & 3
	Political Accommodation and Reconciliation in Somalia	Conflict Dynamics / Somali Youth Development; Network Forum of Federations	5	€ 6.7	1 & 3
South Sudan	Generating Sustainable Livelihoods and Leadership for Peace in South Sudan	ACCORD / Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) Dan Church Aid (DCA)	5	€ 8.2	1, 3 & 4
	Addressing Root Causes of Violent Conflict in Jonglei	CARE / Humanitarian and Development Consortium (HDC)	5	€ 5.9	1, 3 & 4
Sudan	Building Constituencies for Peaceful Change in Sudan	Saferworld / SUDIA	5	€ 6.2	1

Countries	Title	Organizations	Duration (years)	Budget (EUR mil.)	Results areas*
Syria	Enhancing stability through community resilience	ZOA / World Relief	4	€ 4.2	1 & 4
	Strengthening Local Governance in Eastern Ghouta and Western Aleppo Countryside	LDSPS / Kesh Malek / RM Team	3	€ 3.6	1 & 4

Source: MFA/DSH (2019). Summary overview of ARC project

# About Ecorys

Ecorys is a leading international research and consultancy company, addressing society's key challenges. With world-class research-based consultancy, we help public and private clients make and implement informed decisions leading to positive impact on society. We support our clients with sound analysis and inspiring ideas, practical solutions and delivery of projects for complex market, policy and management issues.

In 1929, businessmen from what is now Erasmus University Rotterdam founded the Netherlands Economic Institute (NEI). Its goal was to bridge the opposing worlds of economic research and business - in 2000, this much respected Institute became Ecorys.

Throughout the years, Ecorys expanded across the globe, with offices in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Our staff originates from many different cultural backgrounds and areas of expertise because we believe in the power that different perspectives bring to our organisation and our clients.

Ecorys excels in seven areas of expertise:

- Economic growth;
- Social policy;
- Natural resources;
- Regions & Cities;
- Transport & Infrastructure;
- Public sector reform;
- Security & Justice.

Ecorys offers a clear set of products and services:

- preparation and formulation of policies;
- programme management;
- communications;
- capacity building;
- monitoring and evaluation.

We value our independence, our integrity and our partners. We care about the environment in which we work and live. We have an active Corporate Social Responsibility policy, which aims to create shared value that benefits society and business. We are ISO 14001 certified, supported by all our staff.



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***Sound analysis, inspiring ideas***