

ARC Global Closing Event
December 7th and 8th, 2022
Beeld een Geluid (The Hague) and virtually accessible

Introduction

For the past decade, addressing the root causes of conflict and irregular migration through "bottom up" civil society engagement and fragile states has been a priority for Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The Addressing Root Causes fund (ARC fund-2016-2021) has been the latest centrally managed tender program that the MFA's department for Stabilization and Humanitarian Aid (DSH) has launched and managed to this effect¹.

Beyond implementation, the ARC program had the ambition to build a community of practice in which members take collective responsibility for learning, reflect on common challenges, encourage innovation and develop a repertoire of collective resources (experiences, stories, tools etc.). Building from lessons learned as part of ARC implementation, regional learning symposiums have been organized by ARC partners² (May 2022) in order to capitalize on experience from peace, security and justice programs through collaborative learning and knowledge sharing, establish shared understanding on lessons learned and best practice, and analyze challenges and opportunities on dealing with addressing root causes of conflict and insecurity in the Great Lakes Region, Horn of Africa and Sahel Region.

Building from the said regional events, a global closing event was organized in The Hague on December 7th and 8th, 2022³ by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ), the Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL) and ARC partners. The global event offered space to discuss common lessons learned across the programs and how they could be fed into portfolio reflection for future programming and policy.

Objectives

Specific objectives of the ARC Global Closing event included:

- Offering safe space for both implementing partners and the MFA to discuss/cross-discuss emerging thematic trends⁴ and methodological approaches (harvesting and sharing resources included)⁵ which have proven to be effective (for scaling up purposes) or counter-effective during ARC implementation;

¹ The ARC program has been implemented between 2016 and 2021 by 21 consortia comprised of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local civil society organizations (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.

² The learning and exchange symposiums fell within the ARC global learning agenda/trajectory; and aimed to provide opportunity for practitioners to come together, network and connect with people working in this space, and share best practices, lessons learned, results, and evidence from across the broad spectrum of activities in peacebuilding programming.

³ Participants were MFA policy officers (DSH/DSO), implementing partners (HQ and field office representatives), KPSRL and CRU (researcher working with the MFA on its adaptive programming trajectory).

⁴ Under the following ARC results areas: 1. improved human security, 2. a functioning rule of law, 3. inclusive political processes and legitimate governments and 5. equal access to employment opportunities and basic services.

⁵ It was proposed to study the possibility of compiling (on teams or dropbox for example) the various resources produced within the framework of ARC so that the various partners can have access to them.

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- Discussing whether learning (and adaptation) have genuinely happened, with what results, and what enabled/ disabled it within the ARC program;
- Discussing the nature of the relationship and cooperation between partners on one side (consortia dynamics) and on the other side between DSH/MFA and partner organizations, and how this aspect has influenced learning (and adaptation);
- Distilling and unpacking lessons⁶ to be fed into current (and future) programs and portfolio learning trajectories.

Format

A hybrid format combining a "live" in-person event with a "virtual" online component was used to allow remote participation of in-country partners.

Day 1 was fully online and discussed ARC implementation approaches per specific results areas, and unpacked the nature of partnerships under ARC.

Day 2 was hybrid and delved into broader portfolio related aspects including: feedback loop and adaptation (adaptive programming), holistic support to peacebuilding (including where appropriate, support for livelihoods and public investments), ARC TOC level of ambition and exit strategy.

The following pages contain selected reflections from themes discussed over the 2 days.

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1. Learning from partnerships

The ARC programme was rather traditional in its partnership set up, contracting a Dutch or North NGO to lead consortia. The Dutch MFA and its programming partners have since embarked in a change process through new programmes such as Power of Voices or learning trajectories such as the community of practice on localisation. Despite being implemented within consortia made of INGOs and local partners, did ARC manage to leverage on the partnership/consortia model to learn from diverse expertise? Did it have a real localisation strategy? What gaps in equal partnerships that ARC highlighted remain unaddressed to this day? Are there enablers to scale up? And what could be the way forward? This is what this session meant to unpack.

In terms of format, the session used group reflections on partnerships mechanisms and dynamics, based on different scenarios⁷ followed by a plenary conversation on how partnerships could be improved and leveraged.

Overall, many of the points highlighted by the partners seem to be characteristic/typical and common to the different ARC consortia.

In terms of what worked and has strengthened partnerships, sustained interaction and communication as well as leveraging on respective expertise (and complementary skills) have been pointed as key aspects. Examples shared include: quarterly learning sessions, in-person meetings, a good communication, support from partners in connecting with local authorities, good dynamics with in-country partners, working on finding a common understanding/strategy and ensuring that feedback resonates into action.

Having a structured but flexible learning framework through which all partners can participate and contribute equally was also mentioned as a key enabler for smooth consortia dynamics and better learning. However, partners admitted that their intentions were from time to time, tested by the different organizational cultures at subtle hierarchical dynamics within consortia.

⁷ **Scenario 1.** You are a group of different organizations implementing programs in a consortia with a formal “learning partner” role. However, each consortium member has its own organizational learning structure and culture (with different systems and templates for data collection, analysis, and reporting.) How do you align your different approaches to strengthen your partnership and address potential inter-organizational barriers to learning and knowledge sharing?

Scenario 2. A recent MTR review of the program you are funding notes that learning is taking place, but stuck in individual consortia, not shared across the programme’s consortia, not with other programs in your portfolio (could be the program portfolio of an Embassy or the program portfolio of a central government department), and not captured in other ways that support broader learning for change at policy level. How do you adjust your collaboration with your partners to ensure effective joint learning for the remainder of the program? What new practices or approaches could you introduce that get learning and knowledge “unstuck” and used at different levels?

Scenario 3. You are the lead organization within an implementing consortium, and notice some hostile and competitive dynamics between partners within the said consortium. What do you do to avoid tensions and siloed work?

Scenario 4. Take the perspective of implementing partners (both INGOs and in-country partner) who you are working with the Ministry to co-create a learning trajectory for the program. The ambition is to go through a properly participatory design process, inclusive of the in-country partner, and seeing one of the local NGO/in-country partners taking the role of contractor, manager, and penholder for the learning trajectory in their country of implementation. Through which process would you build a common learning vision/narrative, find common values, and prepare for implementation? What might be some of the key points of the learning partnership?

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In terms of challenges (what didn't work and requiring to be addressed for future programming), heaviness of procedures, diversity of organizational cultures/identities, turnover issues as well as slow communication and lack of flexibility (in some cases) appeared to be the most stringent issues. Specific examples include: contracting related procedures, bureaucracy around reporting, conflicting organizational identities and working frameworks.

A couple of practical implications for both programming and policy emerged from the conversation:

- Revisiting the nature of partnerships do not mean shifting responsibility and risk from one party to another, but sharing risks and pooling resources and talents for better implementation;
- It is crucial to find a common ground/direction between the practices of lead organizations and the ones of other implementing partners as in some cases, there is a clash between the two: some implementing partners describe lead organizations practices as being characterized by rigidity and more oriented towards traditional MNE, thus hampering equitable partnerships and effective learning;
- Unpacking difficulties linked to translating "flexibility offered" by the Dutch MFA into formal agreements and the need to create a uniformed system beyond different identities/perspectives/working frameworks of partners;
- It is vital to see partnerships as an opportunity to leverage different expertise and to better learn. This requires however, more intentionality and proactiveness by defining clear mandates, dedicating enough resources and remaining alert to power dynamics;
- There is a need to create better coordination tools to ensure a timely and effective information sharing and learning within, and especially between consortia to better strategize;
- Having a shared vision and building trust within and between consortia remains key and quite tenuous. This brings into the scene subtle but quite important nuances related to subdivision of roles within consortia;
- A lot still needs to be done to ensure a better localized action. Partners note that this will require intentional harmonization of working frameworks, leveraging respective expertise, continued conversation on capacities and needs of different types of organizations;
- Equality issues and power dynamics can't be overlooked and equitable space to lead, shape and contribute to projects should be guaranteed in a more intentional and systematic way.

2. Adaptive programming

The working session on adaptive programming aimed to unpack practically what adaptive programming means and what are both programming and policy preconditions for successfully adapting. The session built from preliminary results of a learning trajectory initiated by the Dutch MFA, with the objective of consolidating the knowledge that is already available on adaptive programming and translate it into avenues for action (practices, incentives, management culture...).

The session served as a space to pitch and test preliminary research findings with partners and on the other side, offered the opportunity to partners to reflect on the findings and provide concrete recommendations to refine institutional practices in place.

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Introduction-MFA perspective

Julia Mc Call from Bureau International Cooperation (BIS) kicked off the session with a short introduction, recalling interest of the Dutch MFA in this exercise. She explained that at the level MFA/DSH but also at the embassy level, there is a lot of interest in the question, with the aim of going beyond the “talk” and diving deep into elements which could allow to walk the talk. She noted that as expressed by partners, adaptive programming is not new as a topic and has even become in some instances, a “buzzword”, hence the particular eagerness of the MFA to learn about practical obstacles to implement the concept; obstacles which can be observed at both administrative level (internal processes and portfolio management) and legal level (tenders formats and requirements).

While handing over to key discussants of the sessions, she emphasized that MFA was looking forward to hear more from partners and from an operational/practical perspective how to better translate adaptive programming aspirations.

CRU presentation on adaptive programming

Introducing key results of the research conducted as part of the trajectory, Mariska van Beijnum from CRU-Clingendael Institute, explained that despite the growing consensus on value of adaptive programming, a lot still needs to be done in order to strengthen the collective thinking on how to do adaptive programming. In that regard, the learning trajectory focused on unpacking obstacles in the MFA operational model that currently hinder adaptive programming, and identifying operational elements which could be adjusted to better enable adaptive programming.

Mariska emphasized that, though the trajectory focused on the role of MFA, it's the implementing partners who have to do the actual adaptive programming: Hence the crucial need to discuss how can MFA create enabling conditions.

The main structural and operational barriers identified by the research include:

- MFA programming is managed from and reported against policy-level thematic TOCs and results frameworks (setting overarching priorities), which is perceived to clash with the flexibility and exploration required to program adaptively at the country level;
- A perceived lack of monitoring capacity (quality and quantity), both within the MFA and implementing partners, to conduct the kind of monitoring required for adaptive programming (in terms of focus (political); consistency; uptake; etc.);
- Both the MFA and implementing partners experience pressure to spend requested budgets not to jeopardize chances for future funding, which does not match with adaptive programming which may require a full re-think of programming (and temporarily stop in spending);
- Procurement and tender frameworks pre-determine parameters for programming and partnership, which clashes with the flexibility and incremental, as well as co-creative approach required to program adaptively.

Overcoming these barriers requires in practice:

- Revisiting the nature of partnership and fostering strategic conversations with implementing partners rather than contract management;
- Working with flexible TOCs and results frameworks – with focus on outcome / impact level, rather than on output level

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- Working with context-relevant results indicators across thematic MFA priorities; mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators; process indicators
- Integrating learning and adaptation in the program – including in terms of budget:
- Be clear about resources / capacity required to work adaptively
- Creating institutional incentives for experimentation and learning (e.g., as performance indicators)

- Working with flexible budget design: (multi-annual budgets, budget categories against strategic outcomes instead of detailed budget lines against activities, fixed % of the budget not allocated upfront)

- Adjusting contract management parameters: include in annual report formats specific section challenges and desired adjustments; standard lump-sum payment per year (or on basis of liquidity prognosis), adjusted on basis of annual report; include local partners in contract, ensuring inclusive partnership across all levels; re-assess possibilities of risk-sharing between lead applicant / penholder and partners.

Oxfam Novib

In her introduction, Asma Kiran from Oxfam Novib flagged that the results of the research resonated with the adaptation journey of ARC Pakistan.

Given the political context, the pandemic and the nature of the project, Oxfam Novib and its partners had to adapt constantly. MFA support was unstinting, but, as explained by Asma, what was missing was the institutionalization of adaptive programming in both development proposal but also in the contract. Adapting was possible but the path and steps to do so was less clear as the flexibility offered and practical guidance was not initially build in the proposal and in the contract.

Along the same lines, the program encountered contextual challenges linked to the shrinking civic space in Pakistan. The Dutch MFA via the Dutch embassy to Islamabad, was very active in discussing with the government. However, this was done on an ad hoc basis and not in a formal way. Formalizing ministry(diplomatic) engagement and support would have been much more efficient.

The initial program design was confronted to continuous adjustment during implementation given the context – with consequences for program objectives, planning and budget allocations. In-country teams and and partners struggled with technical implications of budget adjustments. This is to highlight that adaptive programming require specific resources and capacities which needs to be clarified from the onset.

The importance of adapting in a conflict sensitive way was also emphasized: In the case of ARC Pakistan, various tools and approaches of conflict analysis were very useful. Conflict sensitive and a gender transformative approaches were integral part of both design and implementation and two political economy analysis during the 5 years if implementation. Safe programming guidelines were also implemented to ensure alignment to the Do No Harm principles. All this requires however building staff capacity, conducting risk assessments, developing mitigation measures developed, while ensuring community participation.

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Red een Kind

Geert De Jonge, Manager Expertise and Development at Red een kind, discussed extensively the role of power dynamics and organizational culture.

Building from Red een Kind's experience as a consortium leader in Burundi, he argued that the consortium model encourages unequal power dynamics and by default creates hierarchies among implementing partners. Consortia structure inherently gives power to penholders who are the remains the primary counterparts of the donor. Multiple layers are found within consortia of implementation:

- Steering committee, made typically solely by INGOs
- County Coordination teams combining INGOs representatives and some in-country partners
- In-country partners/local CSOs

Between all these layers reside strong power dynamics exacerbated by organizational cultures, organizational size, budget allocations, risks bearing level and intercultural aspects.

Beyond technical requirements, enabling and fostering adaptive programming takes an intentional analysis and introspection of organizational barriers, a sensitivity to intercultural aspects which may hinder the nature of partnerships, building flexibility and inclusion into consortia functioning.

Cultural change is required at both programming and policy level: INGOs and Dutch MFA need to intentionally and continuously question assumptions and be open to critical analysis of what is working or not working in a particular context and why.

Geert emphasized the importance of developing new ways of assessing consortia beyond technical expertise, by giving more prominence to organization capacity to foster inclusive and equitable partnerships as these are key to adaptive programming. Beyond discourse, this requires to practically translate ideals of adaptive programming into organizational cultures and program penholders intentions and capacity to do so should be assessed.

A couple of programming and policy related questions emerged from the conversation:

- Could a minimum overall guideline on how, when and in what contexts adaptive programming can be possible?
- How can Adaptive Programming be better institutionalized/ built into projects, to not become an extra effort?
- Beyond technical yardsticks, how could organizations be assessed against their organizational culture in terms of eagerness to learn, adapt and build equitable partnerships.
- How could a more supportive and formal leadership role for the MFA be part of the program contracts?

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3. Holistic approach to peacebuilding

One of the learning points emerging from ARC is the need for a holistic support to peacebuilding, including, where appropriate, mental health and psychological support as well as support for livelihoods and public investments. However, DSH's policy funding structure at this moment does not know such a holistic approach, which leads to the limitation of DSH funds to be used for non SRoL goals, strictly speaking. Building from ARC experience, the session discussed how both donor (MoFA) and implementing NGOs could overcome the development, humanitarian, and peace building silo's and ensuring a solid strategy overarching different departments can be reached.

In terms of format, the session was a panel composed of representatives of 3 organizations, having adopted, as part of ARC, a holistic approach to their peacebuilding and social cohesion activities namely ZOA, Care Nederland and Red een Kind.

All the 3 speakers pitched how using a more holistic approach to peacebuilding, one that addresses various dimensions simultaneously, brought an added value to the program as a whole.

ZOA

In DRC, the ARC program led by ZOA aimed to contribute to stabilization in the intervention zone through reinforcement of resilient communities, empowered civil society and good governance as well as equitable access to sustainable livelihoods.

Timothée Rukundo, ZOA DRC Country Director described how the multi-pronged approach combining access to land, conflict resolution and a livelihood component functioned: different consortium partners focused respectively on economic activities for young people, on strengthening local authority leadership capacity and agricultural activities and land rights. All these different strands contributed to stabilization and community resilience:

- Social Dialogue around access to land allowed the communities to have areas for agriculture activities.
- Conflicts resolution dimension increased the social cohesion and peaceful cohabitation.
- Community structures proved to be a sustainable way to ground peacebuilding activities within communities.
- The livelihood component contributed to the resilience of communities, increased production and young people have income and were not tempted to join armed groups.

Care Nederland

Recognizing similarity of Care Nederland experience with the ZOA one, Cornelia Winter De Platz from Care Nederland explained how participation in Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) influenced social cohesion in South Sudan. *VSLAs are self-managed savings groups of individual members from within a community who regularly meet to save their money in a safe space and access small loans.*

- In most cases, participating in a VSLA led to higher self-awareness, confidence and a clear (new-found) identity as entrepreneur or leader;
- VSLAs also minimized the drivers for conflict by improving economic status. As a result of their improved economic status gained through the VSLA, members were in most cases, less inclined to engage in conflict;

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- Marginalized groups such as women and young men especially see their role in the community changing as their economic empowerment grows, leading to a better-defined, more positive identity in the community and more harmonious relationships with those around them.

She recognized however, that experience has shown that VSLAs alone cannot lead to increased social cohesion amongst the community. They must be combined with other interventions and operate in a relatively stable environment. When very severe crisis like climate related ones hit the entire community, then community members still require supplemental supports beyond what VSLAs can offer. Other complementary factors that need to be in place include: incorporating peacebuilding trainings, identifying shared income-generating activities (IGAs) with which to engage, finding safe spaces for interaction, and having complementary activities with other community groups.

Red een Kind/Help a Child

The Building Bridges in Burundi (BBB) program led by Help a Child Burundi, was developed to mitigate the root causes of conflict and instability in Burundi. It provided holistic support to enhance access to justice, primarily in Burundi's informal justice system, which remains the primary provider of justice for Burundians. The target demographic has been youth from diverse social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

The program activities included: organizing Self-Help Groups with youth from different ethnic and social backgrounds to strengthen social cohesion; community-based awareness sessions on themes of conflict management/resolution, transitional justice, psychosocial care, gender-based violence, and the rule of law; and learning events to exchange experiences between community members and other justice stakeholders, at the community and the national level. BBB has also established community structures and resources including informal justice mechanisms, community-based transitional justice mechanisms, participatory research and evidence-based, multi-level advocacy. Through trauma healing and psychosocial care, communities and authorities were introduced to PTSD symptoms, raising awareness of the need to address this form of invisible trauma.

Michelle Kaneza from Help a Child Burundi, explains how the project came at a time of extreme polarization but also economic distress among the youth in Burundi, given the political crisis which was ongoing; and how the self help groups created provided a sense of identity to marginalized young people.

- Youth lives were transformed by the fact that they were provided via the self help groups with means to become responsible and resilient citizens; which increased their self-confidence;
- Collaboration via the self help groups and other community structures improved social cohesion;
- Self-groups provided an entry point to discuss some sensitive matters like ethnic related grievances, transitional justice, trauma healing.

Recognizing that the self-help groups were beneficial at both individual and community level, Michelle flagged however, that when aiming to be holistic at peacebuilding work, there is no one size fits all solution. It is rather looking at the context, and see what are the specific needs at stake and the available room for movement, in order to shape activities accordingly.

A couple of practical implications for both programming and policy emerged from the conversation:

- In terms of programming, rebuilding livelihoods in conflict affected and post conflict settings is a critical component of peacebuilding and recovery. Where conflict-affected communities rely on natural resources for livelihood security, peacebuilding solutions must address the livelihood needs

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of poor and vulnerable populations to ensure the sustainable management of these resources in the context of future national development planning and encourage their equitable distribution;

- Re-establishing natural resource-based livelihoods following conflict can strengthen food security, provide employment, help reintegrate and empower vulnerable groups such as women and youth, and offer opportunities for cooperation between formerly warring groups;
- At the same time, there is no uniform approach that can work in every case. Theoretical approaches must be informed by best practices that are rooted in messy, complex local realities.
- From a policy perspective, the MFA recognize the broadness of peacebuilding as a field and the linkages withing different sub-component, hence the need to break the siloes and to be multidisciplinary. However, policies and departmental frameworks are not always conducive to such a holistic approach. While it might not be possible to immediately change back the policy at stake for the moment, a first step could be strengthening cooperation and dialogue between the different departments as they often talk a very different language.
- The MFA explained efforts made to integrate a mental health dimension to peacebuilding emphasizing that it is a long term effort. It encouraged partners to keep sharing best practices on holistic approaches to building from different donors, as it is keen to keep engaging on the topic.

4. ARC TOC ambition

In ARC, high level policy objectives and concepts have been matched by interventions that didn't generated contribution at the required scale. Instead, they did generate humbler positive contribution (mainly at the local level). The session on ARC TOC ambition discussed potential solutions to solve the dilemma between TOCs' ambitions and actual capacity to create relevant contribution at both local and national levels.

Using a world café methodology, participants used different scenarios to reflect on how to connect activist peacebuilding and institutional peace buildings for better results.

The following examples served as case studies. Response scenarios are also highlighted below:

Scenario 1. You are a policymaker at the Dutch MFA and one of the managers of the ARC programme. You are preparing to report to Parliament about the ARC results and discover that, according to an IOB evaluation, the programme generated contribution at local level, but not at higher levels which was one of the key objectives of the programme. How do you present this situation to Parliament and respond to potential critics? What plans do you make with your colleagues for:

- A. ARC's second phase, including ways to support your grantees to achieve better outcomes.
- B. A future programme successor to ARC: how would you structure such a programme differently to avoid that a similar situation happens again?

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Scenario 2. You are a manager at one of the programming partners of the Dutch MFA, in charge of implementing one of the ARC projects. You become aware that an IOB evaluation criticizes your project because it is not able to achieve positive contribution to conflicts at national level, which is one of the ARC objectives. At the same time, you are aware that your achieving good results at community level, where it is easier to work, and that the grant resources available to you and the connections you have with country partners do not make realistic a contribution at national level. How do you approach this problem, including:

- A. Making policymakers aware of this situation from your perspective.
- B. Introducing new programmatic approaches or country partners that might be better capable to leverage contribution at national level.
- C. Perhaps connecting with more “political” activists who might be able to achieve broader contribution.

The points below have been identified as having the potential to not only explain the situation on ground to policymakers but also leverage gains achieved at the local level:

- Use Political Economy Analysis to clearly portray how power and resources are distributed and contested in the specific context of implementation, and the implications for development outcomes;
- Leveraging connection with partners at different levels (community and institutional level) and creating whenever possible, linkages between the said levels;
- Communicate with donors in a clear and sustained manner;
- Admitting when relevant that a TOC was too ambitious and unrealistic and adjusting accordingly,
- Looking for linkages/entry points to enhance existing national policies rather than working on completely different streams;
- Realizing that the government level is (can be) different from national level and redefining what national contribution really means;
- Reflect together with all partners on specific levels at which traction can be get inside layers of government;
- Backing policy messages with strong evidence;
- Ensuring cooperation with policy formulation processes of partner countries.

Scenario 3. You are a researcher (or member of a research team or a practitioner or policymaker writing the TORs for a research assignment that you will contract out to researchers). You are aware that an IOB evaluation found that the ARC programme generated positive contribution on conflict dynamics at the local level of intra or inter-communal conflicts but no influence at higher levels of government and with conflicts that have a country-wide scale. You deduce that current theories and knowledge on how interventions can generate positive contribution on conflict dynamics at both local and national level are not reflecting actual practice, and because of this, they are not helping practitioners design and implement the right kind of interventions. For example, you see evidence gaps on how to leverage local approaches to peace building to achieve national level change, nor whether this is possible at all, and in any case how to bridge the complexity of these processes.

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What learning projects would you design to fill the knowledge gaps and generate the learning relevant for practitioners and policymakers? Your reflections might include:

The points below have been identified as having the potential to create the right environment for joint learning:

- Commission research assignment for a third party to generate new data, systematically review already available evidence and theories and use results to prompt a learning trajectory;
- Check past TOC and studies and develop the right TOC at the right level of ambition
- Initiate a dialogue between practitioners and policymakers, and action research done directly by key stakeholders;
- Provide resources for international and local partners, knowledge partners, communities of practice, portfolio managers and relevant embassies to discuss and agree on the most appropriate learning processes to into programmes.
- Leverage think tank or other learning facility in-country to better shape the right interventions
- Understand that based on the context, you may need to work(first) at different scale
- Shape(refine) collaborative methodologies to ensure co-design and co-implementation as much as possible
- Be cautious with political ambitions which often translated into overambitious programs aiming to do too many things;

Scenario 4. You are a national-level politician in one of the ARC partner countries, one of the most important politicians in your political party and the holder of an office in Government (or Parliament). You become aware that the Netherlands has the ambition to fund a peacebuilding programme in your country that could also contribute positively at national scale to the major conflicts ongoing in the country. These conflicts include elite competition for positions of power, wealth, and influence, which mobilise supporters according to ethnic and / or religious lines. It also involves a violent rebel movement with an Islamist ideology. You are part of this conflict. You hear that the programme has achieved some positive contribution with communities in some areas of the country. How do you react to the invitation to engage with the programme? How should the peacebuilding programme look like to be interesting to you?

The following characteristics have been identified as having the potential to garner politician's interest:

The peacebuilding program should:

- Be clear, well connected but realistic peacebuilding ambition at both local level and national level;
- Be aware of(and display) potential such as opening pandora boxes but offering potential solutions to mitigate the said risks;
- Have a solid narrative and plan on how the program intends to tackle key issues
- Be attractive, acceptable to many(if not all) parties to the conflict;
- Clearly present dividends linked to a more stable/peaceful country.

Building such a program would require:

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- Having a clear understanding of factors at stake (power, wealth, influence...)
- Identifying what are the real interests of the politician and entry points to get his attention;
- Identify who has the ear of the politician: traditional/religious leaders and others;
- Check his power base and his allies at both local, national and international level;
- Find allies/connectors
- Use a convincing narratives/incentives such as better visibility as a potential gain connected to engaging with the program.

5. Exit strategies

In this session, The Dutch MFA and ARC partners reflected on their experience shaping and implementing exit strategies and related implications. Within the framework of this conversation, a program Exit Strategy was understood as a plan describing how the program intends to withdraw its resources while ensuring that achievement of the program goals is not jeopardized and that progress towards these goals will continue. The question of exit strategies was an important one in the context of ARC, given the fact that The Dutch MFA didn't plan a direct follow up in the form of phase 2.

Guiding questions for the session included:

- Exit strategies and duration of programs: what can really be achieved within short timeframes (funding cycles)?
- Which sustainability aspects are critical to consider for good exit planning? (and how to plan effectively for exit from the earliest stages of program design)
- Linkages with localization efforts: are (well-thought) exist strategies carrying potential for a positive long-term transformation and local resilience?
- How can exist strategies and processes help to rethink partnerships (and vice versa how the latter can facilitate successful exit)

The conversation featured a representative of the Dutch embassy in Kigali and two ARC partners, namely Care Nederland and Saferworld.

Dutch embassy to Kigali

From a policy perspective, Marloes van Fulpen, first secretary at the embassy, discussed the process of phasing out the entire development aid program in Rwanda. The political decision to change the relationship between Rwanda and Netherlands from an aid oriented to a trade oriented one intervened at a stage when the Rwandan government was also trying to shift to less aid dependent relationships with external/bilateral partners. This was however, technically speaking, an abrupt decision and both the embassy but also SROL partners had to adjust accordingly in the embassy multi-annual country strategy which was being developed by then (2018).

Phasing out development aid resources meant less fund for SROL activities and more on food security, water and agriculture. This also meant less possibility to use delegated budget for SROL but some possibility to go via the centralized budget with the caveat that this is generally channeled via UN and other big INGOS, thus hampering cooperation with CSOs and localization related efforts.

Embassy strategy was a *handover strategy*, aiming also to ensure sustainability of achievements realized during the last two decades of SROL (in particular justice sector) support was to

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- On one hand, work to ensure the ownership of the said achievement by both CSOs but also justice institutions like the Ministry of Justice which were both heavily dependent on foreign aid and in particular Dutch funding;
- On the other side, find another donors willing to take up the work.

Marloes explained that in the end the embassy managed to secure new relations between its initial partners with new donors like the European Union but admits that they were lucky as there was no guarantee that the said donors would buy into this.

She recognized that in 4 years it is very difficult to implement an exit strategy and that the decision puts a lot of pressure on CSOs that needed to find new donors.

Key enablers were continued engagement with both CSOs and justice institutions to ensure that the latter can embed achievement in their structures and frameworks; as well as sustained dialogue with other donors to make sure some other alternatives can be provided to partners (engagement, openness and frankness do play a key part in the whole process).

Care Nederland

Reflecting on ARC experience in South Sudan, Merlijn van Wass, Head of Sustainable Development at Care Nederland flagged how volatile the South Sudanese context was (at the time of implementation), and recognized that there are limits to what can be accomplished by INGOs within such a context and within a (relatively) short period of time.

Care Nederland and its partners managed to reach concrete gains especially at the community level with both CSOs and local authorities. Solid community structures were established and strengthened via both peacebuilding but also economic activities which contributed to a shift in terms of mindset (sense of identity as well as social cohesion).

These gains were severely put to test a couple of times throughout ARC life due to external factors on which the organization didn't have any influence: political crisis (2016), heavy floods (2027), the COVID pandemic (2020). All this, coupled with the volatility and the instability described above means that for the success of an exit strategy requires:

- A good scenario planning (worst cases scenarios included) of what the program would likely have to respond to;
- Building Community ownership by strengthening capacity but also early and ongoing involvement of the said community in decision-making (jointly shape the most appropriate activities based on the context)
- Ongoing dialogue with local authority. In the case of South Sudan, Merlijn mentioned that to ensure commitment, formal MOUs were signed.
- Being honest and realistic about one's role as an INGO (in particularly complex settings), communicate about this at the start of the project and evolve in an advisory role as much as possible (ensuring that activities are community/local structures driven)
- MEAL frameworks play a huge role in this context given the need to assess constantly what the evolution of context both social-politically but also economically means for the initially planned exit strategy.

Saferworld

ARC Global Closing Event
December 7th and 8th, 2022
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Ali Hersi, Saferworld Somalia and Somaliland country director, shared key reflections from Saferworld experience implementing ARC in Somalia.

He pointed first on the fact that having a 5 years program was a huge chance to build the necessary trust with different stakeholders: community but also authorities. This allowed to gradually build a relationship with the involved stakeholders (seeking the right partnerships) and jointly shape context appropriate activities and identify intervention areas.

Building trust was key in the context of Somalia given the collapse of institutions and the huge divide between the said institutions and communities.

Ali emphasized that most of the times success of exit strategy and sustainability means for development aid actors having the same activities continued/carried in the same manner by a different entity. In his opinion, this is not necessarily true. ARC experience in Somalia has shown that sustainability can also mean recognition of community structures and uptake of new/tested models of working by specific institutions leading to better collaboration between the said entities. Which is a concrete sign of community structures evolving and getting more and more embedded in the local security and justice apparatus (broadly speaking).

He also insisted on the fact that even when activities are not carried further under the same format, end of project doesn't mean close out of relationships of different partners (especially donors and grantees), citing positive examples of cases where former partners continued to share feedback on post-programming activities and/or better collaboration with police and other justice institutions.

Uptake of community security models/approaches by police and local institutions was in the case of ARC Somalia, an indicator of a different but valuable way of fostering sustainability.

A couple of programming and policy implications emerged from the pitches but also from the Q&A held just after:

Exit Strategies can protect and improve a community's resilience and can help to empower beneficiaries with assets and leadership. When planned and implemented correctly, can be a springboard for improved sustainable development. However, there are preconditions:

- It is crucial to define clearly the rationale of exit and plan accordingly: The purpose of an exit strategy is not to hasten the exit as the latter is not valuable for its own sake, but to improve the chance of sustainable outcomes for the program;
- Context matters: sometimes, it might be useful to plan gradually, starting by a phasing down instead of a complete phase out;
- Exit strategy shouldn't be considered as a handover strategy⁸ but rather as a inclusive process aiming at identifying from the onset. Some alternatives of new formats/funding under specific activities can be undertaken (this might mean having them embedded into new institutions);
- Funding cycles don't always coincide with needs at stake. Donor support and funding cycles should avoid imposing artificial timelines on program phase-out which put a lot of pressure on local partners; It is useful to reflect on how harmful some political phase out might be for ongoing partnerships and localization efforts;

⁸ Exit strategy and sustainability means for development aid actors having the same activities continued/carried in the same manner by a different entity

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- It is very important to be realistic(and communicate clearly on that) in terms of specific levels at which sustainable results are promised promising results?
- Ongoing engagement with partners(both CSOs but also governmental institutions and where relevant other donors) on key questions around sustainability and alternative ways of working is crucial;
- ARC partners suggested to dig deeper into the sustainability question via post- impact evaluation for instance 2 years at the end of the project and ensure feedback is incorporated in new programming(reframing exit strategies and researching innovative ways of exiting);
- ARC partners also flagged the importance of institutional memory for sustainability. The knowledge platform was specifically called to support on this angle via the creation of a repository for instance.