IOB Evaluation

Inconvenient Realities

An evaluation of Dutch contributions to stability, security
and rule of law in fragile and conflict-affected contexts

August 2023

Executive summary

In 2022, a quarter of the world's population, and three-quarters of all people living in extreme poverty globally, lived in fragile contexts.[1]

This evaluation assesses the combined Dutch efforts to promote stability in fragile contexts and break the vicious cycle between (ethnic) tensions, armed conflict, instability and weak governance. It focuses on the period 2015-2022, and includes all Dutch foreign instruments, including diplomatic efforts, development cooperation and military interventions.

The policies that guide these interventions are rooted in concepts that have existed since the early 2000s. What is striking about the policy reconstruction is the consistency of the key objectives, guiding principles and approaches throughout this period. The central problem analysis underlying Dutch foreign policy and development cooperation has been that fragile and conflict-affected contexts are both a burden for the people living in these contexts and a possible security threat for Europe and the Netherlands. It is these insecure countries in particular that are having the greatest difficulty achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Promoting stability, security and rule of law in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is therefore one of the priorities of Dutch foreign policy. Over the years, development cooperation has increasingly targeted fragile countries, with expenditures on stability, security and rule of law totalling EUR 2.7 billion for the period 2015-2021.[2] Through its interventions, the Netherlands aims to contribute to 'legitimate stability' and an improved 'social contract' in fragile contexts, thereby addressing the root causes of violent conflict, terrorism, irregular migration and poverty.

The main question this evaluation aims to answer is:

To what extent has the Netherlands contributed to stability, security and rule of law in fragile contexts, and what lessons can be learned for future policy formulation and implementation?

The evaluation draws on three case studies: Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan. In these countries, the Netherlands has had a substantial and long-term political engagement focused on promoting stability; allocated a large share of its development budget to stability, security and rule of law; and conducted military engagements. In Mali and South Sudan, extensive field research was conducted. Afghanistan was studied from a distance. The research draws on a theory-based evaluation methodology and explores the contribution of the interventions to (observed) results by verifying important assumptions and taking other influencing factors into account accordingly. To complement the analysis of project documents, interviews and data collected in-country, this evaluation took into account the academic and evaluative literature. Furthermore, IOB commissioned a systematic review of all evaluative literature on development and stabilisation interventions in South Sudan and Mali, replicating the systematic review for Afghanistan.

Based on the evaluation, IOB has drawn the following conclusions:

Conclusion 1: The Netherlands has contributed to some positive results at the local level and in technical sectors, but the evidence is mixed, and these results did not break the vicious cycles of violence and instability in Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan.

The key assumption that shaped Dutch policy was that enhancing 'legitimate stability' and improving the 'social contract' in a country would help reduce its level of fragility. In the three case studies, the combined efforts of the Netherlands and the international community did not lead to country-wide improvements in 'legitimate stability' or in the 'social contract between governments and their citizens'. Consequently, it was not possible to link enhanced stability and a better social contract to the broader objective of reducing fragility.

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[1]   OECD, States of Fragility 2022, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2022.

[2]   This is the total figure for budget articles BHOS 4.3 and BZ 2.4, including country-unallocated funds. The figure excludes expenditure allocated to activities related to migration ('reception in the region' or development approaches to forced displacement).

Although the overall context remained highly fragile and insecure, it was possible to achieve positive results on social cohesion, livelihoods and resilience at the local level. It can be argued that these results helped to prevent further deterioration of the context, locally and in the short term. However, the assumption that local improvements in social cohesion could 'trickle up' and help break cycles of conflict and violence at the inter-ethnic communal, regional or national levels did not hold. At the same time, efforts to build the capacity of government institutions and security actors were often unsuccessful. Therefore, the assumption that legitimate stability would 'trickle down' to improved stability at the local level did not hold. Autocratic leadership and ongoing power struggles between elites provided a context in which there was little or no political will to embrace reforms that could lead to greater accountability, more robust formal institutions and democratic procedures. And the escalation of conflict had a strong detrimental effect on many of the positive results that were achieved, undermining their sustainability.

Conclusion 2: There are limitations to the malleability of society in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and there is a gap between the policy ambitions and the sphere of influence of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the political level in The Hague, there has been a tendency to create a positive narrative and formulate priorities that fit the Dutch political context. This contributed to a discrepancy between the ambitious policy objectives on paper and the limited sphere of influence of Dutch policies and programmes in practice. The high-level policy objectives from The Hague were not effectively translated and operationalised at the country and programme levels. Assumptions about the malleability of society in fragile and conflict-affected settings were crucial to achieving the policy objectives, but they were inherently beyond the Ministry's sphere of influence.

Engaging directly with authorities in fragile and conflict-affected settings was a challenge for the Dutch government, as the Netherlands avoids supporting or engaging with regimes responsible for violence or gross human rights violations. However, supporting governance processes requires continuous and long-term support to the authorities in these countries. Moreover, the cases of Afghanistan and South Sudan have shown that creating and supporting parallel structures may yield short and medium-term results, but that this approach undermined longer-term sustainability and had negative effects on the wider political economy of the conflict.

Conclusion 3: Internal political and institutional barriers have hindered the ministry from working in an integrated fashion and effectively adapting its programmes and policies to changing contexts.

An important assumption underlying Dutch policy is that different foreign policy instruments can complement and reinforce each other. However, ambitions to connect interventions in different sectors, under the auspices of an 'integrated 3D approach' or 'triple nexus', have not materialised in practice.

The evaluation found that Dutch programming was largely driven by priorities set in The Hague, rather by context and local needs assessments, and that local ownership was limited in practice. The disconnect between the ambitious policy objectives set in The Hague and the ever-changing and volatile reality on the ground often remained unaddressed. In part, this is the result of political and institutional barriers within the MFA that have impeded the flow of information from the local implementation level in each country to the headquarters and political level in The Hague:
1. Limited institutional memory as a result of staff rotations.
2. Limited attention for programme management. More focus is placed on formulating new policies, which affects the ability of the MFA to process information and respond to new developments.
3. Limited access to reliable information. With limited capacity to monitor programmes and hindered by security issues, the MFA relies on information provided by implementing organisations. Competition for funding can lead implementing organisations to inflate reported results, and implementing organisations may not always have access to the local level to verify their results.
4. Risk aversion of the ministry in the Netherlands. Although new policy documents stress the need to be open about risks, the anticipation of negative media coverage or critical questions in parliament impeded an open flow of information about the context and progress of the implemented programmes.

Conclusion 4: There is insufficient attention for conflict sensitivity and the risk of doing harm in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

Although conflict sensitivity was generally discussed during the inception phase of a programme, it was rarely monitored or evaluated during or after implementation. Furthermore, the wider presence of international organisations and donors, and their role in and impact on the political economy of a conflict, was seldom considered. And when it was discussed, it rarely led to changes in policy and implementation.

In light of these conclusions, IOB recommends the following:

Main recommendation 1: Reassess the objectives and strategies of Dutch interventions in diplomacy, development and defence in highly fragile contexts.

In recent years, the number of fragile and conflict-affected countries has increased, and the share of the world's population living in fragile places is expected to grow. Given that particularly fragile and conflict-affected countries are lagging far behind in achieving the SDGs, the Dutch commitment to the SDGs worldwide could warrant continued investment in these contexts. However, the findings presented in this evaluation suggest that there is a need to rethink and reconceptualise interventions in fragile contexts. It is important to have realistic expectations about the potential role of the international community and the Netherlands, especially given the complexity and structural patterns of fragility and violence in these contexts. At the same time, there is a need to improve the way in which the Netherlands operationalises and implements its policy on stability in fragile contexts.

IOB considers this main recommendation to be pivotal, as improved implementation alone is unlikely to lead to the achievement of current policy objectives in fragile contexts. In addition to this main recommendation, the six recommendations below aim to provide concrete strategies to guide this reassessment:

Recommendation 2: Address the disconnect between the limited sphere of influence of Dutch foreign policy and the formulation of highly ambitious policy objectives.

The MFA should translate long-term objectives at the impact level ('the points on the horizon') into country-specific, more concrete and realistic objectives closer to the ministry's sphere of influence, at the intermediate outcome level. Programmes should be assessed on their added value and whether objectives, time frames and financial means are realistic given the specific context. Programmes should also use longer time frames for programming, at least 8-10 years, but with sufficient flexibility to adapt programming to changing dynamics. Finally, it is crucial that the MFA policy staff and political leaders become more open about the dilemmas of engagement in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. For example, dilemmas regarding the coherence between human rights objectives, development objectives and political objectives.

Recommendation 3: Prioritise context specificity and local ownership.

The complex and multidimensional nature of conflict and fragility implies that programmes and policies should be as context-specific as possible. The fact that foreign interventions may at best contribute to local processes to improve stability and development calls for the genuine inclusion of local actors and local ownership. The MFA and implementing partners should ensure that policy priorities, objectives and programmes are demand-driven and based on the national context and local needs. This also implies rethinking the thematic funding structure within the MFA in favour of country-specific interventions for fragile contexts. More decision-making power, budgets and capacity should be delegated to embassies, supported by strengthened country teams in The Hague, to better tailor interventions to local contexts. Furthermore, the MFA and implementing partners should develop mechanisms for downward accountability to better reflect local perspectives and operationalise the MFA's ambition to promote localisation. At the same time, the MFA should articulate how to deal with possible tensions between promoting the norms and values underlying Dutch interventions on the one hand, and the ambition to promote localisation on the other.

Recommendation 4: Adopt a pragmatic approach to engaging in fragile contexts

Human rights and democratic values are key principles underlying Dutch interventions in fragile contexts. However, the ability of interventions to effectively address these issues is relatively limited. The MFA should therefore be careful in drawing red lines for engaging with governments. Given the importance

of peace and stability at the national level, it is important that the MFA maintains diplomatic ties and continues to engage in policy dialogue and support peace processes. This also means that the MFA and political leaders should accept the inherent risks of operating in fragile contexts. The MFA should engage in evidence-based policy dialogue with national actors, and use insights gained from development projects to inform diplomatic efforts in pursuit of its political objectives. At the same time, the MFA should remain realistic about what can be achieved and, in the event of a political decision to disengage from national government actors, the MFA should reassess its policy objectives accordingly.

Recommendation 5: Improve the MFA's capacity for organisational learning and adaptive programming.

Intervening in fragile and conflict-affected contexts requires a willingness and ability to constantly learn and adapt to changing conditions. While adaptive programming is identified as a key operational tool in the 2022 policy note on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, this evaluation finds that the MFA's capacity for adaptive programming to lag behind. The MFA should invest in staff expertise and capacity, give greater priority to programme management, and continue to integrate monitoring, evaluation and learning into the general workflow. The MFA should also promote a culture of transparency and learning. This requires creating a working environment where policymakers and political leaders can be more open about dilemmas, risk taking, mistakes, shortcomings and a lack of progress, as well as incentivising transparency and learning in reports from implementing partners. Furthermore, the MFA should invest more in scenario exercises to plan ahead of time for possible scenarios and enable more coherent decision-making.

Recommendation 6: Improve the coherence of Dutch foreign policy

The evaluation found that the government's ambitions to coordinate the various elements of its foreign policy interventions with each other lag behind in practice. The Dutch government should be more explicit about the objectives and operationalisation of the integrated approach and invest more in joint problem analysis to ensure the coherence of foreign interventions by different ministries. When national peace processes are critical to achieving political objectives, the MFA must allocate sufficient political attention, diplomatic staff and resources to support these processes. In addition, political engagements should be more systematically institutionalised within the MFA to ensure greater consistency between successive ambassadors. The MFA and implementing partners must make a greater effort to operationalise the 'triple nexus' between development, peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance. For both the integrated approach and the triple nexus, the MFA should strengthen its efforts to promote coherence and coordination with the wider international community.

Recommendation 7: Take conflict sensitivity much more seriously

The evaluation found that there was insufficient attention for conflict sensitivity. To address this, the MFA and implementing partners should actively (and independently) monitor conflict sensitivity and the risk of doing harm during the implementation of programmes and policies. Where necessary, policies, programmes and projects should be adjusted to avoid harm. International donors and implementing partners should reflect on the impact of the presence of international organisations and donors on the political economy of a conflict, and proactively identify ways to mitigate the negative effects. Furthermore, the perspective of targeted or affected communities should be included in determining where the conflict sensitivity risks outweigh the expected benefits.

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1 Introduction

In 2022, a quarter of the world's population, and three-quarters of all people living in extreme poverty globally, lived in fragile contexts.[1] It is these insecure countries in particular that are having the greatest difficulty achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Promoting stability, security and rule of law is therefore one of the priorities of Dutch foreign policy. In the 2022 policy note, the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation indicated that the MFA would continue its development cooperation in fragile contexts.[2] By investing in fragile contexts, the Netherlands aims to contribute to Sustainable Development Goal 16 'Peace, justice and strong institutions'. An implicit assumption of Dutch policy is that stability is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Creating stability would therefore effectively address the root causes of poverty, irregular migration and violent extremism. According to the Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy (GBVS) for the period 2018-2022 and the Security Strategy for the period 2023-2029, these efforts thus contribute to the security of the Netherlands.[3]

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[1] OECD, States of Fragility 2022, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2022.
[2] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is', kst-36180-1, 24 April 2022, p. 36.
[3] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wereldwijd voor een veilig Nederland' - Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022', kst-33694-12, 19 March 2018, pp. 23-4; Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid en Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Veiligheidsstrategie voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden', kst-2023D13646, 3 April 2023.

This IOB evaluation assesses the effectiveness of Dutch-supported interventions to promote stability in fragile and conflict-affected contexts between 2015 and 2022.[4] The main question this evaluation aims to answer is:

To what extent has the Netherlands contributed to stability, security and rule of law in fragile contexts, and what lessons can be learned for future policy formulation and implementation? [5]

Unlike a recent IOB evaluation, which focused on three specific programmes on this theme,[6] this evaluation takes a broad perspective on promoting stability and takes the context as point of departure. The evaluation assesses the combined contributions of the broad range of instruments used by the Netherlands to promote stability, security and rule of law in three country case studies: Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan.[7] This means that the evaluation takes a wide range of instruments into account, including diplomatic efforts, projects and programmes, funded both by embassies and directly from The Hague, as well as the coherence with Dutch military and police support. This provides an opportunity to take into account possible synergies between these instruments and the implementation of the integrated approach[8].

This introductory chapter defines stabilisation in section 1.1, which explains that this evaluation assesses the wide range of Dutch efforts to promote stability in fragile contexts. Subsequently, section 1.2 explains how the three case studies were selected. Section 1.3 presents the methodology, while section 1.4 discusses some of this evaluation's limitations, including remarks about external validity.

1.1   Defining stabilisation and the scope of this evaluation

There is no clear definition of what constitutes stabilisation or efforts to promote stability, and donors include a wide range of activities under the term.[9] For the purposes of this evaluation, promoting stability in fragile contexts is defined as external interventions aimed at breaking the vicious cycle between (ethnic) tensions, armed conflict, instability and weak governance. This includes all Dutch foreign policy instruments, including diplomatic efforts, development cooperation and military interventions that aim to contribute to legitimate stability and an improved social contract in fragile contexts, thereby addressing the perceived root causes of violent conflict, terrorism, irregular migration and poverty. IOB has focused on the Dutch-supported interventions in the themes presented in figure 1 below. These themes correspond with the activities that the Netherlands has used to promote stability and security in fragile states, as identified in the policy reconstruction in section 2.4.[10]

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4   The Terms of Reference indicated a time frame of 2015-2020, but due to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been updated to link to current policy. See the Terms of Reference for a more detailed description of the scope of the report.

5   An overview of the questions set out in the Terms of Reference for this evaluation, and how these questions are answered, can be found in chapter 3 of the background report.

6   IOB, *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*, The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2019.

7   Throughout this document, 'interventions' refer to the wide range of diplomatic initiatives, activities, projects and programmes. In the context of this evaluation, diplomatic interventions are concrete initiatives with tangible interventions where the Netherlands tries to influence policy on one or more institutional levels: the EU level, the multilateral level or the bilateral level.
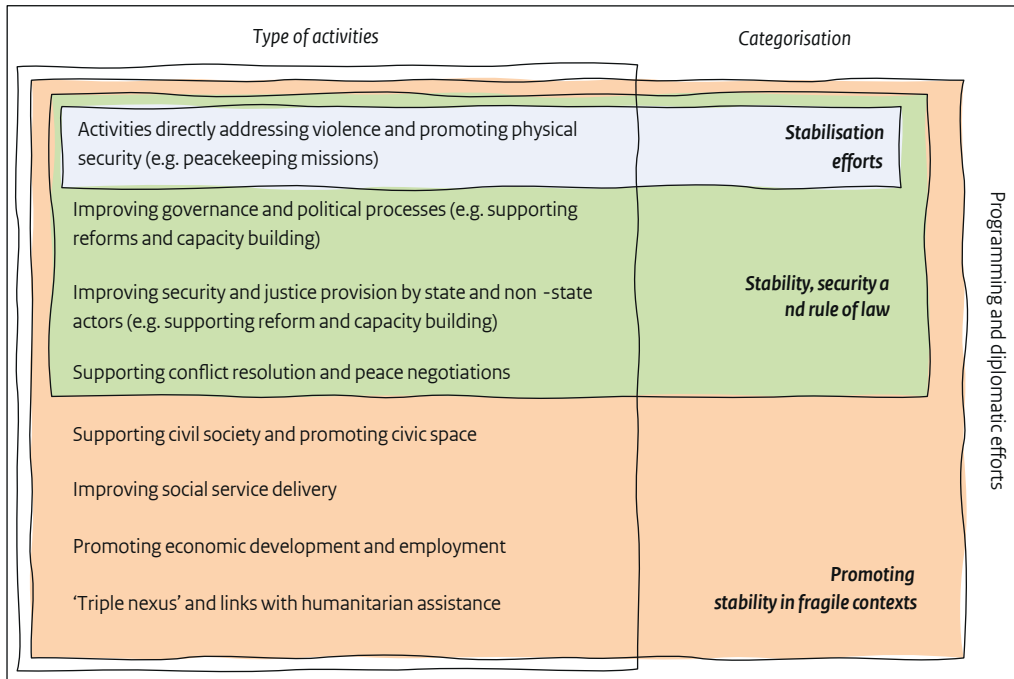
8   The integrated approach is defined as a whole-of-government approach, involving a combination of instruments (diplomacy, defence, development cooperation and foreign trade, justice and police) and relevant actors (Ministries of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Defence, Justice and Security, etc.) to promote security and stability in fragile states and conflict areas. See also the policy reconstruction in section 2.3.

9   C. Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States.* A synthesis of three systematic reviews of aid to Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan, 2008–2021, The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2022.

10 See background report for a more detailed description.

Figure 1 *Scope of the evaluation*

Type of activities	Categorisation
Activities directly addressing violence and promoting physical security (e.g. peacekeeping missions)	*Stabilisation efforts*
Improving governance and political processes (e.g. supporting reforms and capacity building)	*Stability, security and rule of law*
Improving security and justice provision by state and non -state actors (e.g. supporting reform and capacity building)	
Supporting conflict resolution and peace negotiations	
Supporting civil society and promoting civic space	*Promoting stability in fragile contexts*
Improving social service delivery	
Promoting economic development and employment	
'Triple nexus' and links with humanitarian assistance	

*Programming and diplomatic efforts*

As explained in more detail in section 2.1, the causes and characteristics of fragility and conflict are multidimensional. This evaluation takes a broad view and assesses the broader Dutch efforts to promote stability in fragile contexts (the orange area in figure 1). We distinguish these longer-term efforts to contribute to stability from more short-term stabilisation efforts. *Stabilisation efforts* aim to directly address violence and ensure a basic level of physical security, for example through ceasefire negotiations, peacekeeping missions, crisis management operations and/or demining (the blue area in figure 1). When effective, stabilisation efforts create an environment of sufficient security for other interventions to promote development, security and governance, thereby contributing to more sustainable stability.

Within the selected case studies (see section 1.2), we also focus on the broader scope of Dutch development cooperation (the orange area), as promoting stabilisation is also pursued through development programming, such as water, food security, private sector, civil society and health. Furthermore, the evaluation looks at diplomatic efforts, which may be undertaken in support of specific development activities or in pursuit of the political objective to promote stability. Finally, we look at the coherence with military engagements as part of the integrated approach.

1.2   Case selection

The IOB researchers selected three countries for primary data collection: Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan. In these countries, the Netherlands has had a substantial and long-term political engagement focused on promoting stability, allocated a large share of its development budget to stability, security and rule of law, and conducted military engagements (see figure 2).

Figure 2 *Total expenditures 2015-2021 (in EUR, mln) on stability, security and rule of law, by country*
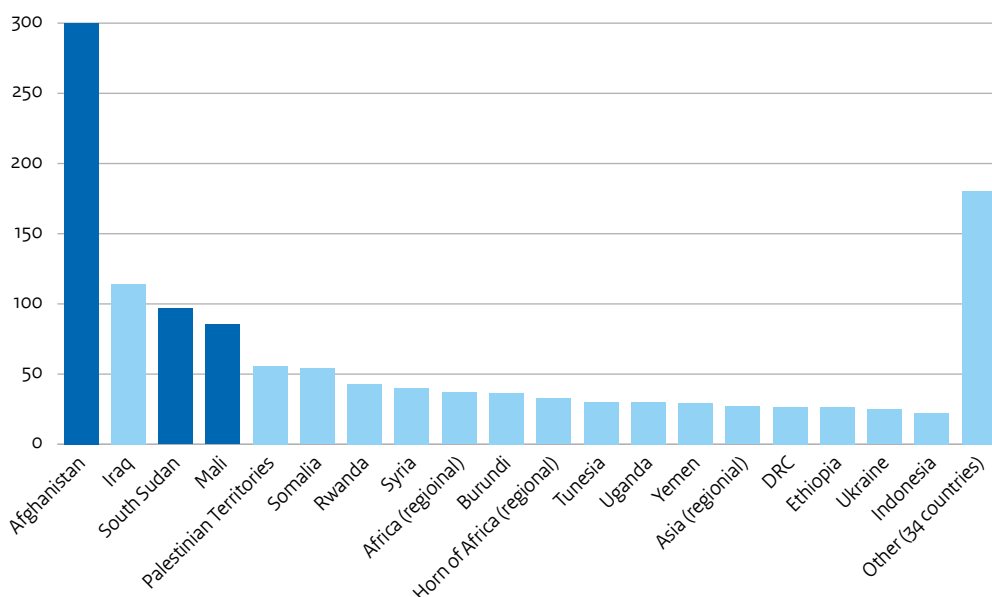
Source: data derived from MIBZ 51.
NB: Includes all expenditures for sub-articles 2.4 (BZ) and 4.3 (BHOS) in the columns (left axis). The figure excludes activities related to migration ('reception in the region' or development approaches to forced displacement) and country-unallocated funds.

The allocations to these countries represent a large share of total Dutch expenditure under Foreign Affairs budget article 2.4 and Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation budget article 4.3 (see figure 2).[11], [12] The cases selected for the evaluation also all had a significant share of the total Dutch development cooperation allocated to stability, security and rule of law (the green area in figure 1).[13] These activities include stabilisation efforts, but also longer-term efforts to reform governance and improve the provision of justice and security. This set of activities is most closely aligned with the main priorities of Dutch development cooperation in fragile states, as explained in more detail section 2.4. These activities correspond roughly with the expenditure under Foreign Affairs budget article 2.4 ('promoting security, stability and rule of law') and Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation budget article 4.3 ('security and rule of law development').

1.3 Methodology

The IOB researchers reconstructed the ministry's Theory of Change (ToC) on stability, security and rule of law in fragile and conflict-affected settings.[14] Although there are various policy documents that cover part of the policy areas, there was no single overarching policy that linked the security and rule of law

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[11] Other countries classified as extremely fragile by the OECD-DAC, where the Netherlands allocates a substantial share of its development cooperation budget to stability, security and rule of law, include Iraq, Somalia, Chad and the Palestinian Territories. Since 2018, a substantial share of Dutch development cooperation in Tunisia, a country considered more stable by the OECD, has also been allocated to stability and security. However, Dutch support to Tunisia had only just started when this evaluation began, making it too recent to evaluate effectiveness. For the OECD-DAC categorisation of fragility, see: OECD, *States of Fragility 2022*.

[12] The Netherlands has development cooperation with several other countries classified as fragile or extremely fragile by the OECD, such as Benin, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Niger, Sudan and Yemen. The Netherlands supported a large security sector reform programme in Burundi until 2017, but it was suspended due to the political situation in the country. In these countries, less than 10% of the national budget is allocated to stability and security, with priority given to areas such as food security, water, climate and SRHR. Similarly, in Uganda, Jordan and Lebanon, countries considered more stable by the OECD, less than 5% of the budget is allocated to stability and security. In Rwanda, the Netherlands has phased out its support for stability and security.

[13] Selection criteria included the volume of Dutch expenditure, the policy relevance and the Dutch contribution to peacekeeping operations.

[14] The background report presents an elaborate version of the reconstructed ToC and a description of the key assumptions underlying the various activities supported. An abridged version of the policy reconstruction and a list of key assumptions is presented in chapter 2 of this evaluation.

efforts with broader efforts to promote stability, including the ministry's diplomatic efforts and Dutch military engagement. To reconstruct the ministry's ToC, the IOB researchers reviewed all relevant policy documents (see section 2.4.1), conducted semi-structured interviews with policy staff at the ministry and the embassies, as well as interviews with staff from implementing partners. An important step in reconstructing the ToC was the identification of the ministry's most common activities in fragile and conflict-affected settings by systematically reviewing all project and policy documentation for the three selected case study countries. Based on these activities and the reconstructed ToC, the IOB researchers subsequently formulated the key assumptions underlying Dutch policy, as presented in section 2.4.3.

The three country case studies are an important source of information for this evaluation. In South Sudan and Mali, the IOB researchers used a theory-based evaluation methodology to explore the contribution of the interventions to (observed) results by verifying important assumptions and taking other influencing factors into account.[15] The basis for the methodology was the integrated approach for small-n analyses, which combines elements of various qualitative research methodologies, such as contribution analysis and process tracing.[16] Roughly, the approach in South Sudan and Mali consisted of the following steps:

1. Draw a (regionally based) sample of all the (co-)financed programmes in South Sudan (Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria) and Mali (Bamako and Mopti) between 2015 and 2021. In addition to regionally-based programmes, the samples also included national programmes;[17]
2. Conduct a document review of all sampled programmes, including proposals, inception reports, progress reports, Mid-term reviews (MTRs), final reports, external ex-post evaluations, multiannual country strategies (MACS) and the annual plans of the embassies involved and interviews with respective MFA staff at headquarters and embassies and staff of implementing organisations.
3. Translate the overall policy assumptions into country-specific assumptions relevant to the identified activities and formulate cause-effect contribution research questions for the activities supported;
4. Collect primary data to test the assumptions in an iterative way;
5. Validate or falsify the assumptions by triangulating all collected primary and secondary data (e.g. project evaluations and progress reports) to provide reasonable evidence of the contribution of the activity to the formulated and observed outcomes.

In South Sudan, the IOB researchers carried out steps 1-3 together with two South Sudanese researchers. In Mali, IOB commissioned a Clingendael Conflict Research Unit-led team to perform steps 1-3 together with two Malian researchers. In both countries, the national consultants carried out step 4 for twelve weeks in South Sudan and for six weeks in Mali in 2021 and 2022. The IOB researchers accompanied the national consultants for two weeks in South Sudan and two weeks in Mali.[18] The in-country data collection included project site visits and observations by the consultants, as well as interviews and focus group discussions with a range of stakeholders, including representatives from implementing organisations (UN, NGOs, etc.), national and sub-national governments, and beneficiaries. In both countries, an important aspect of data collection was to maximise consideration of alternative explanations and unintended effects, so informed non-beneficiaries and other stakeholders were also an important source of information. The national researchers used an iterative approach to step 4, formulating additional alternative hypotheses based on their research findings, jointly with the IOB researchers, and collecting additional evidence to verify/falsify these hypotheses. In both countries, step 5 was a joint effort between IOB and the international and national consultants.[19] For Afghanistan, IOB

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15 IOB carried out the case study of Afghanistan, which, given the challenging political and security situation, included only a desk review and interviews, mainly conducted online, with MFA staff, staff members of partner organisations (UN, NGOs, etc.) and experts.

16 H. White and D. Phillips, *Addressing attribution of cause and effect in small n impact evaluations: towards an integrated framework*, 3ie Working Paper 15, 2012.

17 In South Sudan, the two regions with the most projects were selected purposefully, and in these regions all 28 projects were considered by the consultants. In Mali, the two regions with the highest number of projects were also selected, and the researchers sampled a total of 13 projects in these areas based on a purposeful selection to include the most important projects focused on stability and to ensure a sample that was representative of the MFA's overall project portfolio in the country.

18 To minimise respondent bias, the consultants targeted both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries from the same towns for interviews and focus group discussions.

19 To address potential evaluator bias during data collection in the evaluation, the analysis of the collected data and individual interview and focus group reports into project- and country-specific findings was always carried out by at least two researchers; first, the researchers simultaneously conducted separate analyses and, then jointly compared their findings and reached consensus.

researchers carried out steps 1-5 at a distance, drawing on project documents and interviews with MFA staff and implementing organisations.

To complement the analysis of project documents, interviews and in-country data, this evaluation took into account the academic and evaluative literature, including evidence derived from an evidence gap map by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie).[20] To further strengthen the analysis, IOB commissioned Christoph Zuercher to conduct two systematic reviews of development and stabilisation interventions in South Sudan and Mali between 2008 and 2021, and replicate a similar mixed-methods systematic review for Afghanistan.[21] Combined, the three systematic reviews include 322 individual evaluations from the three case studies, and common patterns across the three cases are presented in a synthesis report (hereafter: the meta-review).[22]

The evaluation also analysed diplomatic interventions, coherence with military engagement, and policy coherence across the country cases. This analysis drew on internal documentation and semi-structured interviews with relevant policy officers at the ministry and the Dutch embassies, staff from implementing partners and embassy staff from other countries present in South Sudan and Mali. For the assessment of the military contributions, this evaluation draws largely on the IOB's post-mission assessments of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA) and Resolute Support and a limited number of semi-structured interviews in The Hague and online. In total, IOB and consultants conducted 267 interviews. Chapter 3 of this evaluation presents all findings from primary and secondary data collected in an integrated fashion.

1.4 Research and quality control

This report was written by an evaluation team at the Ministry's Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) consisting of Rens Willems and Caspar Lobbrecht. In South Sudan, the research was supported by IOB researcher Arjan Schuthof and two South Sudanese consultants, Ohide Johnson and Christopher Oringa. The Mali case study was guided by IOB and carried out by a team from the Clingendael Conflict Research Unit, consisting of Wendyam Aristide Sawadogo, Modibo Ghaly Sissé, Yida Seydou Diall, Mariska van Beijnum, Anna Schmauder, Kars de Buijne and Katia Golovko.

An external reference group provided advice to enhance the quality and independence of the research. IOB would like to thank the members of the reference group for their commitment and constructive feedback: Cindy Chungong (formerly International Alert), David Laws (University of Amsterdam), Geert Geut (retired Ambassador of the Netherlands to South Sudan), Jorrit Kamminga (formerly Oxfam), Marriet Schuurman and Martijn Beerthuizen of the Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid (DSH), Wouter Jurgens and Annemaaike Tempelaar of the Security Policy Department (DVB), and Gerard Steeghs of the Multilateral Organisations and Human Rights Department (DMM). The internal IOB advisory group who provided regular feedback consisted of Johanneke de Hoogh, Paul de Nooijer, Rob van Poelje, Sam Streefkerk and Martin van Vliet. Arjan Schuthof chaired the internal IOB advisory group and the external reference group. Final responsibility for this report rests solely with IOB.

1.5 Limitations

It is important to note that the evaluation focuses on three countries with a very high levels of fragility. The external validity of the research findings is therefore inherently limited: the findings cannot automatically be generalised to other and less fragile contexts. That said, the three countries do represent a large proportion of Dutch development cooperation to highly fragile countries, with the aim of contributing to stability, security and rule of law (see figure 2 – case selection). The selected locations in Mali and South Sudan represent areas with the most activities of Dutch-funded projects. Therefore, while the findings should not be generalised to diplomacy and development assistance in general, they are valid for efforts to promote stability in the most fragile contexts.

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[20] 3ie, *Building Peaceful Societies Evidence Gap Map*, 18 June 2019.

[21] The systematic review for Afghanistan was previously conducted for the German Federal Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation.

[22] Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*.

This evaluation assesses the effectiveness of Dutch contributions to stability, security and rule of law in fragile contexts. While it does look at the integrated approach, which includes activities of the Ministry of Defence or the Ministry of Justice and Security, this evaluation is limited to the policies and programmes of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It takes the coherence with defence and justice interventions into account, but does not assess the effectiveness of efforts by other ministries. This limitation is partially compensated by drawing on IOB studies of the Dutch contributions to MINUSMA and Resolute Support, which do account for contributions by other Dutch ministries.[23]

As in-country visits were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the situation in Afghanistan had significantly deteriorated by the time travel was possible once again, it was not possible to collect data in-country for this case study. While much data could be collected from a distance, this nevertheless left a gap in the data sources for Afghanistan, particularly as it was not possible to speak with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries on the ground.

In countries where field research was carried out, travelling was restricted due to flooding (South Sudan) and a deteriorating security situation (Mali and South Sudan). In the insecure areas, there were several instances where it was difficult for the consultants to interview non-beneficiaries and wider community members, which may also have contributed to distorted and biased findings. Despite these limitations, the national consultants were able to spend a considerable amount of time in the field. The limitations of field data collection for all case studies were complemented as best as possible by the other data sources presented in the methodology.

We acknowledge that the regionally-based sampling strategy focusing on the areas where most of the activities were implemented may not have resulted in areas representative of the rest of the country and may therefore lead to somewhat biased results. However, we deliberately used this strategy as it provided an opportunity to look specifically at the coherence and synergies between the implemented activities.

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23   IOB, *Een missie in een missie. De Nederlandse bijdrage aan de VN Multidimensionale Geïntegreerde Stabilisatie Missie in Mali (MINUSMA) 2014-2019*, The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2022; IOB, *Tussen Wens en Werkelijkheid. Eindevaluatie Nederlandse Bijdrage aan Resolute Support*. The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2023.

2 Fragile contexts and policy background

2.1 What is fragility?

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) characterises fragility as the combination of exposure to risks and insufficient coping capacity of the state, systems and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks.[24] It identifies six dimensions of fragility: economic, environmental, political, security, societal and human capital.[25] Fragility, violence and conflict are most often rooted in (a combination of) multiple, context-dependent causes. The UN and World Bank identify the key causes in their *Pathways for Peace* study: '*Exclusion from access to power, opportunity, services, and security creates fertile ground for mobilising group grievances to violence, especially in areas with weak state capacity or legitimacy or in the context of human rights abuses.*'[26]

In 2022, the OECD identified 60 fragile contexts, the largest number since the introduction of its multidimensional framework for measuring fragility in 2016. Of these contexts, 15 are considered extremely fragile. The case studies selected for this evaluation are among the 60, with Mali considered

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[24] OECD, *States of Fragility 2020*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2020, p. 15.
[25] Ibid.
[26] United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. Washington, DC, World Bank, 2018, p. xviii.

fragile and Afghanistan and South Sudan considered extremely fragile. They all suffer from the typical characteristics of fragility, such as low life expectancy, widespread poverty and a lack of economic opportunities, low levels of education, high levels of violence, political instability and internal displacement.

2.2   Country contexts

2.2.1   Afghanistan

After the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the United States (US) retaliated against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan with Operation Enduring Freedom. [27] The US-backed Northern Alliance overthrew the Taliban regime, and Hamid Karzai was installed as interim president. Vast amounts of foreign assistance poured into the country, as the international community sought to build a stable and developed Afghanistan. Following the decision for Dutch military involvement in Afghanistan, the Netherlands increased its humanitarian support and development assistance to Afghanistan.
Initially, support was channelled exclusively through multilateral trust funds, including the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).[28] In 2004, the Netherlands opened an embassy in Kabul, and the MFA has considered Afghanistan as a partner country for development cooperation since 2006.[29] The Netherlands had a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Baghlan between 2004 and 2006, and, together with Australia, in Uruzgan between 2006 and 2010 as part of Task Force Uruzgan under the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Subsequently, the Netherlands led the 'integrated police training mission' in Kunduz between 2011 and 2013.[30]

In 2013, the US started peace talks with the Taliban. However, these talks quickly stalled. Following disputed elections in 2014, Ashraf Ghani succeeded Karzai as president. Between 2011 and 2014, NATO and the US focused on handing over responsibility for security in the country to the Afghan authorities. ISAF was succeeded by 'Resolute Support' in 2015, a new NATO-led non-combat mission to help rebuild the Afghan army and police. The Netherlands also contributed to this mission in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif and Kunduz.[31]

In 2018, the US started formal negotiations with the Taliban, resulting in a deal in 2020, in which the US unilaterally agreed to withdraw its troops in 2021 in exchange for various concessions, most notably in the form of security guarantees and the Taliban's willingness to agree to intra-Afghan peace talks. These peace talks commenced later in 2020, but a sustainable agreement was never reached. While NATO coalition countries decided to withdraw, the Taliban launched a military offensive, claiming the US had violated the US-Taliban deal by not withdrawing its troops before 1 May. Fighting between the Taliban and the Afghan government – supported by international forces – continued, and from May 2021 onwards the Taliban quickly gained territory and control of key cities. After a chaotic evacuation, the last US plane departed on 30 August, leaving the Taliban in control of the country. Afghanistan is a landlocked country almost 16 times the size of the Netherlands and has a population of 38 million people.[32] Between 2015 and 2022, Afghanistan consistently ranked among the 15 countries with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI)[33], and the top 10 most fragile states.[34] Afghanistan has the lowest life expectancy in the world at 54 years.[35]
Dutch involvement in Afghanistan increased substantially after the political decision was taken to

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[27]   See the background report in chapter 4 for a more detailed country background on Afghanistan.

[28]   Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken en Ministerie van Defensie, 'Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme', kst-27925-95, 25 June 2003.

[29]   Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, *OS Resultaten Afghanistan*, May 2020.

[30]   IOB, *Op zoek naar draagvlak: de geïntegreerde politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan. Post-missiebeoordeling*, The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2019.

[31]   IOB, *Tussen Wens en Werkelijkheid*.

[32]   CIA, *The World Factbook, Afghanistan*, 2022.

[33]   The HDI measures each country's social and economic development by focusing on the following four factors: mean years of schooling, expected years of schooling, life expectancy at birth and gross national income (GNI) per capita. UNDP, *Human Development Index*, 2023.

[34]   The fragile states index includes 12 indicators focused on cohesion (Security Apparatus, Factionalized Elites, Group Grievance), economic (Economic Decline, Uneven Economic Development, Human Flight and Brain Drain), politics (State Legitimacy, Public Services, Human Rights and Rule of Law) and social indicators (Demographic Pressures, Refugees and IDPs, External Intervention). The Fund for Peace, *The Fragile States Index*, 2022.

[35]   CIA, *The World Factbook, Afghanistan*, 2022.

become militarily active in the country in 2002. While Dutch military ambitions decreased significantly after the Uruzgan mission ended in 2010, the priorities in terms of development and security programming became more ambitious over time. In its multiannual country strategy for 2014-2017, the MFA focused on the policy priority 'security and rule of law', with special attention for women's rights. The strategy stated that the MFA wanted to help prevent the security situation and the position of women from deteriorating.[36] The subsequent multiannual strategy for the period 2019-2022 was more ambitious, aiming to help Afghanistan *'to become a safe, stable and well governed nation.'*[37] The supported activities have remained roughly the same over time:

- The MFA aimed to support the Afghan peace process, contribute to a stable and elected government and promote reconciliation. Activities included diplomatic efforts and support to civil society. The Netherlands also aimed to improve the position of women through a specific national funding mechanism earmarked for the implementation of the National Action Plan 1325.
- The ministry supported government capacity in healthcare, education and development programming through the ARTF and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).
- The Netherlands supported stability mainly through Resolute Support, but also through contributions to the Law and Order Trust Fund Afghanistan (LOTFA) and the Afghan National Army Trust Fund (ANA TF) and support for demining. There has also been an increased focus on migration, including working with the government on the regulated return of migrants.

In Afghanistan, the Netherlands was a relatively small donor: it contributed about 1.4% of the total official development assistance (ODA) allocated to the country between 2015 and 2021.[38] Roughly 75% of Dutch development assistance to Afghanistan was allocated to stability, security, and rule of law (see figure 3).

Figure 3 *Dutch ODA to Afghanistan*
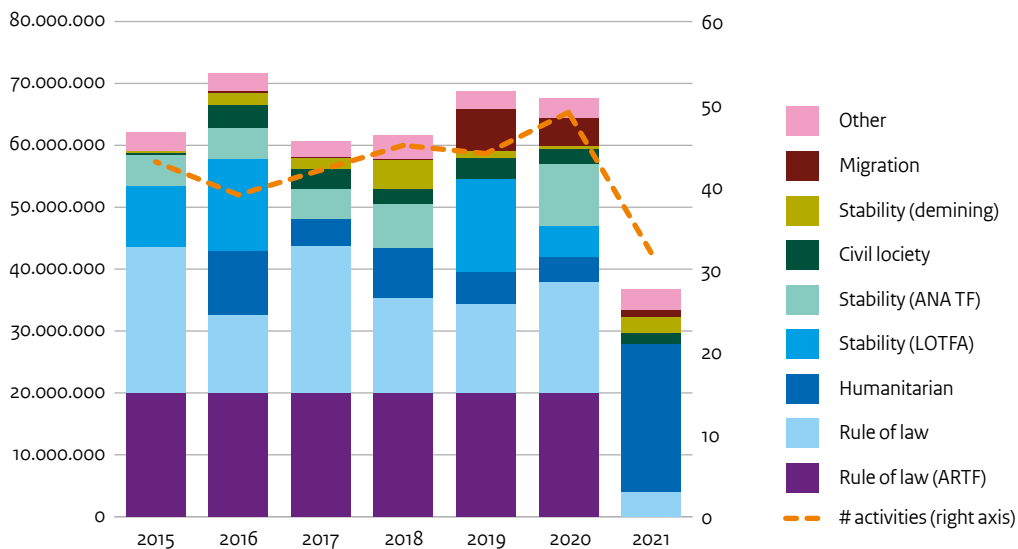
Source: MIBZ16 and MIBZ51
NB. Includes all MFA projects and programmes implemented in Afghanistan only and includes an attribution of multi-country programmes and projects implemented partially in Afghanistan. Excludes unearmarked funds and contributions to missions.

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36 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2014-2017' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2014).
37 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2019-2022' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2019).
38 OECD, *Creditor Reporting System*, 2023.

2.2.2 Mali

Despite tensions between the nomadic Tuareg people and the government, until 2012 most donors previously considered the country to be relatively stable and on an upward trajectory.[39] Mali successfully organised democratic elections in 1992, 1997 and 2002. This changed after the Tuareg Rebellion of 2012, when several armed groups fought for the independence of regions in northern Mali called 'Azawad'. Subsequently, the army ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré and the country fell into a protracted crisis. Violence in Mali has spread geographically – from northern Mali to its central and southern regions – coinciding with the proliferation of non-state armed groups, both ethnic-based self-defence groups and jihadist insurgents. When advancing jihadist insurgents reached the town of Konna in central Mali and threatened to march through on the capital Bamako,[40] this triggered the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) and the French military intervention Serval (predecessor of Operation Barkhane).

Rebelling pro-independence groups signed a peace agreement with pro-Bamako groups and the government in 2015, but the period that followed was characterised by a downward spiral of communal violence. This correlates with the emergence of Katiba Macina – a regional, pre-dominantly Fulani insurgent group that was subsumed by Al-Qaeda in 2017. Its establishment saw the rise of two further non-state armed groups: the (at times) state-supported self-defence militia Dan Na Ambassagou and the jihadi rival Islamic State in the Greater Sahel.[41] In 2020, a military coup d'état took place when the Malian Armed Forces detained President Keita, who dissolved the government. Only nine months later, in 2021, another military coup took place. Mali is a landlocked country almost thirty times the size of the Netherlands, with a population of almost 21 million people.[42] The Human Development Index of Mali has steadily improved since 1990, but it fell in 2012. Between 2015 and 2022, Mali consistently ranked among the five countries with the lowest Human Development Index.[43] On the Fragile States Index, Mali fell from the thirtieth to the fourteenth most fragile country between 2015 and 2022.[44]

The Netherlands has been active as a donor in Mali since the late 1970s, but the deteriorating circumstances in the country and the Sahel region led to a shift in development cooperation in Mali. In 2013, the Dutch government decided that it would contribute to the UN stabilisation mission MINUSMA, which replaced AFISMA. Consequently, the MFA prioritised security and rule of law interventions in its revised multi-annual strategic plan for 2014-2018, with the intention of aligning the efforts with the contribution to MINUSMA. Over time, the focus of Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) programming has broadened to include human rights – increasingly moving from a focus on state institutions to a more decentralised and local focus, allowing for the inclusion of traditional authorities and informal justice providers in the portfolio.

The Netherlands was a relatively small donor in the country, as the Dutch ODA was about 2.7% of total ODA tot Mali between 2015 and 2021.[45] Support to stability, security and rule of law roughly made up 24% of the Dutch development cooperation (see figure 4).

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[39] See background report chapter 5 for a more detailed country background on Mali.
[40] R. Valdmanis and D. Lewis, '*Mali Islamists suffer split as Africans prepare assault*', *Reuters*, 24 January 2013.
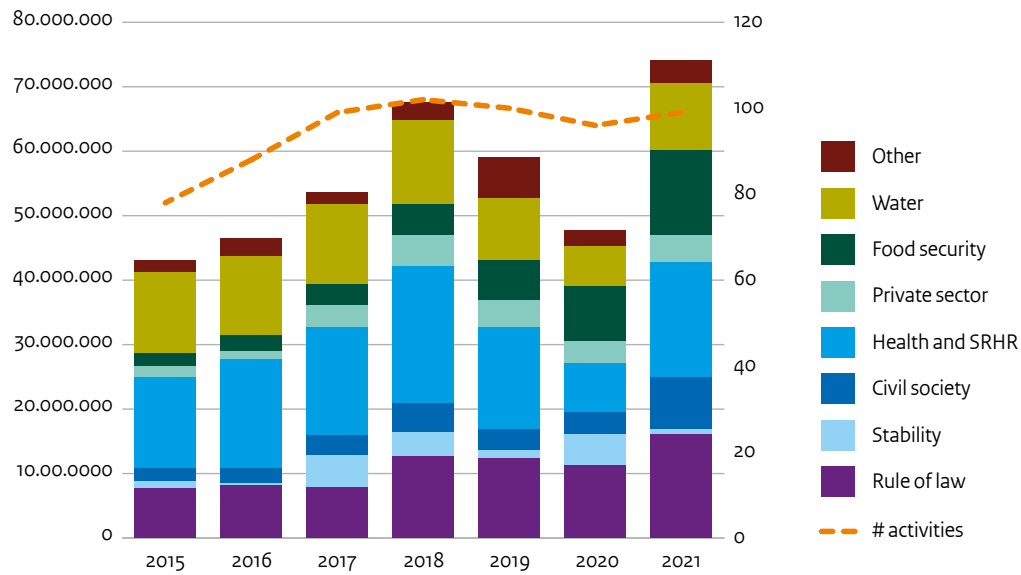[41] In 2022 renamed into the Islamic State Province Sahel
[42] CIA, *The World Factbook, Mali* , 2022.
[43] UNDP, *Human Development Index*, 2023.
[44] Fund for Peace, *The Fragile States Index*, 2022.
[45] OECD, *Creditor Reporting System*, 2023.

Figure 4 *Dutch ODA to Mali*

Source: MIBZ16 and MIBZ51
NB. Includes all projects and programmes implemented in Mali only and includes an attribution of multi-country programmes and projects implemented partially in Mali. Excludes unearmarked contributions.

2.2.3 South Sudan

After decades of civil war and political and ethnic conflict, the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army signed a peace agreement in 2005.[46] This marked the beginning of a six-year transitional period, after which South Sudan became independent on 9 June 2011. While donors were very optimistic about supporting the development of the new country, the previous decades of civil war had led to an extremely low level of development and strong competition between the various ethnic groups. In 2013, fighting erupted between troops allied to President Salva Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar, after which violence spread across the country.

A slow and cumbersome peace process resulted in a peace agreement in 2015, renewed fighting three months later, and a revitalised peace agreement signed in 2018. A government of national unity was formed in 2019, with elections being currently scheduled for December 2024. The violent conflict resulted in nearly 400,000 deaths between 2013 and 2018, and over 4 million people were displaced during this period, including almost 2 million internally displaced persons.[47] The security situation, meanwhile, remains fragile with sporadic sub-national conflict and high levels of inter-communal violence. South Sudan is a landlocked country more than 15 times the size of the Netherlands and a population of over 11 million people,[48] of which an estimated 2.2 million are currently internally displaced due to conflict, insecurity and natural disasters.[49] The Human Development Index of South Sudan has steadily worsened since 2011, and since 2018 it has been the lowest ranking country in the world.[50] In the Fragile States Index, South Sudan's ranking has fluctuated between the fourth and most fragile country in the world since 2015.[51]

The Netherlands has been a donor to Southern Sudan since the 1970s and has played an active political role in the country's peace process leading up to its independence. After independence in 2011, the

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[46] See the background report in chapter 6 for a more detailed country background on South Sudan.
[47] Checchi et al., 'Estimates of crisis-attributable mortality in South Sudan, December 2013- April 2018: A statistical analysis 2018', London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, September 2018.
[48] CIA, The World Factbook, South Sudan, 2022.
[49] UNHCR, 'South Sudan: Overview of the IDPs population per County', August 2022.
[50] UNDP, Human Development Index, 2023.
[51] Fund for Peace, The Fragile States Index, 2022.

promotion of security and stability became one of the overall objectives. When violence flared up in 2013, former minister Ploumen discontinued all direct support to the South Sudanese government in 2014.[52] In contrast to most other donors, the Netherlands would continue to support sectors other than only humanitarian assistance; it was a priority for the MFA to ensure complementarity between humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and peacebuilding interventions in South Sudan. Budget was also allocated to activities that focused on reconciliation and local peace dialogues, with special attention to the inclusion of women. Between 2015 and 2021, the MFA allocated roughly 24% of its development assistance budget to stability, security and rule of law in South Sudan (see figure 5). The Netherlands was a relatively small donor in South Sudan, contributing about 3% of total ODA to the country. About two-thirds of Dutch ODA was allocated to non-humanitarian assistance to the country. Overall, however, the humanitarian sector was dominant in South Sudan, with about USD 7 billion allocated to humanitarian assistance to the country, or around 55% of total ODA.[53]

After the revitalised peace agreement was signed in 2018, the MFA formulated a new multiannual plan (2019-2022) that outlined the intention to build resilience to shocks, with the expectation that this would then lead to less violence, hunger and poverty, and ultimately, less migration.[54] The Netherlands made a very modest contribution to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) before it ended in 2019. Other activities in support of stability, security and rule of law included support to Access to Justice programme of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and support to the Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience (RSRTF), a joint initiative aimed at aligning various development partners and UNMISS.

Figure 5 *Dutch ODA to South Sudan*
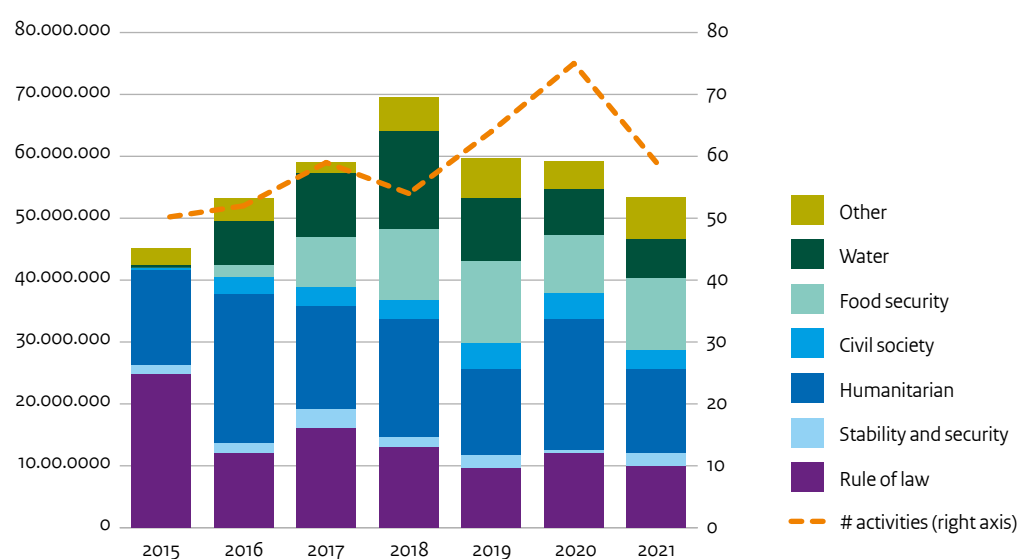
Source: MIBZ16 and MIBZ51
NB. Includes all projects and programmes implemented in South Sudan only and includes an attribution of multi-country programmes and projects implemented partially in South Sudan. Excludes unearmarked contributions.

2.3   Global developments

For over a decade, international policy reports have stressed that fragile and conflict-affected settings are the least likely to develop.[55] The four high-level forums on aid effectiveness resulted in declarations that aimed to improve the effectiveness of global development assistance in general, as well as the New Deal

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[52]   Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '*De Hoorn van Afrika*. Verslag van een bezoek aan Zuid-Sudan (1-4 September)', kst-22831-102, 13 October 2014.
[53]   OECD, *Creditor Reporting System*, 2023.
[54]   Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS South Sudan 2019-2022' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2019).
[55]   OECD, 'Ensuring Fragile States are not Left Behind: Summary Report'. Paris, OECD/INCAF, March 2009.

for Fragile States in 2011.[56, 57] This New Deal identified five 'Peace and Statebuilding Goals' to promote security and stability in fragile contexts:
- Foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution
- Establish and strengthen people's security
- Address injustices and increase people's access to justice
- Generate employment and improve livelihoods
- Manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery

While few policy documents today still refer to the New Deal, these main goals continue to guide the aspirations of international donors, including the Netherlands. Despite these efforts, recent reports from the UN, World Bank and OECD continue to warn that fragile and conflict-affected states are the furthest away from achieving the SDGs. The proportion of the world's population living in fragile and conflict-affected states is expected to grow in the coming years.[58]

2.4 Policy reconstruction: what does the Netherlands do in fragile contexts?[59]

2.4.1 Key policy documents
Dutch policy on stability, security and rule of law has not been designed in isolation; the priorities and strategies of the Netherlands built strongly on analyses and priorities set in global fora and documents. These included, among others, the aforementioned New Deal on Fragile States, as well as the annual OECD States of Fragility report, and the joint report Pathways for Peace by the UN and the World Bank.

The policies for the period 2015-2022, are rooted in policy concepts that have existed since the early 2000s. This included policies on the reconstruction after conflict and Dutch policy for fragile states.[60] Dutch development cooperation was restructured entirely during the second government under prime-minister Rutte and in 2010, SRoL became one of the four priorities in development cooperation.[61] Specific target areas mentioned were:
- human security (preventing violence and ensuring peace and stability); [62]
- effective rule of law (contributing to the development of rule of law);
- inclusive political processes (involving different groups of the population);
- legitimate and capable government (contributing to the delivery of basic government services);
- peace dividend (stimulating employment and improving basic services to visibly improve people's living conditions).[63]

While the number of target areas was increased from three to five, the focus of Dutch policy remained essentially the same. The target areas were also in line with the above-mentioned goals of the New Deal.

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[56] Rome (2003), Paris (2005), Accra (2008) and Busan (2011)

[57] International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, '*A New Deal for engagement in fragile states*', Paris, OECD, 2011.

[58] United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*, 2018; World Bank, '*World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility*, Conflict, and Violence 2020–2025', Washington, DC, World Bank Group, 2020; OECD, *States of Fragility 2022*.

[59] A more elaborate version of the policy reconstruction presented in this section can be found in the background report, chapter 2.

[60] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wederopbouw na conflict', kst-28000 V-60, 24 April 2002; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ministerie van Defensie en Ministerie van Economische Zaken, '*Wederopbouw na gewapend conflict*', 30075-1, 22 March 2005; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '*Een zaak van iedereen*. Investeren in ontwikkeling in een veranderende wereld', kst-31250-1, 16 October 2007; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '*Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten*. Strategie voor de Nederlandse inzet 2008-2011', kst-31787- 1, 7 November 2008.

[61] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '*Basisbrief Ontwikkelingssamenwerking*', kst-32500 V-15, 26 November 2010; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '*Focusbrief ontwikkelingssamenwerking*', kst-32605-2, 18 March 2011; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '*Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde*', kst-32605-94, 21 May 2012.

[62] Human security focuses on the security needs of people rather than the security of the state. While a broad interpretation of human security can also include health and food security, the MFA uses a narrower interpretation related to (threats of) physical violence.

[63] In 2018, this component was transferred from the Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid (DSH) to the Department of Sustainable Economic Development. The peace dividend, however, still needs to contribute to stability in fragile contexts.

As in the previous policy letters published since 2002, the 'integrated approach'[64] was a central element; the documents stated that the complex problems in conflict-affected areas required simultaneous interventions focusing on security, rule of law, institution building and social development. Therefore, the documents argued, coherence was needed between military, diplomatic interventions and development cooperation. The importance of conflict prevention and long-term involvement was also stressed.[65]

The policy note on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation from 2013 (*'What the world deserves'*) emphasised that there should be more coherence between trade and development cooperation in general, but the policy on security and rule of law in fragile states remained unchanged.[66] The subsequent policy notes of 2018 (*'Investing in Global Prospects'*) and 2022 (*'Doen waar Nederland goed in is'*) largely presented a continuation of Dutch policies and programming on promoting stability, security and rule of law in fragile contexts.[67]

Despite the overall continuity of Dutch policy, there have been changes in emphasis and motivations. In 2013, the International Security Strategy (IVS) placed Dutch efforts to promote stability in fragile contexts within the government broader policy on international security.[68] The ministry explicitly linked Dutch efforts to promote stability and security abroad to stability and security issues in Europe and the Netherlands, such as terrorist threats, transnational crime and irregular migration. The MFA replaced the IVS with the GBVS for the period 2018-2022.[69] The strategy confirmed the need for an integrated approach and emphasised the need for Dutch investment in peacekeeping missions and crisis operations in light of continuing pressure on international rule of law and instability, but it did not significantly change the policy on interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Geographically, the strategy implied a stronger focus on Europe's borders: West Africa/Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa. The 2018 policy note 'Investing in Global Prospects' confirmed this focus. Conflict prevention and poverty reduction were presented as key objectives. The priority of security and the rule of law has been expanded financially and geographically.[70] Tackling instability as a root cause of migration was also included in the government's 'Integral Migration Agenda' in 2018.[71] The new Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands integrates the policies for domestic and foreign security for the period 2022-2029. In line with previous policies, the strategy underscores the importance of international peace and security for Dutch security interests, and priorities include addressing root causes and promoting the SDGs.[72]

2.4.2 Reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC)

The policy documents mentioned above were presented in a political context in which irregular migration had become an important issue. There was a large increase in the number of refugees in Europe as a result of the Syrian conflict, as well as an increase in irregular migration. In addition, Europe witnessed several terrorist attacks supported or inspired by terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda. According to the 'Investing in Global Prospects' note and the GBVS, armed conflict or rising ethnic tensions would make developing countries more insecure and politically unstable. Weak governance and corruption would undermine people's trust and feed conflict. Other factors mentioned as contributing to instability

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[64] In 2014, the 'integrated approach' was further elaborated in a joint policy note by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, of Defence and of Justice and Security. This document defined the integrated approach as a whole-of-government approach, that combines instruments (diplomatic, defence, development cooperation and foreign trade, justice and police) and relevant ministries with the aim to promote security and stability in fragile states and conflict areas. Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie en Ministerie van Defensie, 'Leidraad Geïntegreerde Benadering.'; De Nederlandse visie op een samenhangende inzet op veiligheid en stabiliteit in fragiele staten en conflictgebieden', kst-31787-11, 11 July 2014. At the time of writing, the guideline on the integrated approach was being revised.

[65] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Focusbrief ontwikkelingssamenwerking'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde'.

[66] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wat de wereld verdient: Een nieuwe agenda voor hulp, handel en investeringen', kst-33625-1, 5 April 2013.

[67] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', kst-34952-1, 18 May 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is'.

[68] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie', kst-33694-1, 21 June 2013.

[69] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022'.

[70] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Focusregio's voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking', kst-34952-33, 13 November 2018.

[71] Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, et al., 'Integrale migratieagenda', 29 March 2018, kst-19637-2375.

[72] Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid en Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Veiligheidsstrategie voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden', pp. 12, 23.

were poverty, inequality and the effects of climate change. Both of these policy documents therefore stressed the importance of addressing the 'root causes of terrorism, irregular migration, poverty and climate change.'[73]

The central problem analysis underlying Dutch foreign policy and development cooperation has been that fragile and conflict-affected contexts are both a burden for the people living in these contexts and a possible security threat for Europe and the Netherlands. It is these insecure countries in particular that are having the greatest difficulty achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.[74] Poverty has become more concentrated in these countries, and the people living there have the least access to clean water, food, education, healthcare and basic security. Violence can drive people from their homes and cause internal displacement, negatively affecting their well-being and welfare. And, according to Dutch policy, fragile and conflict-affected countries can also pose risks to other countries because they can form safe havens for extremist and terrorist groups, and for criminal activities such as drug and human trafficking. Furthermore, Dutch policy assumes that a lack of economic opportunities drives irregular migration.[75]

What is striking about the various policy documents is the consistency in the key objectives, guiding principles and main policy instruments. The key themes and objectives can be broadly summarised as follows:
- improving justice and security for citizens (promoting human security);
- improving the legitimacy and capacity of governance;
- supporting local peace processes and negotiations; and
- promoting socio-economic development.

While there are nuances in the emphasis placed by different policy notes, there is also a great deal of consistency in the key approaches to working in fragile and conflict-affected countries. The key approaches can be broadly summarised as follows:
- the integrated approach, 3D or whole-of-government approach as a guiding principle;[76]
- the need to work contextually, focusing on local priorities and working with local partners;[77]
- the need to be flexible and adaptable to changing contexts;[78]
- the need for long-term commitments;[79]
- the need to cooperate and coordinate with international partners; [80]
- the need for a regional approach, as challenges do not respect national borders; [81]

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[73] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', p. 8; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022', p. 6

[74] OECD, States of Fragility 2020.

[75] In 2018, IOB published a literature study on the relationship between development and migration, exploring the evidence behind this assumption. See IOB, *Ontwikkeling en migratie*, The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2018.

[76] See, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wat de wereld verdient'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie en Ministerie van Defensie, 'Leidraad Geïntegreerde Benadering'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Security and Rule of Law. Theory of Change' (SRoL ToC), 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Security and Rule of Law. Theory of Change' (SRoL ToC), 2023.

[77] See, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, SRoL ToC, 2023.

[78] See, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wat de wereld verdient'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015.

[79] See, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wat de wereld verdient'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is'.

[80] See, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wat de wereld verdient'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects'.

[81] Ibid.

- the recognition that working in fragile and conflict-affected settings requires taking calculated risks;[82] and
- the need to focus on prevention and conflict sensitivity.[83]

The question then becomes how these objectives and approaches are operationalised and implemented. The Theory of Change for the policy priority Security and Rule of Law provides some insight, but the owner of this document is a policy department and it does not represent the MFA's broader efforts to promote stability in fragile contexts.[84] Other documents that further detail the operationalisation of Dutch policy in fragile contexts are the multiannual country strategies (MACS). These documents contain country-specific policies and implementation plans for all relevant policies that contribute to stability.[85]

The picture that emerges from these documents is that in order to address fragility, Dutch foreign policy and development cooperation aims to enhance 'legitimate stability': a political, socio-economic and cultural situation in which citizens feel represented and safe on the basis of inclusive political processes, trust between them and the state, and social cohesion between groups.[86] The relationship between citizens and the state is generally understood in terms of the 'social contract,'[87] which can be defined as the process in which 'everyone in a political community, either explicitly or tacitly, consents to state authority, thereby limiting some of her or his freedoms, in exchange for the state's protection of their universal human rights and security and for the adequate provision of public goods and services'.[88] Global policy debates and reports also use these concepts to support and operationalise support for fragile contexts.[89] According to the MFA's analysis, fragile and conflict-affected countries are characterised by a lack of social cohesion, which is reflected in and fuelled by a broken relationship between the government and the people (weak social contract).[90] Furthermore, fragile and conflict-affected countries are caught in a vicious cycle: armed conflict and ethnic tensions make countries more insecure and politically unstable. And weak governance and corruption undermine people's trust and feed conflict.[91]

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82   See, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wat de wereld verdient'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is'.

83   See, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, SRoL ToC, 2023.

84   The Theory of Change for the policy priority Security and Rule of Law is developed by the Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid in 2015, and revised in 2018 and 2023. For more details, see the background report, section 2.1.2.

85   For more details on the MACS for Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan, see the background report, section 2.1.3.

86   Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Security and Rule of Law. Theory of Change' (SRoL ToC), 2018.

87   Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', p42, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, SRoL ToC, 2023.

88   UNDP, 'Engaged Societies, Responsive States: The Social Contract in Situations of Conflict and Fragility', New York, UNDP, 2016, quoted from Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023.

89   The OECD refers to the social contract in its policy guidance on statebuilding in situations of conflict and fragility and suggest to prioritise support for key state functions, the first being the provision of security and justice: OECD, 'Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility: Policy Guidance', Paris, OECD, 2011. In 2012 UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon argued for a 'new social contract' in: UNSG, 'Agenda for Peace', SG/SM/14083, New York, UN, 2012. And almost a decade later in 2021, UN Secretary-General Guterres called for a renewed social contract in UNSG, *Our Common Agenda*, New York, UN, 2021. The UNDP presented the social contract as a guiding concept in its 2012 and 2016 concept notes, and characterises fragility as settings where authorities may lose the monopoly on legitimate violence. Other key international reports such as the joint report by the UN and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace* and the World Bank's *Strategy for Fragility* are more implicit, but also emphasise the need to strengthen state institutions and make them more inclusive.

90   Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2018, see also: OECD, States of Fragility 2020, p. 71.

91   Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', pp.18, 29.

2.4.3 Key assumptions

Based on a review and analysis of all policy-relevant documents and interviews, as well as focus groups with relevant policy actors at the MFA, the IOB evaluators distilled a number of key assumptions underlying the Dutch policy of promoting stability, security and rule of law in fragile contexts. The relevance of these assumptions was subsequently confirmed in discussions with policy staff.[92] The list of assumptions was not meant to be exhaustive, but the intention was to capture the most important ones. They provided an important framework that facilitated the operationalisation of the broad policy concepts and approaches. The list of assumptions is presented in Box 1.[93]

Box 1 *Reconstructed key assumptions*

1. Enhancing 'legitimate stability' and improving the 'social contract' in a country will help address its level of fragility.	**Ultimate impact**
2. Diplomatic efforts can contribute to the political objective of promoting stability in fragile contexts and help create conditions to enhance the effectiveness of development programming and military interventions. 3. External stabilisation efforts (e.g. peacekeeping missions, cease-fire negotiations or crisis management operations) can provide enough stability and security to facilitate or enable development and enhance the legitimacy of governance and security actors in a sustainable manner. 4. Externally financed security and justice reforms can influence and improve domestic, people-centred security and justice provision by actors that are increasingly trusted and considered legitimate by the entire population. 5. Democratisation, inclusive political institutions and good governance (a state that accepts responsibility for and is accountable to its citizens) can be facilitated in fragile contexts and conflict-affected settings; 6. There is sufficient willingness on the part of security and government actors to adopt the proposed institutional reforms and improve the social contract between the state and citizens, or they can be incentivised to do so; 7. There is sufficient absorptive capacity for individual and institutional capacity building; 8. Peacebuilding, mediation and reconciliation activities can lead to improved social cohesion between different societal groups and improve the social contract between the state and the people; 9. Social cohesion at the local level can help to reduce inter- and intra-communal violence, and thereby 'trickle up' and contribute to a more peaceful society at the national level. Conversely, peacebuilding and reconciliation at the national level can 'trickle down' and contribute to social cohesion at the local level. 10. External support to civil society can enhance the engagement between government institutions and citizens, and improve advocacy for people's needs, including those of minority groups. This, in turn, leads to improved legitimate governance and service delivery. 11. Improved service delivery by the state provides a 'peace dividend', thereby improving trust in society and strengthening the social contract between the state and citizens.* 12. Economic development and equal distribution of opportunities can reduce tensions over scarce resources, thereby reducing the underlying causes of conflict.	**Policy and intervention effectiveness**
13. External interventions to promote stability and security focus on the key drivers of conflict and fragility; 14. Localisation in development and humanitarian programmes helps to better address the needs and priorities of affected populations;** 15. Adaptive programming and flexibility can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Dutch foreign policy and development assistance in fragile and conflict-affected settings;	**Relevance** / **Intervention architecture**
16. Improving the coordination and cooperation with other actors enhances the effectiveness of interventions; 17. Through the integrated approach, the different instruments of Dutch foreign policy – diplomacy, development cooperation, defence and justice – can complement and reinforce each other; 18. International support for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected contexts can be more coherent, effective and sustainable when international partners cooperate across the humanitarian-development-peace ('triple') nexus.	**Coherence**
19. The results and benefits of external interventions make a lasting contribution to the social contract between the state and its citizens. If this is not the case, domestic actors will take over the activities when Dutch funding ends.	**Sustainability**

*   *In the context of civil war, peace dividend refers to a tangible development benefit for the population after conflict.*
** *Localisation is the process by which ownership and decision-making are increasingly transferred to local actors.*

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92 The policy reconstruction and key assumptions have been discussed with the external reference group, consisting of external experts and representatives from relevant policy departments at the MFA.
93 The background report more elaborately presents these key assumptions in relation to specific activities supported by the Netherlands.

In the following chapter, we will reflect on the validity of these assumptions based on the evidence collected for this evaluation. The assumptions are grouped into three main categories, which also indicates the interdependence of these assumptions. The first category includes the main assumption underlying Dutch foreign policy in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, namely that international interventions can address fragility by supporting 'legitimate stability' and improving the 'social contract'. The second category contains a number of assumptions that relate to a broad range of policies and interventions in different sectors, each of which aims to contribute to 'legitimate stability' and the 'social contract' from its own perspective. The validity of these assumptions, in turn, is influenced by the design of the intervention architecture, which is related to the relevance, coherence, efficiency and sustainability of interventions.

3

Findings on Dutch efforts to promote stability, security and rule of law in fragile contexts

This chapter presents the main findings, drawing on evidence from the three country case studies, as well as the wider literature.[94] In doing so, we aim to answer the main research question: *to what extent has the Netherlands contributed to stability, security and rule of law in fragile contexts, and what lessons can be learned for future policy formulation and implementation?* We focus on assessing the key assumptions underlying the activities implemented as part of Dutch policy on legitimate stability, as presented in the policy reconstruction.

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94   Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*; 3ie, *Building Peaceful Societies Evidence Gap Map*.

Section 3.1 assesses the effectiveness of Dutch-supported efforts to promote stability, security and rule of law in fragile and conflict-affected settings. As explained in the introduction (see figure 1, section 1.1), activities range from stabilisation efforts aimed directly at addressing violence to wider development support aimed at contributing to stability and addressing root causes. The sub-sections in section 3.1 present various groups of supported activities and outline the key assumptions underpinning these activities. The sub-sections then test the validity of these assumptions by presenting all the evidence and data collected for the three selected country case studies.

The overall conclusion of section 3.1 is that the effectiveness is limited. Although there are some small improvements in stability and security, the wider impact is limited. The two following sections analyse the conditions for effectiveness, in order to better understand the results. The second section looks at relevance, and particularly the way in which Dutch policies and priorities relate to the context in the three selected countries. It concludes that the Netherlands has been a relatively flexible donor, allowing for flexible programming. At the same time, many interventions were not sufficiently aligned with the local context. The third section examines coherence: it shows that the intention to link interventions from different sectors often did not materialise in practice. Section 4 looks at efficiency, mainly by assessing the operational capacity of the MFA to monitor and steer programming. Finally, section five discusses the sustainability of the results of the interventions and concludes that it is very difficult to achieve sustainable results in a highly fragile context.

3.1 How effective are Dutch-supported interventions?

3.1.1 Diplomatic efforts to contribute to stability, security and rule of law

Supported activities
The main diplomatic objectives of the MFA were to support the broader development objectives and military engagements. The underlying assumption is that diplomatic efforts can contribute to the political objective of promoting stability in fragile contexts and help create conditions to enhance the effectiveness of development programming and military interventions.[95] We find this assumption to be partially true. In all three country cases, the Netherlands was an average donor with limited influence. The Netherlands was able to attract attention and raise support for Dutch priorities and forge coalitions with other donors with similar priorities. In several instances, this resulted in joint diplomatic action and the adoption of UN resolutions. As such, the diplomatic efforts have had direct results, although these were mostly at the output level. It remained difficult to assess whether these results led to more effective programming and what the impact was on the ground. Comparing the three cases, a few things stand out. The Netherlands had very limited diplomatic influence in Afghanistan, with other donors playing a much more prominent role. In Mali, the Netherlands was able to carve out a niche in the security and justice sector with a few like-minded donors. In South Sudan, the diplomatic role of the Netherlands is not as strong as it could be, mainly due to the lack of political interest for South Sudan in the Netherlands.

Main findings from the case studies and literature
In Afghanistan, the Netherlands was a relatively small donor – both in terms of development assistance and military contribution – but influential enough to get a seat at the table in several donor meetings. The coordination in the Nordic+ helped to further strengthen the position of the Netherlands and like-minded Nordic countries vis-á-vis the wider donor group. At a multilateral level, efforts were made within the donor community to coordinate the political messages to Afghan military and political actors.[96] That said, other countries had a much bigger role and stronger influence, with the US being the most dominant player. In the last few years of their presence, the US increasingly went its own course without involving other donors. A case in point was the unilateral decision to agree to a withdrawal of troops without informing either the Afghan government or NATO partners.

The capacity available at the embassy was a limiting factor that undermined the information position of the MFA. The effectiveness of its efforts to coordinate and influence policy in Kabul also depended heavily on the experience and quality of individual staff members. The complex and difficult working environment also made it hard to recruit experienced staff. As a result, many projects and programmes were managed by relatively junior staff, often with little experience in conflict settings. The retention of

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95 Assumption #2.
96 Interviews.

knowledge and experience was further limited by the relatively high turnover of staff in Kabul.[97]
In Mali, the Netherlands sought to promote coherence and cooperation between donors; embassy staff took an active role in donor coordination meetings. The Netherlands participated in the regular meetings between bilateral donor governments, multilateral actors and the Malian government (the so-called 'troika') – and chaired these meetings in 2018. These troika meetings were supported by a number of thematic working groups, which the Netherlands either participated in or chaired. The challenge of these types of meetings is to move beyond an exchange of information to real collaboration. This was particularly possible with smaller coalitions of donors with similar priorities. While several donors focused on 'hard' security and counterterrorism measures in response to the conflict in Mali, the Netherlands advocated the inclusion of 'softer' elements, such as justice, human rights and governance. In collaboration with the European Union (EU), Denmark, Sweden and others, the Netherlands undertook diplomatic efforts to include these 'softer' components in the EU/G5 Sahel agenda for the region – for instance, by organising side events to the summits on these issues.[98] Eventually, the MFA succeeded in engaging the defence ministers of the five Sahel countries in an ongoing dialogue on human rights with their European counterparts.[99] In addition, the Netherlands – together with Belgium and Luxembourg – funded the establishment of a UN International Commission of Inquiry for Mali, which investigated allegations of abuses and violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including allegations of conflict-related sexual violence, committed throughout the territory of Mali between 2012 and 2018. The Commission reported back to the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) and the UN Member States at the end of 2020.[100] In terms of results, it is not possible to say that the Dutch efforts led to fewer human rights abuses in the region – but they did lead to better documentation of human rights abuses, to making the issue become a standard point of discussion at meetings, and to increased donor funding for justice programming.

In South Sudan, the Netherlands is well-respected as a long-term and stable partner. Nevertheless, the 2018-2022 multiannual strategy notes that the Netherlands is not a strong influencer in South Sudan, given its relative size as a donor.[101] This can be partially explained by the limited domestic political and economic interests in South Sudan. As a result, it has been difficult for embassy staff to generate political interest from The Hague, either for the country or the peace process led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Furthermore, direct support to the government of South Sudan has been suspended since 2013.[102] Diplomatic objectives were therefore not necessarily linked to the development portfolio, which focused more on building resilience and delivering services to the South Sudanese population. The main diplomatic objectives were to support the country's peace process. In practice, however, the Netherlands has played a relatively modest and passive political role in the country and had an observer role in the peace process, whereas the US, UK and Norway had much prominent positions. There was little guidance from Headquarters (HQ) and no comprehensive diplomatic and political strategy for South Sudan. Diplomatic initiatives depended on the views and strategy of the staff, and different Dutch ambassadors in Juba have adopted different approaches to the role of the Netherlands in IGAD over time.[103]

Nevertheless, the combined diplomatic efforts at the level of HQ and the Dutch embassies sometimes produced results. The Netherlands has always advocated for an arms embargo and, in addition, as a member of the UN Security Council in 2018, the Netherlands supported Resolution 2428, which extended the sanctions regime and imposed an arms embargo on South Sudan. The Netherlands also played an active role in the formulation of Resolution 2417, which is relevant to South Sudan because it recognises the deliberate starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, and in the inclusion of sexual and gender-based violence as a separate criterion in the sanctions regime. Although the EU does not play a major role in South Sudan, the Netherlands is an active member state when it comes to South Sudan in the EU. In 2018, the EU imposed sanctions on three South Sudanese individuals.

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97   Staff were stationed in Kabul for a maximum of two years and worked on a schedule of four weeks on/four weeks off.
98   In 2020 for instance, the Netherlands initiated and coordinated the drafting of a joint non-paper as input to revise the EU Sahel strategy on behalf of nine EU Member States, which identified these areas as key policy priorities.
99   Interviews.
100 UN, 'Report Of the International Commission of Inquiry for Mali', New York, UN, 2020.
101 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS South Sudan 2019-2022'.
102 Minister Ploumen first suspended all direct support in 2014 after the conflict erupted in 2013. When the Government of National Unity was formed in April 2016, the Netherlands intended to continue with bilateral support, but this decision was undone after violence erupted again in July 2016. See also, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Nederlandse deelname aan vredesmissies', kst-29521-320, 28 July 2016.
103 Field notes South Sudan.

3.1.2 Improvements in stability and security as a result of stabilisation interventions had limited wider impact

Supported activities and validity of the underlying assumptions

The Netherlands has contributed to stabilisation efforts in Afghanistan, South Sudan and Mali. Whereas a wider range of development assistance can help to promote stability, we define stabilisation efforts more narrowly as activities aimed at directly addressing violence and ensuring a basic level of security. Such activities include military engagement in peacekeeping missions, crisis management operations and demining.[104] The underlying assumption is that external stabilisation efforts can provide enough stability and security to facilitate or enable development and enhance the legitimacy of governance and security actors in a sustainable manner.[105] We conclude that this assumption is partially true. Dutch-supported interventions have contributed to small improvements in stability and security in areas of interaction, but this has enabled only limited progress in development and governance.

Main findings from the case studies and literature

There is evidence that certain Dutch interventions aimed at stabilising an insecure area have indeed helped to improve security. The MFA funded several demining programmes in South Sudan, Afghanistan and Mali. Evaluations of demining projects in Afghanistan and South Sudan showed that demining actions have generally led to positive and concrete results, especially at the output level: clearance of explosive devices, land clearance and land release.[106] Dutch contributions to demining programmes in Afghanistan and Mali helped to improve security in the area where Dutch troops were based.[107] The relationship between the outputs achieved and wider outcomes was sometimes limited. In South Sudan, for instance, the population fled the target area due to the conflict shortly after the activities of Danish Church Aid's (DCA) Humanitarian Mine Action and Cluster Munition Programme started. As a result, the decontaminated land was no longer used.[108]

The Netherlands also contributed to UNMISS and MINUSMA in Mali. In the evaluation of the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA, IOB concluded that it was of high quality and innovative in the UN context. However, the intelligence contribution provided only limited support to the mission's decision-making and did not strengthen the intelligence chain in a sustainable manner.[109] Although the Netherlands sought to apply an integrated approach in the mission, this was not effectively operationalised as there were multiple interpretations of what this should entail in practice. The Netherlands also supported the MINUSMA Trust Fund, which aimed to contribute to the recovery and stabilisation of northern and central Mali. The effectiveness of the fund, however, was limited as it mainly focused on short-term recovery projects, which did not always reflect the priorities of the population.[110, 111]

In South Sudan, the Dutch contribution to UNMISS was very modest before it ended altogether in 2019. A special investigation into the violence in 2016 concluded that UNMISS failed to respond effectively due to a general lack of leadership, preparedness and integration between the various components of the mission.[112] Despite the many problems reported with the mission in South Sudan, external evaluations indicate that it was able to provide physical protection, thus helping to prevent a much worse trajectory for the country.

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[104] Very often, these stabilisation efforts also included 'hearts and minds' projects, such as small-scale development and infrastructure projects, in order for the military mission to deliver a direct 'peace dividend' - a tangible development benefit for the population after conflict.

[105] Assumption #3.

[106] L. Skilling, 'External Evaluation Report Humanitarian Mine Action and Cluster Munitions Activities 2016-2020', 2020; Tana Copenhagen, 'Evaluation of DCA Humanitarian Mine Action & Cluster Munition 2016-2020 programme', 2021; Samuel Hall, 'Global HALO Trust Mine Action Projects with Multiple Spheres of Change', Evaluation report, 2021.

[107] IOB, *Een missie in een missie*, p. 35.

[108] Tana Copenhagen, 'Evaluation of DCA Humanitarian Mine Action & Cluster Munition 2016-2020 programme'.

[109] IOB, *Een missie in een missie*.

[110] Zuercher, C. et al., 'Impacts of Development Aid to Mali 2008–2021. Part II. Country level Evaluations' The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2022.

[111] IOB, *Tussen Wens en Werkelijkheid*.

[112] UNSC, 'Executive summary of the independent special investigation into the violence in Juba in 2016 and the response by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan', S/2016/924, New York, UN, 2016.

The police officers, in addition, also helped to reduce crime rates around the Protection of Civilians sites, and its Civil Affairs Division contributed to a reduction in local conflicts. Nevertheless, UNMISS was only one of many contributor working towards sustainable peace.[113]

The evidence from the case studies shows that stabilisation activities directly contributed to increased stability and security. However, the impact of these stabilisation efforts on wider stability at the national level remained limited. In a context of ongoing violence and political struggle, national tensions quickly trickled down to local levels. For instance, stabilisation efforts in Afghanistan were accompanied by various 'hearts and minds' development programmes through ARTF's National Solidarity Programme. An evaluation of that programme revealed that the approach to win 'hearts and minds' was not effective in areas where the insurgency was dominated by fighters who did not come from the local communities.[114]

Trickling down stability was particularly difficult when political elites rallied support from local constituencies, for instance during elections. Conversely, improvements in security at the local level had limited impact on violence and political struggles at the national level. By definition, stabilisation efforts such as peacekeeping, peacemaking and demining are stop-gap measures aimed at creating a basic level of stability and security to enable the development of basic services and further improvements in governance and security. For stabilisation measures to be effective, they need to be complemented by interventions that address the root causes of these conflicts, mediate conflicts, improve governance, security and justice, and create better living conditions for the population. These activities are discussed from section 3.1.3 onwards.

The findings from the case studies are partially consistent with the evidence from the literature. The meta-review did not find that stabilisation programmes in Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan were able to reduce violence, and at times even exacerbated inter-group tensions.[115] As for peacekeeping, there is ample evidence that it has a positive effect at the macro-level, making the resumption of civil war much less likely once a ceasefire is in place.[116] However, other studies show that peacekeeping does not have a significant effect at the micro-level, finding no evidence that deployments increase local security, and only modest effects on economic or social vitality.[117]

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113 Carroll et al., Evaluation of the contribution of the UNMISS Civil Affairs Division to the reduction of local conflict in South Sudan, New York, OIOS, 2019; Day et al., 'Assessing the Effectiveness of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)', Oslo, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2019.
114 Beath, A., F. Christia and R. Enikolopov, 'Can Development Programs Counter Insurgencies? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan', Working Paper, World Bank, 2017.
115 Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*, pp. 28-29.
116 V.P. Fortna and L. M. Howard, 'Pitfalls and Prospects in the Peacekeeping Literature', *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 11, 2008, p. 289.
117 E. Mvukiyehe and C. Samii, 'Peacekeeping and development in fragile states: Micro-level evidence from Liberia', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 58, no. 3, 2021; E. Mvukiyehe and C. Samii, 'Laying a foundation for peace? Micro-effects of peacekeeping in Côte d Ivoire', Toronto, American Political Science Association, 2009.

Box 2 *Stability Fund*

The MFA established the Stability Fund in 2003 to enable quick and flexible funding for activities at the nexus of peace, security and development.[118] Between 2015 and 2021, the Stability Fund financed 308 individual projects in 42 countries and regions, with a total expenditure of about EUR 632 million. The fund consists of a diverse portfolio, including demining programmes, large contributions to international trust funds, core funding to international organisations and many small and tangible projects financed through NGOs.

A significant proportion of the projects have been implemented in the three case study countries, and the portfolio of the Stability Fund largely overlaps in terms of activities with the projects reviewed for this evaluation. Between 2015 and 2021, the MFA allocated about EUR 109 million to Afghanistan through the Stability Fund, the most notable contributions being to LOTFA (EUR 45 million) and the ANA TF (EUR 32 million). In the same time period, the fund financed various activities for about EUR 17 million and EUR 13 million in Mali and South Sudan respectively, including various demining programmes and support to the MINUSMA TF.

To a certain extent, the findings of this evaluation on effectiveness can be extrapolated to the Stability Fund, with two important caveats. First, this evaluation focuses on three extremely fragile contexts, whereas the Stability Fund also includes activities in more stable environments. Second, several of the fund's projects are also financed for political objectives, rather than project objectives. These, however, are rarely made explicit and could therefore not be evaluated.

3.1.3 Improvements as a result of governance, security and justice reform are scarce and mainly concentrated at the local level

Supported activities and validity of the underlying assumptions
As improving governance, security and justice is considered to be at the core of efforts to promote stability, a wide range of Dutch-funded interventions targeted these sectors. These included support for institutional reform, capacity building in the security and justice sectors, and the promotion of people-centred security and civilian participation and oversight. A related set of interventions aimed to improve governance and inclusive political processes.[119]

One assumption underlying such activities is that externally financed security and justice reforms can influence and improve domestic, people-centred security and justice provision by actors that are increasingly trusted and considered legitimate by the entire population.[120] We found little evidence to support this assumption. The Dutch contribution to governance, security and justice reforms was either not very effective or very modest in the three case studies. More results have been achieved at the local level, but these improvements have not been transferred to the wider regional or national levels.

Another assumption is that democratisation, inclusive political institutions and good governance (a state that takes responsibility for its citizens and is accountable to them) can be enabled in fragile and conflict-affected settings.[121] The evidence for this assumption is very weak. Interventions in the three country cases sometimes led to minor improvements in governance, particularly at the local level. Overall, structural reforms were rarely adopted, and, when adopted, rarely implemented.

Main findings from the case studies and literature
The ministry achieved modest results in terms of governance, security and justice reform at the national level, but the wider impact of many of the supported activities remained limited. In South Sudan, the Dutch embassy was the largest contributor to the UNDP's Access to Justice and Rule of Law programme, which aimed to deliver a legal framework for the provision of legal aid services and to improve

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[118] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Memorie van Toelichting', kst-29200-V-8, September 2003, p. 9.
[119] While there is overlap between supporting reforms and capacity building, and some projects combined these activities, for the sake of analysis, this section focuses on supporting reforms and physical infrastructure, whereas we turn to capacity building in the next section.
[120] Assumption #4.
[121] Assumption #5.

government capacity in the rule of law.[122] While the project achieved some results in terms of policy and legislation development, the implementation of these policies remained limited and overall progress could not be achieved due to weak government capacity or political will.[123], [124]

In Afghanistan, the Netherlands supported the Afghan National Army Trust Fund (ANA TF). This Trust Fund was a mechanism to support the Afghan forces with equipment, services, engineering projects and training in and outside the country. Most funds were used for physical infrastructure, such as providing electricity to army bases, and equipment, such as medical supplies. The ministry's contribution to the ANA TF was limited in any case; financially, the Dutch contribution of EUR 42 million represented 1.2% of all ANA TF funds and only about 0.05% of all funds allocated to the ANDSF. The vast majority came directly from the US Department of Defense.[125] The main success of the Trust Fund, according to the respondents, was that it created a mechanism for burden-sharing among NATO members, and the political message of solidarity and political unity that this conveyed.

In addition to the ANA TF, the Netherlands contributed to NATO's Resolute Support mission from 2015 to 2021, which aimed to build the capacity of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), including the Afghan National Army.[126] The main objective of Resolute Support was to help the ANDSF become a self-reliant force capable of enforcing security in Afghanistan. While the takeover by the Taliban after the withdrawal of NATO troops demonstrated that this objective was not achieved, the evaluation of the Dutch contribution to Resolute Support also showed that the ANDSF was never on track to achieve this goal during the mission.[127] In the same vein, the ANA TF also failed to achieve its intended impact.

Despite the ministry's policy objectives at the national level, most results were achieved at the local level and, in practice, it was often difficult to move beyond the local level. In some areas, the results of programmes have led to increased trust in local security and government actors. For example, a project in Afghanistan that supported community policing and tangible improvements to roads, lighting and waste management helped to improve safety in the urban areas where the project was implemented, both in terms of perceived security and incident reporting.[128] At the local level, government and security actors often came from the same community, which enhanced their legitimacy in the eyes of the population. The fieldwork conducted for this evaluation showed that support to the Malian prison system through training and capacity building helped to improve the skills of prison staff and penitentiary personnel. This, combined with the refurbishment of prisons, improved the living conditions of prisoners. The project also helped to improve prisoners' access to justice.[129] Support for legal aid clinics and paralegal officers in South Sudan and Mali improved access to justice.[130]

Various NGOs have been supported to provide legal aid to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) or to set up mobile courts. The literature shows that improved access to formal courts can promote access to justice for groups that are more disadvantaged under customary law, such as women, the poor people and refugees.[131] In general, however, the geographical coverage and number of people reached by Dutch-supported activities remained low, especially in rural areas. The evaluation of a project in Afghanistan that aimed to build the capacity of Afghan justice sector institutions found that it had improved the participants' skills and knowledge to handle the cases more easily. Nevertheless, the

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[122] First phase 2013-2017, second phase 2017-2020.

[123] E.g. the Legal Aid Bill had not been enacted into law.

[124] C. Collin and G. Batali, 'Final Evaluation of UNDP South Sudan Access to Justice and Rule of Law Project'; R.M. Chiwara and G. Batali, 'Evaluation of South Sudan Interim Cooperation Framework (ICF) 2016–2018', Evaluation Report, Juba, United Nations South Sudan, 7 July 2018.

[125] The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported that as of March 2021, 37 donors had contributed USD 3.4 billion to the ANA TF (SIGAR 22-04 AR, October 2021), of which the Netherlands contributed EUR 42 million. In comparison, since 2002, the US Congress had designated USD 88.3 billion to train, equip, and sustain the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) (SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the Unites States Congress', 30 April 2021, p. 35).

[126] The ANDSF consisted of the Afghan National Army (ANA) under the Ministry of Defence, as well as the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the special police units under the Ministry of Interior.

[127] IOB, *Tussen Wens en Werkelijkheid*.

[128] B. Rodey, 'Afghanistan Urban Peacebuilding Programme 2015-2018', End-of-Programme Evaluation, 2019.

[129] Project analyses by Malian consultants.

[130] See chapters 5 and 6 in the background document.

[131] Sandifur, J. and B. Siddiqi, 'Delivering justice to the poor: theory and experimental evidence from Liberia,' Washington, Stanford: Center for Global Development, Stanford University, 2013.

benefits were mostly felt at the individual level, while improvements at the level of the Ministry of Justice and the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association remained at risk due to limited financial resources.[132] In all three countries, access to formal legal services remained generally restricted.

The meta-review found that interventions aimed at improving the governance of Afghan government institutions were generally unsuccessful.[133] While technical capacity to conduct elections was improved, projects to promote democratic awareness and participation had little impact.[134] The Dutch ministry provided financial support to the ARTF, which contributed to the Afghan government's operating costs and funded several development projects. While the trust fund helped to keep the Afghan government afloat and contributed to service delivery, it did not generate improvements in governance or institutional capacity.[135] Key problems that prevented a positive impact included continued insecurity and a lack of political will on the part of government institutions to implement the necessary reforms.[136]

Furthermore, donor-supported programmes were often not sufficiently responsive to the local 'political economy'. For example, in Mali, administrative decentralisation was seen as a way to promote stability and improve governance following the 2015 peace agreement. As a result, many donors supported the decentralisation process. However, little was achieved – mainly because there was no political buy-in from the central government for decentralisation, which was seen as strengthening the political position of the North.[137]

3.1.4   Limited results in capacity building of government and security actors

Supported activities and validity of the underlying assumptions
Many initiatives funded by the MFA aimed to build government capacity in Mali, South Sudan and Afghanistan. One assumption underlying such activities is that there is sufficient absorptive capacity for individual and institutional capacity building.[138] This assumption is only partially true. While there is some absorptive capacity, the objectives of donor programmes are often misaligned and over-ambitious.

Another assumption underlying such activities is that there is a sufficient level of willingness on the part of security and government actors to adopt the proposed institutional reforms and to improve the social contract between the state and citizens, or that they can be incentivised to do so.[139] This assumption is partially true. In the case studies, we found pockets of success at the sub-national level and in less politicised areas such as water, education and health. And the literature suggests that building government capacity can improve government service delivery. However, in the case studies, more structural and national reforms were hampered by ongoing power struggles between elites, and between the centre and the periphery, resulting in a context with little political will to accommodate the redistribution of power and improve broader access to resources.

Main findings from the case studies and literature
Strengthening the capacity of government and security actors proved difficult to achieve tangible and sustainable results. In conflict-affected settings such as Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan, government capacity was already poor and inequitable access to services and corruption was high. The programmes and reforms proposed by international donors were often too ambitious and did not match the absorption capacity.[140] The constant pressure from donors to show results in the short term led to the hiring of external capacity and substitution rather than endogenous capacity building. In Afghanistan, foreign private

132 IDLO, 'Evaluation of the project Afghan Justice Institutions Strengthening (AJIS)', The IDLO - International Development Law Organization, 2018.

133 Interviews; C. Zuercher, 'Meta-Review of Evaluations of Development Assistance to Afghanistan, 2008–2018. Chapeau Paper', Berlin, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 2020, p.18 and pp. 21-22; M.M. Shah, E. Sylvester and C. Zuercher, 'Meta-Review of Evaluations of Development Assistance to Afghanistan, 2008 – 2018. Part 2: Summary Report of Eleven Bilateral Country-Level Evaluations', Berlin, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 2020, p. 28

134 Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper', p. 18.

135 Shah, Sylvester and Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan. Part 2: Country-Level Evaluations, p.16.

136 Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper', p.18; Shah, Sylvester and Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan. Part 2: Country-Level Evaluations, p.16; Scanteam, 'Taking Charge: Government Ownership in a Complex Context. External Review ARTF', Oslo, December 2017.

137 Zuercher et al., Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States, p. 31.

138 Assumption #7.

139 Assumption #6.

140 Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*, p. 44

contractors were used to implement government programmes.[141] In South Sudan, UN agencies and NGOs have taken responsibility for large parts of service provision, with little government involvement. While this facilitated the delivery of services to the population in the short term, it also had a negative impact on strengthening and legitimising the government and threatened the sustainability of service delivery.

In the three selected countries, the impact of capacity building initiatives and government reforms were constrained by the high turnover of government staff. At high levels of government, political appointees regularly changed positions. At the operational level, attracting qualified staff was hampered by high salary disparities between positions in the government and international organisations.[142] As a result, capacity building programmes were rarely able to build reliable partnerships with government officials, and improvements in capacity and the operationalisation of reforms were often swept away by changes in key government staff.[143] A project promoting security sector reform in Mali, for example, had to constantly start from scratch due to constant changes in the leadership of the Ministry of Justice.[144]

Ongoing insecurity, power struggles and corruption, resulting in a lack of political will, also hindered reform and government capacity building.[145] As noted in the meta-review, in highly fragile states, political power often resides not in formal political institutions but in informal networks. An important implication is that the elites in these networks are not interested in reforms to the political system that would affect their access to power and resources. In South Sudan, most of the country's oil revenues have been spent on patronage networks, army salaries and civil servants.[146], [147] As a result, the effectiveness of good governance, decentralisation and anti-corruption programmes therefore tends to be low.[148] However, the meta-review identified a few pockets of success, mainly in technical, non-political activities at the sub-national level, such as education, rural development, and health.[149] Furthermore, field research in Mali and South Sudan showed that there is often a greater willingness to adopt reforms at the sub-national level, where local politicians are closer to their constituents.[150]

Impact evaluations from other countries have shown that strengthening government institutions through capacity building and institutional reform can contribute to better public service delivery (in terms of access, quality and reliability).[151] At the same time, however, these studies have also shown that while these programmes have been able to improve overall service delivery in fragile contexts, they have not been able to address inequalities and corruption in access to public services.[152]

3.1.5 Conflict resolution contributed to temporary reductions of violence

Supported activities and validity of the underlying assumptions
Another set of interventions supported through Dutch-funded projects and programmes aims to resolve conflicts within society and promote reconciliation. Activities can include support for peace negotiations between warring factions at the national level, as well as mediation between and within communities at the local level. One assumption underlying

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[141] Interviews; Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper', pp.21-22.

[142] Literature refers to an 'internal brain drain' from the public sector to international organisations. See for instance, Lemay-Hébert, N. et al., 'The internal brain drain: foreign aid, hiring practices, and international migration', *Disasters*, vol.44, no.4, October 2020.

[143] Interviews.

[144] Among others, clearly stated in DCAF project evaluation. See: D. Hendrickson, 'Evaluation of DCAF Project. Supporting Security Sector Reform and Governance in Mali', Conflict, Security and Development Group Department of War Studies – King's College London, 2016.

[145] Interviews, Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper', pp. 21-22.

[146] International Crisis Group, 'Oil or Nothing: Dealing with South Sudan's Bleeding Finances', Africa Report N°305, Brussels, International Crisis Group, 6 October 2021.

[147] Day et al., 'Assessing the Effectiveness of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)'.

[148] Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*, p. 43.

[149] Ibid. p. 46.

[150] Project analyses by Malian and South Sudanese consultants.

[151] P. Beramendi, O. Soomin and E. Wibbels, 'Final report: evaluation of the Local Government and Infrastructure Program', Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary, 2018; Chemin, M, 'The impact of the judiciary on entrepreneurship: evaluation of Pakistan's Access to Justice Programme', CIRPÉE Cahier de recherche/Working Paper 07-27, 2007.

[152] Beramendi, Soomin and Wibbels, 'Final report: evaluation of the Local Government and Infrastructure Program'; D. Killian and J. Agee, 'The contribution of legal awareness raising toward access to justice and stability in Afghanistan', 2014.

such interventions is that peacebuilding, mediation and reconciliation activities can lead to greater social cohesion between different societal groups and improve the social contract between the state and the people.[153] *We find that this assumption is true at the local level, but not at the national level.*

Another assumption is that improved social cohesion at the local level can lead to reduced intercommunal and intracommunal violence, and thus 'trickle up' and contribute to a more peaceful society at the national level. Conversely, peacebuilding and reconciliation at the national level can 'trickle down' and contribute to social cohesion at the local level.[154] *We find that this assumption is partially true. Activities focusing on conflict resolution at the local level have contributed to temporary reductions in violence, but the results achieved have been undermined by power struggles at the national level.*

Main findings from the case studies and literature

At the local level, the MFA has supported various organisations that have created or revitalised structures to promote peace or reconciliation.[155] Findings from in-country data collection in South Sudan and Mali suggest that some of these structures have been successful in facilitating peace processes in the communities. In Mopti, Mali, MFA-supported projects strengthened the capacity of communities and civil society organisations on peacebuilding issues, which led to interactions with local government in the preparation of local development plans. In South Sudan, the MFA supported various organisations that created or revitalised structures to promote peace or reconciliation. For example, a project in Torit established community action groups that effectively addressed community conflicts on issues such as theft or robbery.[156] The groups also contributed to several peace dialogues and peace initiatives. Another project supported the Inter Church Committee, which successfully reconciled host communities and returnees over land issues. A project in Bor set up community committees to resolve minor conflicts, such as marriage issues. These peacebuilding initiatives had a positive impact, though most were at the interpersonal or local level.

These findings are consistent with the results of an earlier IOB evaluation and with impact evaluations conducted in other countries, which show that peace education and conflict resolution support can have a limited impact on reducing violence and improving perceptions of security on a limited scale.[157], [158] However, the impact of these positive results on the wider security situation was limited; successful conflict negotiation and improved perceptions of security at the local level did not 'trickle up' to the (sub)national level.

In addition, the meta-review found that that many of the more successful interventions targeted conflicts *within* a community, rather than the more complex lines of conflict that run *between* communities and ethnic groups.[159]

The fieldwork conducted for this study in Mali and South Sudan revealed that the sustainability of these interventions is often limited. In several cases, increased insecurity, conflict or (internal) displacement led to the dissolution of the local peace structures. Furthermore, many local peace structures struggle to continue after project funding ends. Members of the peace structures were generally given small incentives to facilitate their work; after the external funding ended, many groups became inactive

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[153] Assumption #8

[154] Assumption #9

[155] These structures often have different names, such as community action groups, community security working groups, peace committees, conflict resolution committees, peace clubs.

[156] Similar findings arose from various existing evaluations. The evaluation of the Freedom from Fear project indicated that it contributed to a reduction in night robberies and youth gangs because supported youth clusters worked together with local authorities, See: R. MacLeod, P. Vernon and F. Karanàsou, 'Evaluation of the Freedom from Fear Strategic Partnership', Intrac, 2021.

[157] IOB, *Less Pretension, More Realism*.

[158] C. Blattman, A. Hartman and R. Blair, '[Can we teach peace and conflict resolution?](#) Results from a randomized evaluation of the Community Empowerment Program (CEP) in Liberia: a program to build peace, human rights, and civic participation', Policy Report 2011.2. Washington, DC: Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), 2011; K. Baldwin and S. Muyengwa, 'Impact evaluation of supporting traditional leaders and local structures to mitigate community-level conflict in Zimbabwe. Final Report', USAID, 2014; E.E. Atienzo, S.K Baxter and E. Kaltenthaler, 'Interventions to prevent youth violence in Latin America: a systematic review', *International Journal of Public Health*, vol. 62 no.1, 2017; Dawop, D.S. et al., '[Does peacebuilding work in the midst of conflict?](#) Impact evaluation of a peacebuilding program in Nigeria.' Oregon, Mercy Corps, 2019; Hartman, A.C., R.A. Blair and C. Blattman, '[Engineering informal institutions](#): long-run impacts of alternative dispute resolution on violence and property rights in Liberia', NBER Working Paper No. 24482. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), 2018.

[159] Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*.

because these incentives were no longer available. Studies from other countries demonstrate that peace education and conflict resolution can also have unintended effects, including an increase in social tensions and local disputes.[160]

Experience from South Africa, Rwanda and Sierra Leone shows that national peace negotiations and reconciliation can help to promote social cohesion.[161] However, this, requires a serious commitment from the political leadership of the country itself. In the three case studies, international support has had limited success in facilitating national-level peace processes. Rather than contributing to national processes with results 'trickling down' to the local level, elite power struggles at the national level have repeatedly had a negative impact on peace at the local level.

3.1.6 While support for civil society contributes to service delivery and advocacy for disadvantaged groups, civic space continues to shrink

Supported activities and validity of the underlying assumptions
Through programmes and projects, the Netherlands has contributed to interventions that focused on promoting civil society and civic space. This includes support to civil society organisations and fora, journalists and human rights activists. The aim is to expand civic space to allow for the free organisation and representation of different groups and constituencies. Such interventions are based on the assumption that external support for civil society can enhance the engagement between government institutions and citizens, and improve advocacy for people's needs, including those of minority and disadvantaged groups. This, in turn, should lead to improvements in legitimate governance and service delivery. [162] *We find that this assumption is partially true. Particularly at the local level, interventions have been able to improve engagement between government institutions and citizens. However, at the national level, there were no visible improvements in the three country cases, and the space for civil society continued to shrink.*

Main findings from the case studies and literature
The evaluation found several cases where the civil society was successful in lobbying and advocating for people's needs.[163] The literature suggests that pressure from civil society leaders can improve the quality of governance at the local level.[164] However, in the context of poorly functioning state institutions, this has mostly not led to the implementation of policies adopted as a result of NGO pressure. In South Sudan, most sub-national authorities were severely underfunded and, as a result, were unable to deliver services to the population that would have improved their legitimacy. Many international NGOs working in South Sudan were also unable to engage directly with government institutions as a result of donor restrictions. And despite support for civil society, our case studies show that relations with the state and civic space continue to deteriorate. In a context where international donors provide most of their support through UN channels and NGOs, international support for civil society that is critical of the government has at times triggered a negative response from the government. In both Mali and South Sudan, civic space has been shrinking during the period under evaluation, and politicians have called for more autonomy and taken a critical stance towards foreign donors. In South Sudan, the restricted civic space impeded the meaningful participation of many civil society organisations in the national peace process.[165]

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160 C. Blattman, A. Hartman and R. Blair, 'Can we teach peace and conflict resolution?'; Baldwin and Muyengwa, 'Impact evaluation of supporting traditional leaders'; Hartman, Blair and Blattman, 'Engineering informal institutions'.
161 See IOB, *Less Pretension, More Realism*, p. 47.
162 Assumption #10.
163 Project analyses by Malian and South Sudanese consultants.
164 Baldwin, K., S. Muyengwa and E. Mvukiyehe, 'Reforming village-level governance via horizontal pressure: evidence from an experiment in Zimbabwe', World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 7941, Washington, DC, World Bank, 2017.
165 Project analysis by South Sudanese consultants. See also e.g. W.R. Ginanjar, 'Civil Society and Peace: Local Civil Society Engagement in South Sudan's Peace Efforts', *Nation State: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 5, no.1, 2022.

Box 3   *Promoting gender equality*

Promoting gender equality is an important cross-cutting theme in Dutch development cooperation, and the Netherlands has supported several projects aimed at improving the position of women in the country cases. These projects had an impact at the local level. However, the greatest impact was seen in projects that aimed to provide tangible benefits to women. Projects hat promoted women's literacy or women's economic activities improved women's livelihoods.[166] Evaluations of MFA-funded projects show that women's participation in local governance bodies raised awareness of women's rights and that women beneficiaries perceived an increased space for participation. Furthermore, village savings and loan associations and small business support improved the position of women within their families.[167] In Afghanistan, the general improvements in service delivery also significantly increased women's and girls' access to services such as education and health.[168]

On the other hand, changing prevailing cultural norms about gender roles and relations proved more difficult. The meta-review concludes that while there have been results in terms of legislative change, it has been difficult to establish whether laws have been implemented and whether this has contributed to improved gender equality. For example, while donors pushed for new laws on gender quotas in parliament, or better protection for victims of gender-based violence (GBV), these institutional changes were often not translated into action. In other words, results at the output and intermediate outcome levels did not automatically translate into more ambitious objectives at the outcome and impact levels. The more ambitious the projects and the further away from the prevailing cultural norms the objectives were, the less likely they were to be achieved.[169] This is also in line with the findings from IOB's previous policy evaluation on gender, which showed that increasing gender equality is an arduous, long-term and multi-dimensional process.[170] The evaluation warned that supporting gender equality requires a firm dose of realism and modesty about what can actually be achieved.

An evaluation of an MFA-funded project in Afghanistan concluded that women's advocacy groups were not sustainable, and that the project's four-year time frame was too short to bring about structural change.[171] An evaluation of another project concluded that empowerment at the individual level did not help to reduce violence against women. Rather, there was evidence of some unintended consequences, including cases of backlash from men against women beneficiaries.[172]

See also section 3.2.4 on conflict-sensitive programming.

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166   R. Saraya and C. Zuercher, 'Meta-Review of Evaluations of Development Assistance to Afghanistan, 2008 – 2018. Part 5: Summary Report of Selected Evaluation Reports by Multilateral Organizations and NGO', Berlin, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 2020, pp.18-22, Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper', pp. 20.

167   MDF, 'Final evaluation of the FFP programme. Care Netherlands', Ede, 2016; IOD PARC, 'Final Evaluation of Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women (FLOW 2) 2016–2020', The Hague, MFA, 3 February 2022; J. Corboz et al., 'Women for Women International, FLOW project final evaluation report', 2021.

168   Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper', p.20; Shah, Sylvester and Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan. Part 2: Country-Level Evaluations, p.19; H. Popal and C. Zuercher, 'Meta-Review of Evaluations of Development Assistance to Afghanistan, 2008 – 2018. Part 3: Summary of Selected SIGAR Reports', Berlin, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 2020, pp.25.

169   Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*.

170   IOB, *Gender sense & sensitivity* - *Policy evaluation on women's rights and gender equality (2007-2014)*, The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2015.

171   MDF, 'Final evaluation of the FFP programme. Care Netherlands', Ede, 2016.

172   IOD PARC, 'Final Evaluation of FLOW 2'; Corboz et al., 'FLOW project final evaluation report'.

3.1.7 Results contributing to the delivery of social services did not lead to an improved social contract

Supported activities and validity of the underlying assumptions
The Netherlands also supported activities and interventions aimed at improving the delivery of social services such as healthcare, education and basic infrastructure. This was done through direct service delivery by international organisations and NGOs, or through capacity building and support to government institutions.[173] One assumption underlying such interventions in fragile and conflict-affected settings is that improved service delivery by the state will generate a 'peace dividend',[174] thereby improving trust in society and strengthening the social contract between the state and citizens.[175] We find that the interventions are effective in improving service delivery, but due to the limited involvement of the government in the country cases, the impact on the 'social contract' or the level of trust between the state and citizens is very small and limited to the local level.

Main findings from the case studies and literature
With the restructuring of Dutch development cooperation in 2010, primary education and basic health were put on the back burner and large (sectoral) programmes in these sectors were phased out.[176] Since then, only a small part of Dutch development cooperation in fragile contexts has been allocated to basic health and primary education.[177]

In Afghanistan, the Netherlands also funded health and education service delivery through the ARTF. Through this trust fund, the MFA helped to improve access to education, for both boys and girls.[178] While the ARTF achieved impressive results at the output level, in terms of schools built and increased enrolment, the results at the outcome level, such as the quality of education, remained poor.[179] Furthermore, the US Special Inspector General for the Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported high levels of absenteeism and found that the enrolment figures included 'ghost students' and 'ghost teachers'.[180] The MFA also supported a project that focused on community-based education, which increased access to education and enrolment in remote areas.[181] Finally, since 2011, the Netherlands has supported the National Agriculture Education College (NAEC), which trained Afghans to teach in agricultural schools and improved curricula for agricultural education.

The meta-review found that, in general, interventions in social sectors such as health and education achieved positive results in the three case study countries.[182] Impact evaluations from other countries also show that improved service delivery can have a positive impact on human development and security.[183] Improved service delivery can change people's attitudes towards government institutions,

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[173] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', pp. 30-32 and p. 40; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023.

[174] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde'.

[175] Assumption #11.

[176] IOB, *The gaps left behind: An evaluation of the impact of ending aid*, The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2016.

[177] Support to basic education programmes in in Mali, South Sudan and Afghanistan accounted for about 1%, 2% and 4% of the total Dutch expenditure in these countries, respectively. Support to health and SRHR was about 4% in South Sudan and 2% in Afghanistan. This does not include indirect support through the ARTF in Afghanistan. In Mali, SRHR was among the policy priorities and about 13% of Dutch ODA was allocated to SRHR and health.

[178] Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper', p. 20.

[179] Shah, Sylvester and Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan. Part 2: Country-Level Evaluations, p.27.

[180] Popal and Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan. Part 3: SIGAR', p.15; See also, SIGAR, 'Primary and Secondary Education in Afghanistan: Comprehensive Assessments Needed to Determine the Progress and Effectiveness of Over $759 Million in DOD, State, and USAID Programs', 16-32-AR, April 2016; SIGAR, 'Review: Schools in Herat Province', 17-12-SP, November 2016; SIGAR, 'Review: Schools in Faryab Province', 18-17-SP, December 2017; SIGAR, 'Schools in Kabul Province, Afghanistan: Observations From Site Visits at 24 Schools', 18-31-SP, February 2018; SIGAR, 'Review: Schools in Kunduz Province', 18-40-SP, April 2018; SIGAR, 'Schools In Parwan Province, Afghanistan: Observations From Site Visits At 14 Schools', 18-67-SP, August 2018.

[181] Afghanistan Center for Training and Development (ACTD), End of Project Evaluation of Partnership for Peace, November 2016

[182] Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*.

[183] Atienzo, Baxter, and Kaltenthaler, 'Interventions to prevent youth violence in Latin America'; Blattman, C. et al., 'Hotspot interventions at scale: the direct and spillover effects of policing and city services on crime in Bogotá', 3ie Impact Evaluation Report 88. New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), 2018; Tesfaye, B. et al., '"If youth are given the chance": effects of education and civic engagement on Somali youth support of political violence', Washington DC, Mercy Corps, 2018.

making them more likely to use of government services instead of services provided by non-state actors.[184] In other words, improved service delivery by the state can increase trust in state institutions and an improved social contract. That said, the evidence supporting the social contract assumption is limited to people's perceptions of local government actors; improved service delivery did not significantly affect people's trust in the national government.

Furthermore, particularly in South Sudan and Afghanistan, support for social services has relied on continued donor funding and is largely delivered through UN agencies, NGOs and humanitarian organisations. In addition, engagement with the government of South Sudan is a red flag for many donors, and the Netherlands stopped working directly with the government again in 2016. The international community continues to deliver services to the population without involving the government. The results achieved are therefore not sustainable without continued external support. Such a parallel system of service delivery will not improve people's trust in existing government structures and will collapse if donors leave the country.

3.1.8 Improved livelihoods and resilience as a result of economic programmes did not bring about wider development

Supported activities and validity of the underlying assumptions
The Netherlands contributed to various interventions aimed at promoting economic development. These included support for agribusiness, business development, vocational training or the creation and promotion of job opportunities. The MFA considered a lack of jobs and economic opportunities as a cause of conflict and irregular migration.[185, 186] Furthermore, competition for scarce resources such as land and water could lead to violent conflict.[187] Thus, by improving economic opportunities and creating jobs, the ministry aimed to reduce the root causes of conflict and migration. An important assumption underlying these activities is that economic development and a more equal distribution of opportunities can indeed reduce tensions over scarce resources and thus reduce the underlying causes of conflict.[188] We find that this assumption is partially true. Development programmes supported by the Netherlands have helped to improve livelihoods and enhance the resilience of individuals. While this evaluation could not confirm whether these activities had an impact on the level of conflict and security, they did target underlying drivers of conflict. However, the positive results at the local and individual level did not have an impact on wider development, and therefore the mitigating effect on the root causes of conflict remained limited.

Main findings from the case studies and literature
Several MFA-funded projects contributed to rural development and improved beneficiaries' agriculture and business skills. In Mali, projects promoted food production and income generation, thereby contributing to the underlying drivers of violence, such as the lack of social and economic opportunities. In Mopti, Mali, the projects that were visited had effectively improved the onion and fish value chains as well as actors' access to quality inputs in this region's sectors. In the same area, another project increased income-generating activities and food production through the improved use of water and seeds. It also supported conflict resolution activities and improved water resource management through the signing of conventions and peace agreements. In South Sudan, several tangible results have also been achieved, albeit often at a very local level. For example, the rehabilitation of feeder roads in Eastern Equatoria helped to improve access to markets for farmers in Magwi. A project in Bor distributed farming inputs such as seeds, fertilizer and farming tools, helping beneficiaries to become more self-reliant and improve their livelihoods. In a rehabilitated vocational training centre in Torit, students received training in occupations such as beekeeping and carpentry.

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184 Acemoglu, D., et al., 'Trust in state and non-state actors: evidence from dispute resolution in Pakistan', NBER Working Paper No. 24611, Cambridge, MA, National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), 2018.
185 See, for instance, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', p. 19, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is', p. 37
186 A literature study by IOB showed that a lack of employment opportunities is only one of the many factors that contribute to people's decision to migrate, and that promoting employment only can only have a limited impact. Furthermore, the study also showed that a country's development generally does not directly reduce emigration, but that this initially actually stimulates emigration. See, IOB, *Ontwikkeling en migratie*.
187 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', p. 19; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023.
188 Assumption #12.

These findings are consistent with those of the meta-review, which concluded that rural development interventions such as rural credit, cash and in-kind transfers, saving associations, introduction of new crops and irrigation projects were all were reasonably effective.[189]

The project results at the local and individual level did not result in sustainable economic development. Despite achieving concrete outputs and intermediate outcomes, rural development interventions aimed at increasing productivity beyond subsistence farming were rarely successful.[190] The achieved results generally remained at the local or individual level and rarely 'trickled up' beyond the direct beneficiaries to achieve a positive impact on the wider community. The scale of many of the supported programmes and projects was relatively modest, especially considering the enormous needs in the country. The vocational training centres of the youth employment programme in South Sudan, for example helped over 2,000 unemployed youth in various provinces to acquire vocational and entrepreneurial skills. The mid-term review of that programme and the in-country data collection conducted for this evaluation revealed, however, that the results at the outcome were modest, as only a fraction of the persons trained now have part-time or full-time work.[191, 192] While such programmes achieve tangible results for the direct beneficiaries, the programme results remain a drop in the ocean compared to the enormous needs for jobs and skills trainings across the country.

Similarly, various supported organisations trained farmers in good agronomic practices and aimed to improve their links to the market. This benefited individual farmers, but often failed to deliver (in)direct benefits to the wider community. An evaluation of a project aimed to promote employment in Afghanistan also found that it was fairly effective at achieving output-level targets, such as training, but fell short on the majority of the outcome-level indicators, such as job creation and enterprise growth targets.[193] Similar observations can be made for larger programmes, such as the ARTF: the meta-review showed that this trust fund helped to improve livelihoods and strengthen coping mechanisms, but it did lead to sustainable economic development and growth that would have translated into more jobs or income opportunities – a root cause of conflict.[194] These findings correspond with observations by MFA staff.

3.1.9   Humanitarian assistance has been effective in alleviating suffering

Supported activities
The Netherlands has made substantial contributions to humanitarian assistance through Dutch NGOs in the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UN agencies. In Afghanistan and South Sudan, the Netherlands supported joint responses by the DRA and UN country-based pooled funds. A share of unearmarked contributions to UN agencies and the ICRC has supported humanitarian assistance in Mali.

Main findings from the case studies and literature
The meta-review concludes that humanitarian assistance has been relatively effective in alleviating human suffering,[195] a conclusion that is consistent with IOB's recent evaluation on humanitarian assistance.[196] Evaluations of the DRA's South Sudan Joint Response also indicate that it has been effective and achieved the intended objectives: helping to save lives and alleviate suffering.[197] Despite these positive achievements in the short term, many evaluations of humanitarian programmes found that the impact on long(er) term resilience was relatively small. When humanitarian programmes also focused on building people's resilience, beneficiaries generally valued the assets they received, but progress in

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189   Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*.
190   Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*.
191   Gomez and Wandaloo, 'Youth Employment and Empowerment through Private Sector and Value Chain Development MTE', Final report, UNDP, 2022.
192   Project analysis by South Sudanese consultants.
193   Aleph Strategies, 'Endline Evaluation of the Bright Future Programme', Afghanistan, Cordaid, 2022.
194   Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper', p. 21.
195   This conclusion is based on 7 evaluation reports and 6 country and organisation studies on humanitarian assistance in South Sudan
196   IOB, *Trust, risk and learn. Humanitarian Assistance Given by The Netherlands – Funding and Diplomacy 2015-2021*, The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2022.
197   M. Spoelder et al., 'Final Evaluation of the Joint Response for South Sudan under the Dutch Relief Alliance 2015', Nairobi, MDF, June 2016; M. de Rijck and M. Spoelder, 'Evaluation of the South Sudan Joint Response – Phase 3', Nairobi, MDF, 2018; L. Bell, 'SSJR 2018 Final Evaluation', March 2019; Action Against Hunger, 'Evaluation of South Sudan Joint Response 2019-2021', UK, 2022.

enhancing market access and value chains was mostly limited.[198] The aim is to overcome this lack of longer-term effectiveness by linking humanitarian assistance with development and peacebuilding. This evaluation analyses this connection, often referred to as the 'triple nexus', in section 3.3.4.

3.2 How relevant are Dutch-supported interventions for fragile contexts?

The OECD-DAC defines relevance as the extent to which the intervention responds to the needs, policies and priorities of beneficiaries and partners on the ground, and continues to do so when circumstances change. This means that the objectives and design of the intervention are sensitive to the economic, environmental, equity, social, political and capacity conditions in which it is implemented.[199] Several policy documents mention the specific added value of Dutch efforts and stress the need for contextual analyses to enable context-specific programming.[200], [201] As conflict and fragile contexts are unpredictable and constantly in flux, a degree of flexibility and adaptability is required.[202] An important assumption underlying Dutch policy is that adaptive programming and flexibility can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Dutch foreign policy and development assistance in fragile and conflict-affected settings.[203] We find this assumption to be true. The Netherlands is a flexible donor, which has allowed for efficient programming by Dutch funded partners.

Furthermore, policy documents state that interventions should be conflict-sensitive.[204] One assumption underlying Dutch policy is that in order to promote stability and security, the interventions financed by the MFA should actually focus on the key drivers of conflict and fragility.[205] This evaluation finds that Dutch-funded interventions are not sufficiently aligned with the local context. In the case studies, we found a lack of context-specific strategies accompanied by a critical reflection on key assumptions underlying the work in these countries. The multiannual country strategies do not present a clear and elaborate operationalisation of the links between high-level policy objectives and the proposed activities and interventions. Furthermore, there was insufficient attention for conflict-sensitive programming and the potential negative side effects of development assistance ('do no harm').

Another assumption that increasingly underpins Dutch policy in conflict-affected and fragile settings is that localisation of development and humanitarian programmes helps to better address the needs and priorities of affected populations.[206] Localisation is the process of increasingly transferring ownership and decision-making in development and humanitarian programmes to local actors. Although steps are being taken, we found that the involvement of local ownership is often limited. While this assumption may be valid, the lack of concrete evidence does not allow us to draw conclusions on the extent to which localisation contributes to better responding to the needs and priorities of affected populations.

3.2.1 The Netherlands is a flexible donor that allows for adaptive programming by implementing organisations

In the case studies, international organisations and NGOs generally perceived the MFA as a flexible and accessible donor. Many partners appreciated the flexibility to adapt projects when the context required it. The MFA thus enabled adaptive programming by its partners. Partner organisations generally found Dutch policy staff, particularly at the embassy level, to be willing to think actively with them and to adapt when necessary. In Mali, for example, the requirements for mid-term project evaluations also facilitated the readjustment of certain interventions in the face of with security and pandemic challenges. Implementing partners also appreciated the fact that, compared to other donors, the Netherlands relatively often provided considerable and multiannual funding, which facilitated the efficient longer-term planning and funding of programmes.

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198 Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*.
199 See OECD-DAC, *Evaluation criteria*, 2023.
200 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', p. 97; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is'.
201 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023.
202 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is', pp. 35 and 40, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023.
203 Assumption #18.
204 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', p. 43; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is', p.55; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015, p. 14; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2018, p. 10; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023.
205 Assumption #13.
206 Assumption #14.

3.2.2   Priorities are not always sufficiently aligned with the local context

Not all of the supported programmes targeted the key drivers of conflict and instability. The overall policy objective was to help address the root causes of violent conflict, terrorism, irregular migration and poverty.[207] However, the various policy documents did not clearly define what these root causes actually were or how causes and consequences were linked. For example, the multiannual country strategies for Afghanistan did not make explicit the key assumptions underlying the choices for certain policies and programmes. In particular, the most recent strategy (2019-2022) set an ambitious overall objective without making explicit how the selected activities would contribute to this objective.[208]

In Mali, the multiannual regional strategy for the Sahel referred to the GBVS, the policy framework for development cooperation and foreign trade 'Investing in Global Prospects', and the Comprehensive Agenda on Migration.[209] However, the strategy did not prioritise one over the other or clarify how the three were tied together operationally. As a result, there was no unified political-strategic objective for Dutch engagement in the Sahel region – allowing the various stakeholders involved to formulate their own interpretations. The 'Theory of Change' underlying the strategy indicated that 'a strengthened social contract between governments and the population will lead to more social cohesion, socio-economic perspective and security and as a consequence decrease conflict, violent extremism, cross-border organised crime and irregular migration'[210] However, the document did not explain how activities could help to strengthen the social contract and did not make these assumptions explicit.

Ideally, the multiannual strategies at country level (MACS) allow policymakers to clearly analyse and define the key drivers of conflict and fragility, and set country-specific policy priorities accordingly. In practice, there were institutional barriers in the way as different thematic departments within the MFA have their own budget and policy priorities – for which they are held accountable by parliament. This limits the scope for thematic departments to align their programming with an integrated and context-specific strategy, and creates an incentive to push for their particular priorities to be included in the MACS. Thematic budgets incentivise spending at The Hague level rather than at the embassy level. The MACS is therefore often the culmination of thematically driven policy development. Many of the programmes are largely driven by priorities in at HQ level in The Hague, rather than being based on an assessment of the context and needs in a particular country. When thematic budgets are delegated to embassies, programmes are generally better integrated into a context-specific strategy. This requires decision-making authority to be delegated to embassies and sufficient staff capacity at the embassy to manage the delegated funds adequately.

Several factors hinder a critical reflection on strategies, objectives and results. As discussed above, many of the supported programmes and projects were essentially supply-driven by Dutch policy. This was particularly the case for Afghanistan, where the political decision that the Netherlands would remain active in Afghanistan resulted in a political desire to showcase the results of Dutch interventions in the country.[211], [212] Domestic preferences in the Netherlands – of political parties, NGOs, interest groups, etc. – influenced the programmes and objectives for Afghanistan, even though these were sometimes unrealistic in the Afghan context.[213] Intervening in a fragile and conflict-affected context with (unrealistic) high

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[207] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is'.

[208] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2019-2022'.

[209] See Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2019-2022' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2019), p.3. See also Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Dutch efforts in the Sahel', March 2020, which under the heading 'Why the Netherlands invests in the Sahel' refers to the three policy notes, stating that these offered the basis for an enhanced partnership with the Sahel region, based on an integrated approach (p. 8). Subsequently, the policy notes are each 'translated' to the Sahel region, but the brochure does not make clear what the overarching goal of Dutch engagement in the region is.

[210] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2019-2022', p. 21.

[211] Our findings are consistent with those presented in the KUNO evaluation, which highlighted that this positive narrative was also closely related to the fact that the Netherlands had (military) missions in Afghanistan. Once parliament gave the green light, the political leaders were in constant need of positive stories that show the incremental progress. See, P. Heintze and J. Kamminga, *Balanceren tussen ambitie en wensdenken. Leren van 20 jaar Nederlandse inzet in Afghanistan*. KUNO, 2023.

[212] These findings are also consistent with the IOB evaluation of MINUSMA, which concluded that the ministries and civil servants involved had the tendency to present a positive image about the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA, while reporting about challenges was limited.

[213] Similar findings were found in: IOB, *Op zoek naar draagvlak* and IOB, *Tussen Wens en Werkelijkheid*.

ambitions that were defined elsewhere automatically carried the risk that the intended results, especially at the outcome and impact level, would not be achieved. There was also a risk that support would fall into the wrong hands, unintentionally supporting actors who might violate human rights or spread corruption. Intervening in fragile contexts therefore requires a certain risk appetite that did not exist in practice.[214] The anticipation of negative media coverage or critical questions in the Dutch parliament impeded an open flow of information about the wider context and the progress of the programmes implemented. Several MFA policy staff indicated that a deterioration in the security situation or a lack of results in the supported programmes could be misinterpreted by parliament as failure. According to respondents, this could create a difficult situation for the minister. There was therefore a reluctance in the higher echelons of the MFA to share realistic reflections on the lack of success of the international interventions and the deteriorating situation on the ground.[215] In its evaluation of the Dutch contribution to the Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan and the MINUSMA mission in Mali, IOB similarly concluded that the ministries involved tended to present a positive picture about the Dutch contribution, while the situation on the ground showed a different – often much bleaker - picture.[216]

A critical reflection on objectives and results was also complicated by limitations in the information and monitoring position and a general lack of capacity at the embassies. Short contracts, R&R and staff rotation limited the capacity and retention of knowledge at embassies. As a result, the MFA was often relatively dependent on unverified information provided by the implementing partners themselves. Competition for limited funding creates incentives for implementing partners to showcase positive results. Implementing partners often committed themselves to (overly) ambitious project results within short time frames. In addition, lead organisations often work with several local contract partners, and may not always have the necessary access to information themselves.[217]

3.2.3   Localisation: the inclusion of local ownership remains challenging

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been stressing the need to take better account of local actors and their needs in programming for at least two decades.[218] More recently, this is being referred to as 'localisation'.[219] Several Dutch-supported NGOs have taken steps to improve local ownership and decision-making. Local and national organisations have been increasingly involved in programme development, and country offices with national staff have grown in size and responsibility.

Nevertheless, there are still many challenges in putting localisation into practice.[220] The most notable challenge has been the chain of implementation; the ministry often worked through UN agencies and international NGOs because of their capacity to handle large funds, their ability to implement activities at scale, and their compliance with reporting and auditing requirements. These organisations generally

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214 While the most recent BHOS policy note does mention that the MFA is willing to take calculated risks, this evaluation finds that in practice the MFA is very risk averse. See, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is', p. 40.

215 As an illustrative example, one respondent recalled that a draft report on Afghanistan to parliament mentioned that the security situation was improving. After this statement was challenged by the respondent with figures showing that civilian casualties were increasing, indicating that the security situation was deteriorating, it was changed to say that the security situation was 'mixed'. Another respondent said: 'what can you say about war? Dilemmas, risks, security, integrity of the Afghan government. How much do you explain? There is a fear that if you are too difficult, parliament will say: we don't want to do this anymore.' And other respondents remarked that a possible Taliban takeover had been considered, but that wishful thinking had prevailed in policy and external communication, and that critical voices were side-lined.

216 IOB, *Een missie in een missie.*

217 Similar findings were found in: IOB, *Less Pretension, More Realism.*

218 See, for example, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wederopbouw na conflict'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, SRoL ToC, 2023.

219 According to Barbelet and her colleagues, there is no single definition of localisation and, as indicated above, the meaning and politics of this concept have been contested. Our understanding of localisation have evolved since the 2016 WHS. There is now widespread recognition in the literature that what 'successful localisation' or 'locally-led response' looks like is highly contextual. One influential proposition is the OECD's conceptualisation of 'localising humanitarian response' as 'a process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the leadership by local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations and to prepare national actors for future humanitarian responses'. V. Barbelet et al., 'Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation', HPG literature review. London: ODI, 2021.

220 For more on localisation, see also IOB, *Trust, risk and learn*, pp. 41-44 and 70.

subcontract the implementation of actual project activities to national or local organisations, which affects the extent to which local organisations and the communities and beneficiaries can have a say in project objectives and approaches. However, true delegation of responsibilities to the local level did not occur regularly due to the limited risk appetite of the MFA, which resulted in strict reporting and auditing requirements for implementing organisations. The transfer of risk to international implementing partners created a disincentive for them to delegate responsibility and control to their local partners. Our field research revealed that many national organisations that were partners in larger consortia were still not actively involved in designing and managing the projects and were often not considered as equal partners. A similar pattern also emerged in the relationship between national NGOs and their local counterparts (civil society organisations/CSOs) or the local population. According to many local CSOs, there was little transparency about the design, time frames and budgets of the broader programmes that they were contracted to implement.

An additional challenge in terms of localisation was that many local CSOs in South Sudan are organised along ethnic lines and primarily serve their own constituencies. Effective and conflict-sensitive engagement with these organisations at the local level therefore requires the MFA and its international partners (UN, INGOs, etc.) to have a much more thorough understanding of the local context than is currently the case.

Another interesting conclusion about localisation is that the discussions and operationalisation of localisation have focused primarily on engaging and empowering local and national civil society actors, but much less on involving local government structures and governance, even though this could reinforce the social contract between government and citizens, which was ultimately one of the objectives of the MFA. Indeed, this imbalance in support risks contributing to a capacity gap between civil society actors on the one hand, and government actors on the other.

3.2.4   Insufficient attention for unintended effects and conflict-sensitive programming

Many policy documents mentioned that conflict sensitivity was at the heart of Dutch policy in fragile and conflict-affected settings.[221] This meant ensuring that interventions do not unintentionally create conflict or contribute to ongoing conflict. In practice, however, not enough attention was paid to conflict-sensitive programming and, more generally, to the unintended negative effects of development cooperation. While much attention was paid to the potential financial and reputational risks for the Netherlands, much less attention was paid to the negative side effects of the programmes in recipient countries.

Programme proposals and inception reports often included a conflict sensitivity analysis and a risk assessment. During implementation, however, conflict sensitivity was rarely monitored. The meta-review also found that the concept of 'do no harm' was rarely addressed in project design or evaluations.[222] Yet the risk is real: drawing on several evaluations and academic literature, the meta-review argued that in insecure areas, aid can further exacerbate destabilisation and violence.[223]

For example, the field research in Mali found that a project near Mopti targeted mostly members of the Dogon community to the detriment of members of the Fulani community, exacerbating tensions between the two groups. In another locality, this project resulted in violence within the Dogon community over the management of water points.[224] Also in South Sudan, fieldwork showed that the selections of CSOs and beneficiaries may have exacerbated existing sentiments of mistrust among the population, as some local implementing organisations were accused of nepotism and discrimination.[225] There were some best practices, however. For example, the evaluation of DCA's Humanitarian Mine

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[221] See Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, SRoL ToC, 2023.

[222] Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*, p. 46.

[223] C. Zuercher et al., 'Meta-Review of Evaluations of Development Assistance to Afghanistan, 2008 – 2018. Part 1: Systematic Review of Impact Evaluations', Berlin, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 2020, p. 18; J. Böhnke and C. Zuercher, 'Aid, minds and hearts: The impact of aid in conflict zones,' *Conflict Management And Peace Science*, vol. 30 no .5, 2013; Fishstein, P. and A. Wilder, 'Winning hearts and minds? Examining the relationship between aid and security in Afghanistan', Feinstein International Center, 2012; S. Gordon, 'Winning hearts and minds? Examining the relationship between aid and security in Afghanistan's Helmand Province', Feinstein International Center, 2011; SIGAR, 'Stabilization: Lessons from the U.S. experience in Afghanistan. Special Inspector General of Afghanistan Reconstruction', 18-48-LL, May 2018.

[224] Project analysis by Malian consultants.

[225] Project analysis by South Sudanese consultants.

Action & Cluster Munition Programme found that DCA ensured that its demining staff was accepted by community members on the basis of their ethnicity, while also complying with government demands to use ex-combatants.[226]

Issues of conflict-sensitivity and unintended effects go beyond the project level. The presence of the international community in fragile contexts as a whole can also have negative effects on the political economy of the conflict. There is ample evidence that the vast amounts of development assistance in Afghanistan have contributed to corruption, thereby exacerbating the problems it was trying to resolve.[227] In in all three country cases, the presence of a relatively large international development sector had unintended negative effects on the capacity and legitimacy of the government. The salaries of UN agencies and NGOs are often much higher than those of government officials. In South Sudan, the salaries of drivers working for NGOs were higher than those of government ministers. The resulting 'brain drain' to the humanitarian and development sectors can further undermine state capacity, making it more difficult to build institutions and strengthen the social contract between the state and the population.

When national governments in fragile contexts failed to provide basic services to their populations, humanitarian and development assistance tried to fil the gap. In South Sudan in particular, but also in Afghanistan, this has led to a completely parallel system of service delivery. The international community delivers services to the South Sudanese population without interference from the government.[228] Not surprisingly, the South Sudanese Ministry of Finance and Planning had very limited information on donors' programmes,[229] and our fieldwork indicated that line ministries at the state level in particular were often unaware of the programmes and projects implemented by donors and (I)NGOs in their region.[230] There is no strategy in place for the government to take over, and the current parallel system will ultimately be unsustainable without the involvement of (local) authorities. Meanwhile, these parallel systems continue to undermine the legitimacy of the government, which conflicts with the MFA's intention to strengthen the social contract between the government and the population. At the same time, the presence of humanitarian assistance and development assistance has itself become part of the political economy of conflict in South Sudan, as powerful elites compete for control over the opportunities that foreign assistance provides. These include direct access to aid benefits, but also local jobs and contracts for their constituencies, and opportunities for taxation.[231] For example, warring parties compete to have more people under their control, partly because this brings in more humanitarian supplies.[232]

While MFA staff and implementing organisations occasionally discussed the unintended negative effects of their programmes, these discussions never led to changes in policy and implementation. For larger trust funds, MFA staff generally assumed that the implementing organisations would monitor conflict sensitivity, whereas the implementing organisations pointed to the steering role of donors and expected conflict sensitivity to be addressed in steering committee meetings. In addition, the multiannual country strategies did not adequately assess conflict sensitivity. The multiannual strategy for Mali promoted increased agricultural expansion, but failed to take into account that the expansion of arable land is at the root of increased resource competition.[233] The multiannual strategy for South Sudan proposed area-based programming in what it referred to as 'hubs of stability', without considering that this

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[226] Tana Copenhagen, '[Evaluation of DCA Humanitarian Mine Action & Cluster Munition 2016-2020 programme](#)'.

[227] SIGAR, '[What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction](#)', SIGAR 21-46-LL, August 2021.

[228] This is recognised in the Revised National Development Strategy (2021-2024), which indicates that most social protection and education activities in the country are being paid for with donor contributions. See: Republic of South Sudan, '[Consolidate Peace, Stabilize the Economy. The Revised National Development Strategy for South Sudan – 2021-2024](#)', Juba, Republic of South Sudan, 2022.

[229] The South Sudanese Revised National Development Strategy (2021-2024) stated that there is no consolidated information about the funds received in the country nor regarding the specific programmes and projects through which they are spent. See: Republic of South Sudan, '[Consolidate Peace, Stabilize the Economy](#)'.

[230] Overall analysis South Sudanese consultants.

[231] J. Craze, '[Displacement, Access, and Conflict in South Sudan: A longitudinal perspective](#)', Juba, Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF), May 2018; J. Craze and A. Luedke, '[South Sudan: Why Humanitarians Should Stop Hiding Behind Impartiality](#)', *The New Humanitarian*, Geneva, 22 August 2022; H. Barry, '[Starving Out the Enemy: Withholding food aid as a tactic of war in South Sudan](#)', *Mapping Politics*, vol. 8, no. 2, August 2017.

[232] D. Deng (ed.), '[The Politics of Humanitarianism: Perspectives from South Sudan](#)', London, London School of Economics, 2018, p. 12.

[233] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2019-2022'.

would result in support for areas under the control of one party to the conflict.[234] Although the MFA's most recent multiannual strategies (2023–2026) devote explicit attention to conflict sensitivity, the operationalisation is more elaborate in some countries than in others.

3.3 How coherent are the different interventions supported by the Netherlands?

In most fragile and conflict-affected contexts, several actors were active. In all country cases, the Dutch contributions were substantial as a fraction of the total Dutch expenditure and staff deployed, but a much smaller fraction of the overall assistance provided by the international community. The Netherlands actively sought to coordinate its efforts with other stakeholders in the same area.[235] The underlying assumption was that this would increase the effectiveness of interventions.[236] Although we agree that coordination can reduce duplication, our case studies show that coordination often remains challenging in practice. Where the MFA was able to coordinate between different projects, embassies generally played a key role. Ambitions to link interventions from different sectors under the auspices of an 'integrated 3D approach' or the 'triple nexus' have not materialised in practice.

3.3.1 Donor coordination remains challenging

The embassies of the three countries all actively sought to promote donor coordination, for instance by chairing regular donor meetings on issues relevant to Dutch policy. For example, in Mali the embassy sought synergies with international partners through donor coordination groups, such as the EU Heads of Mission meetings, the Groupe Exécutif de Coopération, the Cadre stratégique pour la Relance Économique et Durable, and the Team Europe Initiatives.[237] An important challenge for the donor meetings was to move beyond the exchange of information to real collaboration. Proactive cooperation and division of tasks was often hampered by decisions at donor headquarters on priorities, time frames and funding. Furthermore, there was often no agreement on strategic priorities, programming or a joint conflict analysis. This also limited the extent to which the Netherlands could coordinate its activities. Nevertheless, there were several examples where the Netherlands actively cooperated with like-minded countries in co-funding programmes or issuing joint policy statements. This was particularly the case where the Dutch embassy and partner embassies had aligned priorities and where funding decisions could be taken at the embassy level.

Donor coordination can also be facilitated through multi-donor trust funds. In Afghanistan, most large donors channelled much of their funding through the ARTF, which acted as an important mechanism for aid coordination. An internal World Bank evaluation stated that the ARTF was a valuable alternative to individually managed projects.[238] Donors themselves also confirmed that the ARTF improved harmonisation and coordination of aid.[239] Allocating Dutch funds to these trust funds therefore contributed to a coordinated donor response in Afghanistan.

At the same time, large multi-donor trust funds can create a large bureaucracy that hinders flexibility. The effectiveness of the steering groups and management of the trust funds was hampered by donors trying to pursue different priorities.[240] For example, one of the key issues that affected LOTFA's performance was the fact that donors had different interests in when, and under what conditions, the payroll system set up by the programme should be transferred to the Ministry of Interior Affairs.[241] Furthermore, large trust funds and often struggle to connect at the grassroots level. This points to a tension between the ambition to promote donor coordination on the one hand, and the ambition to connect with context-specific needs at the grassroots level on the other.

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234 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS South Sudan 2019-2022'.
235 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie', p. 15; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', p. 29; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is', p. 38
236 Assumption #15.
237 Interviews.
238 T. Haque and C. Sassif, 'Evaluation of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. Recurrent and Capital Cost Operation', Washinton DC, World Bank 2021.
239 Shah, Sylvester and Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan. Part 2: Country-Level Evaluations'.
240 Interviews.
241 R.H. Langan and T. Nasary, (2018) 'Mid-term Evaluation of the LOTFA-SPM Project', UNDP, 18 March 2018.

3.3.2 Embassies promote coherence between Dutch-funded activities

Embassies have played a crucial role in promoting coherence between different development programmes funded by the MFA. Particularly at the embassy level, there have been notable efforts to link different projects and support coherent programmes. In Mali, for example, the SRoL focal point organised regular meetings between project implementers to enhance the coherence and cooperation between projects. Embassy focal points and other staff in Mali also sought to engage multiple/higher levels of government to increase the policy salience of SRoL projects. Many challenges in Mali related mainly to coherence between the ministry in The Hague and the embassy in Bamako. There were also some exceptions, particularly when a project was aligned with the country strategy and when the embassy had expertise and capacity on the subject.

Generally, multi-country projects funded directly by headquarters were difficult for embassies to manage. Limited staff capacity was the main constraint on the embassy's ability to focus on these projects and programmes.[242] In Mali, this was particularly evident in projects targeting migration. The Dutch cabinet identified Mali as a priority country in the area of migration, as reflected in the regional priorities for the Sahel. This priority was evident in the funding of various programmes implemented by Dutch, Malian and international actors on migration management. However, these thematic interventions on migration were treated as stand-alone and not effectively integrated with other projects in the embassy portfolio. As the bulk of Dutch migration programming is centrally managed in The Hague, embassy staff have little scope to align these interventions with other existing programming in Mali.[243]

In South Sudan, the embassy sought to address fragmentation by encouraging its partners to work in confined geographical areas ('hubs of stability'). This was intended to increase the focus and create synergies between supported activities. However, at the level of these hubs, there was no concrete strategy for linking the different partner activities, and the embassy did not actively encourage coordination. As a result, there were several individual stand-alone projects in the same geographical area, but with little synergy. At times, the lack of coordination led to inefficiency and duplication. For example, the MFA directly funded an organisation from The Hague to support the capacity of the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) departments in South Sudan. At the same time, however, the embassy was supporting a UN agency to also implement a large WASH programme in the same area. The two programmes had different approaches and did not actively cooperate on the ground. There were also coordination problems between activities funded directly from headquarters. A centrally-funded NGO working to establish peace committees and community dialogues in South Sudan found itself implementing these activities in the same area where two other MFA-funded organisations were undertaking similar, albeit stand-alone, activities.

3.3.3 The integrated approach was not always operationalised in practice

Dutch policy is based on the problem analysis that fragility and conflict are complex and multidimensional, and therefore require a multidisciplinary response. For this reason, the integrated approach has been one of the guiding principles of Dutch foreign policy for the past two decades.[244] It was based on the assumption that the different instruments of Dutch foreign policy – diplomacy, development cooperation, defence and justice – could complement and reinforce each other.[245] In theory, the objectives of diplomacy, development and defence activities should be aligned towards the common goal of promoting stability and security. This objective has been reiterated in policy notes over the past two decades.[246] In practice, however, different priorities, time frames and geographic focuses have meant that there was not much room to adjust the 'Ds' of development and defence in order to directly cooperate and complement each other on the ground.

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[242] Interviews embassy staff.

[243] Field research Mali.

[244] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie', p3 & pp21-22; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie en Ministerie van Defensie, 'Leidraad Geïntegreerde Benadering', p.10; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022', p.24; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', pp.42-43; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is', p.40; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023.

[245] Assumption #16.

[246] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie', p.3 & pp.21-22; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie en Ministerie van Defensie, 'Leidraad Geïntegreerde Benadering', p.10; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022', p.24; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects', pp.42-43; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is', p.40; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023.

In Mali, the Dutch contribution to the integrated civilian-military mission known as MINUSMA led the embassy to prioritise 'security and the rule of law' and to shift the geographical focus of Dutch development cooperation in the country. However, other than the development contribution to the MINUSMA Trust Fund, which directly supported Dutch military personnel working in the mission, there was no clear alignment between Dutch military and development activities. Field research identified efforts to align development assistance to the broader MINUSMA mission by earmarking part of the contribution to the MINUSMA Trust Fund for justice and rule of law activities, thus ensuring a link with Dutch SRoL efforts. However, the IOB evaluation of the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA also found that there was no common, agreed understanding of what the integrated approach meant in practice. In the 2013 Article 100 Letter about MINUSMA, the integrated approach was interpreted as coherence between the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA and Dutch bilateral efforts (in particular, SRoL programming), as well as coherence of Dutch activities with other international efforts in the field of security and stability. In practice, policymakers and politicians have focused mainly on coherence between the different elements of the Dutch contribution to MINSUSMA and on strengthening coherence within MINUSMA as a whole.[247] The most recent multiannual country strategy for Mali refers to the integrated approach as parallel engagement tracks of diplomacy, defence and development, which contribute to an overall objective without cooperation at the technical level.[248] However, working in an integrated way does not mean excluding cooperation at the technical level.

Although the Dutch contribution to Resolute Support in Afghanistan was not an integrated Dutch mission, there was still an explicit aim to integrate defence efforts with development and diplomacy.[249] However, the inter-complementarity of development and diplomacy with defence efforts proved hard to put into practice. While some MFA policy staff were positive about the extent to which an integrated approach existed, the majority did not consider the '3 Ds' as truly integrated and mutually reinforcing in practice.[250] Indeed, there was no joint analysis or programming by defence, diplomacy and development actors. While there were a few instances where it was possible to align development with defence activities – e.g. by including Mazar-i-Sharif in the area of operation of the demining programme – for the most part, there was no clear connection other than that defence staff and diplomats kept each other informed about their work.[251] Resolute Support was a mission in its own right, and the military contribution could therefore not easily be aligned with development objectives. Development objectives, on the other hand, involved long-term commitments that could not easily be aligned with the military contribution. Diplomatic efforts were primarily aimed at supporting both development and military objectives.

The Netherlands has supported UNMISS in South Sudan since its inception in 2011 with a modest contribution of 30 staff. In 2015, the Dutch contribution of individual police officers (IPOs) was suspended as a result of the medical situation outside of Juba, and from 2016 onwards, six Dutch staff officers were deployed to UNMISS' headquarters in Juba. While policy notes on the military contribution highlighted the integrated approach,[252] cooperation with efforts at the embassy level was limited to the exchange of information.[253] In 2019, the Ministry of Defence decided to end Dutch support to UNMISS. Currently, the embassy in South Sudan is the fourth-largest donor in the RSRTF. The link between development and defence is better embedded in this programme, which aligns CSOs, NGOs, UN agencies and UNMISS. At the same time, the recent multiannual country strategy describes the integrated approach in terms of the 'triple nexus'.[254]

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247 IOB, *Een missie in een missie*.

248 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Mali 2023-2026' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2023).

249 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2014-2017'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2019-2022'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Artikel 100 brief Resolute Support', kst-29521-254, 1 September 2014.

250 Interviews.

251 Interviews.

252 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Artikel 100 brief verlenging UNMISS', kst-29521-231, 21 February 2014; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Artikel 100 brief UNMISS', kst-29521-317, 5 July 2016.

253 Interviews.

254 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS South Sudan 2023-2026' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2023).

3.3.4 The humanitarian-development-peace nexus was not operationalised in practice

Humanitarian assistance is generally intended to be short-term in nature and aims to provide relief during and immediately after emergencies. However, in the context of protracted crises, humanitarian assistance is often necessary and focused on the longer-term. Over the past two decades, efforts have been made to link relief with rehabilitation. More recently, there have also been calls for the coherence between programming of humanitarian action, development cooperation and peacebuilding, also referred to as the 'triple nexus'.[255] The underlying t assumption is that international support for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected contexts can be more coherent, effective and sustainable if international partners cooperate across the triple nexus.[256, 257] While this assumption sounds plausible, we have not been able to validate it because the nexus has not been operationalised in practice.

The MFA has been a strong proponent of the triple nexus approach, actively seeking alignment between development cooperation, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding activities.[258] This was particularly evident in South Sudan, where humanitarian assistance became the dominant sector following the outbreak of conflict in 2013. Between 2014 and 2020, 60% of all ODA was spent on humanitarian assistance.[259] At the same time, the Netherlands was one of the few donors that did not reallocate its entire aid portfolio to humanitarian assistance but continued to fund development and peacebuilding activities. Current programmes supported by the Netherlands, such as the RSRTF and the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Food and Nutrition Security Resilience Programme also explicitly aim to link development programming, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding.[260]

Linking humanitarian assistance and development

In general, the evidence shows that there was little collaboration or coordination between the humanitarian and development sectors. Humanitarian and development actors worked mainly in silos, even though some implementing organisations had a dual humanitarian assistance and development mandate that allowed them to link programmes within their organisations. Some organisations active in the DRA provided both humanitarian assistance and had medium- and longer-term development programmes, but these programmes were managed internally by different teams with no intention of linking them.[261] Humanitarian and development activities sometimes overlapped, such as training in improved agricultural practices. These silos reflect the different funding streams and requirements set by donors such as the Netherlands. While there are some individual projects that had the flexibility to link humanitarian assistance to development, these cases are the exception to the rule. The fieldwork also revealed that emergency assistance and medium- and longer-term development assistance or resilience-building can undermine each other when not well-coordinated; for example, the provision of untargeted free (emergency) seeds to the population in Torit in South Sudan has undermined the effectiveness of 'regular' development programmes to support farmer productivity through training and start-up kits.[262]

Linking development and peacebuilding

Development and peacebuilding activities have often been easy to align. These sectors work with similar time frames and funding frameworks, and activities can often take place within the same project. Development projects may, for instance, provide a 'peace dividend' or directly address the socio-economic root causes and consequences of conflict. The construction of water points in South Sudan has alleviated inter-ethnic tensions over access to water. Similarly, demining programmes have facilitated the work of actors in the development sector by clearing land that could then be used for agriculture.[263]

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[255] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Humanitaire Hulp en Diplomatie 2019-2020', kst-34952-108, 13 March 2010, p. 10.

[256] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023.

[257] Assumption #17.

[258] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Humanitaire Hulp en Diplomatie 2019-2020', p. 10

[259] OECD, *Creditor Reporting System*, 2023.

[260] The RSRTF aims to maximise synergies and promote alignment between many actors in the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus. An early evaluation praised its approach as 'potentially ground-breaking' and stated that it filled an important gap in terms of transitional funding, especially for the underserved areas. At the same time, the evaluation also noted that the RSRTF had not yet contributed much to the strengthening of public administration and that the agencies involved had a strong humanitarian focus and less experience in development programming. See: D, Deng et al, Early-stage Evaluation of the RSRTF, 2021.

[261] Interviews.

[262] To the dissatisfaction of some these farmers, the distributed emergency seeds were bought from neighbouring countries.

[263] Tana Copenhagen, 'Evaluation of DCA Humanitarian Mine Action & Cluster Munition 2016-2020 programme'.

Linking humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding
The evaluation found no evidence of any operationalisation of the nexus between humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors. In addition to the issue of different funding streams and time frames, there can be tensions between the political objectives of development and peacebuilding on the one hand, and the humanitarian principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence – that guide the work of the humanitarian sector on the other. The principles of impartiality and neutrality support access and security for humanitarian work. As argued by Dubois (2020), while access and security are valid concerns, these principles function as ideals and should not act as barriers to cooperation between the humanitarian sector on the one hand, and the peacebuilding and development sectors on the other. The sectors are interlinked: violent conflict has been a major driver of humanitarian needs, and, at the same time, the lack of livelihoods and competition for scarce resources can lead to hunger, displacement and conflict.

The reality is that there is the need to work with government authorities, armed groups and community leaders to secure permits and access for relief efforts and as a result, humanitarian assistance can never be completely neutral.[264] For the humanitarian sector, the nexus implies the urgency of better understanding both the needs of people and the unintended consequences of humanitarian assistance. This means a better understanding of development and peace needs and improved conflict-sensitive programming, to prevent humanitarian assistance from inhibiting development and peacebuilding, or reinforcing drivers of conflict (see also section 3.2.3 on conflict sensitivity).[265] Indeed, the literature reveals various examples where humanitarian assistance has contributed to conflict in South Sudan.[266] At the same time, the nexus implies that development and peacebuilding actors engage with the humanitarian sector to find more sustainable solutions to humanitarian crises.

3.4 What can be said about the efficiency of the MFA's policies and interventions?

Efficiency is defined by the OECD-DAC as the extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely manner. Efficiency, then, includes economic efficiency, operational efficiency and timeliness.[267] Evaluations of programmes supported by the MFA have rarely assessed whether they were economically efficient or timely. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the supported programmes offered value for money. This section therefore focuses mainly on operational efficiency. It concludes that the MFA has a relatively limited capacity to adequately monitor implementation and proactively steer adaptive programming.

3.4.1 Multi-annual support reduced overhead and operational costs
The time frames of the programmes supported by the Netherlands were generally longer than those of most other donors, which facilitated the predictability of funding and contributed to more efficient programming. In South Sudan, for example, the Netherlands was the only donor to provide longer-term funding for demining, while other donors only provided contracts for 6 months or 1 year, which substantially increased overhead costs and negatively affected sustainable planning of future operations.

3.4.2 The MFA has limited operational capacity to adequately monitor implementation and proactively steer adaptive programming
Although the MFA was a flexible donor that largely enabled adaptive programming by implementing organisations (see also section 3.2.1), the MFA itself was primarily reactive to the demands of implementing partners and rather than responding proactively to contextual changes.[268] Staff rotation, short postings and a consequent lack of institutional memory significantly reduced the MFA's capacity to effectively learn and actively adapt programmes accordingly. This was particularly the case in Afghanistan and South Sudan, where staff was deployed for only two years, with a continuous R&R schedule. As projects usually last longer than the two-year posting of international staff, virtually all activities were

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264 CSRF, 'Better Together? Prospects and Lessons for Improving Coordination and Collaboration between Humanitarians and Peacebuilders in South Sudan', CSRF Learning Paper, Juba CSRF, July 2022, p. 6.
265 Dubois, M. 'The triple nexus. Threat or opportunity for the humanitarian principles', Discussion Paper, Berlin, Centre for Humanitarian Action, May 2020; and CSRF, 'Better Together?'.
266 Craze, 'Displacement, Access, and Conflict in South Sudan', Craze and Luedke, 'South Sudan: Why Humanitarians Should Stop Hiding Behind Impartiality'; Barry, 'Starving Out the Enemy'; Deng (ed.), 'The Politics of Humanitarianism', London, London School of Economics, 2000, p. 12.
267 See OECD-DAC, *Evaluation criteria*.
268 Interviews.

handed over to successors at some point. Most new embassy staff had relatively little experience with the country context, and therefore it often took time to get accustomed to the country, the context and the programmes. These issues were not unique to the Netherlands; SIGAR noted in its 2021 lessons learned report that 'every agency experienced annual lobotomies as staff constantly rotated out, leaving successors to start from scratch and make similar mistakes all over again' and concluded that this 'had direct effects on the quality of reconstruction'.[269] In Afghanistan, scenarios developed by security agencies to reflect on the potential implications of security trends on the MFA's operations (e.g. staff and embassy security) were later also used by the MFA to develop scenarios that discussed the potential implications for development cooperation and diplomacy. However, the scenario in which the Taliban took over the country was not seen as most likely one in the short term, and policy and programming focused largely on the best possible outcome. Consequently, there were few contingency plans in place for the other scenarios.

Furthermore, adaptive programming also requires a regular critical reflection on the evidence and assumptions underlying policies and programmes, which was often not the case (see section 3.2.1). This is not only an issue for the MFA; the meta-review also concluded that few donors in Afghanistan changed their approach, despite the availability of evaluations showing the ineffectiveness of their programmes.[270]

3.5   How sustainable are Dutch-supported interventions?

According to policy documents, the Netherlands is committed to the SDGs and aims to have a sustainable impact in fragile and conflict-affected areas.[271] Recognising the need for a long-term perspective, the ministry explicitly prioritises longer-term programming to achieve impact.[272] An underlying assumption of Dutch policy is that the results and benefits of the supported interventions can ultimately make a sustainable contribution to strengthening the social contract between the state and its citizens. If this is not the case, domestic actors should take over the activities when Dutch funding ends.[273] We find that this assumption is not true for the country case studies in this evaluation. Sustainability in extremely fragile contexts is very difficult to achieve and requires explicit and specific strategies. More attention for sustainability tis warranted than is currently the case.

3.5.1   Sustainability is by definition difficult to achieve in fragile contexts
In all three countries studied, programme results often suffered from continuing insecurity and events outside the sphere of influence of the MFA or its implementing partners. The most pressing example is Afghanistan, where the US withdrawal and the Taliban's seizure of control of the country quickly undermined many of the previous development results. But also in South Sudan and Mali, community level results have often been unsustainable as a result of protracted conflict. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between the sustainability of interventions and the sustainability of results at the outcome level. Changes in attitudes (e.g. trust between groups that were previously at odds) can persist, even when structures for local peacebuilding or changes in service delivery are reversed. And the effects of girls going to school for two decades in Afghanistan remain, even if access to school is now obstructed by the Taliban. However, the ultimate impact of these effects is difficult to measure.

3.5.2   There is insufficient attention for sustainability
As sustainability of interventions is by definition difficult to achieve in fragile contexts, it warrants special attention to increase the likelihood that results will be sustained. Recognising that promoting stability in fragile and conflict-affected contexts cannot be expected to happen in the short term, and that the behavioural and systemic changes that these interventions seek to stimulate will take time, the pursuit of these objectives also presupposes that there is sufficient political will on the part of donors to sustain these interventions over the long-term. However, we find that the lack of a clear long-term strategy and

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[269] SIGAR, 'Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction', p. x.

[270] Zuercher, 'Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper', p. 8.

[271] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Investing in Global Prospects'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023.

[272] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022', p. 39; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Doen waar Nederland goed in is', p. 41; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2023.

[273] Assumption #19.

insufficient attention for sustainability has contributed to unsustainable programmes. In Afghanistan, LOTFA had many more police on the payroll than the Afghan government could afford, and the salary envelope steadily increased over the years, further impeding sustainability. While the ARTF's infrastructure and service delivery improved, the Afghan government was not capable of maintaining it without external support. Analysts have criticised the US for underestimating the time and resources needed to rebuild Afghanistan, leading to short-term fixes and effectively 20 one-year strategies for Afghanistan, rather than one 20-year effort.[274] Short staff rotations across the international community also discouraged longer-term planning. The lack of a clear long-term strategy, short time frames and continuous pressure to show results increasingly led to the substitution of costly external consultants and contractors for government capacity. Furthermore, without government capacity to take over the responsibility for security and service delivery, and largely dependent on donor funding, trust funds created parallel structures that were not sustainable. As a result, it became increasingly difficult to pull out.

As was the case in Afghanistan, almost all service delivery in Southern Sudan has been and continues to be provided by international donors, including the Netherlands, through both humanitarian assistance and development support (see also 3.2.3). There is hardly any direct donor engagement with the government, and the government shows no signs of taking responsibility for service delivery. The structures created by international donor support for service delivery are entirely parallel to the government and will not be sustainable without continued donor support. This is worrying because interviews with various donors revealed that donor fatigue with South Sudan is increasing domestically in several donor countries.

Our field research found that limited follow-up by implementing organisations often made it difficult to sustain results, even in the short term, at the local level. For example, of the 27 boreholes repaired in Eastern Equatoria, seven broke down again before the project even ended. Some projects set up community committees for the maintenance of boreholes to safeguard the results. But as many of these committees struggle to continue their activities after project support has ended, this does not ensure sustainability either. For example, the committees set up by another water project were unable to raise enough money to buy spare parts for their boreholes. Our fieldwork showed that this was also often the case with established peace committees, community committees or road maintenance committees.

On a more positive note, the MFA has also committed to longer-term and follow-up programming to support continuity and enable implementing partners to build on results. An example of this is the SRoL portfolio in Mali, where the embassy continued with the same partners in a subsequent phase. Several projects had relatively long durations and benefited from additional financing for follow-up phases, which enabled project implementers to build on earlier results. However, most projects were still of limited duration and could hardly accommodate the time span of the Malian political cycle. According to interviews with implementers, most of the initiatives that benefited from Dutch funding cannot be continued or scaled up without additional resources.

The findings from the case studies are consistent with the conclusions of the meta-review. Zuercher and colleagues find that many of the results reported in the programme evaluations were not sustainable.[275] Only in the area of livelihoods did some successes emerge, as capacity building led to improved agricultural skills and income-generating activities.

While the formulation of clear transfer strategies is particularly complicated in fragile and rapidly changing contexts, the question of relevance and ownership by local actors is fundamental to ensuring local ownership and a degree of continuity once financing is terminated.

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[274] SIGAR, 'Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction', p. viii.
[275] Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter provides an overall assessment of the Dutch contribution to stability in highly fragile contexts. *The main question that guided this evaluation was: To what extent has the Netherlands contributed to stability, security and rule of law in fragile contexts?*

This evaluation report reconstructed the most important assumptions that have shaped Dutch foreign policy on promoting stability in fragile contexts and aimed to assess their validity. The key assumption was that enhancing 'legitimate stability' and improving the 'social contract' between governments and citizens would address fragility in a country.[276] Although this sounds plausible, the evaluation was unable to test this assumption. In the case studies of Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan, the combined efforts of the Netherlands and the international community did not lead to country-wide improvements in 'legitimate stability' or the 'social contract'. Consequently, it was not possible to link enhanced stability and a better social contract to the broader objective of decreasing fragility.

This evaluation focused on all Dutch foreign policy instruments that aimed to contribute to 'legitimate stability' and an improved 'social contract' between government and citizens. This included direct stabilisation efforts such as demining and peacekeeping missions, but also interventions that aimed to improve governance, security and rule of law, and efforts that aimed to address the root causes

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276 Assumption #1.

of violence and conflict by promoting social and economic development. Based on its findings, the evaluation came to four main conclusions, which will be discussed in greater detail below:

1. The ministry has contributed to positive results at the local level and in technical sectors, but these results did not break the vicious cycles of violence and instability in Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan.
2. There are limitations to the malleability of society in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and there is a gap between the policy ambitions and the sphere of influence of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
3. Internal political and institutional barriers have hindered the ministry from working in an integrated fashion and effectively adapting its programmes and policies to changing contexts.
4. There is insufficient attention for conflict sensitivity and the risk of doing harm in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

Conclusion 1: The Netherlands has contributed to positive results at the local level and in technical sectors, but these results did not break the vicious cycles of violence and instability in Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan.

This evaluation covered a wide range of policies and interventions in different sectors, all of which aimed to contribute to 'legitimate stability' and the 'social contract' from their respective perspectives. The evaluation found that several of the assumptions underlying specific policies or types of interventions were at least partially valid, especially when they were (more) directly within the ministry's sphere of influence. Various activities contributed to temporary and small improvements in security, stability and resilience at the local level, although sustainability was often limited. Stability interventions such as support for governance, security and justice or demining, led to temporary reductions in violence at the local level. Peacebuilding and mediation activities helped to resolve local conflicts and reduce communal tensions. Development programmes helped to improve service delivery, including access to services for women. Positive results have also been achieved in more technical sectors such as agriculture or water management. Overall, through its programmes, the Netherlands has helped to enhance livelihoods and resilience, albeit on a small scale, in highly fragile and insecure contexts.

However, despite support from the MFA, the relationships between the state and civil society continued to deteriorate in the three countries. Positive effects on relations between government actors and citizens were small and limited to the local level. Efforts to build the capacity of government institutions and security actors were often unsuccessful. Therefore, the assumption that legitimate stability would 'trickle down' to improved stability at the local level did not hold. Autocratic leadership and ongoing power struggles between elites provided a context in which there was little or no political will to embrace reforms that could lead to greater accountability and more robust formal institutions and democratic procedures. Dutch involvement in peacekeeping missions was very modest (UNMISS, South Sudan) or only partially achieved its objectives (MINUSMA, Mali). The NATO Resolute Support mission to train, advise and assist national security forces and to enable them to maintain security in Afghanistan was largely ineffective.

Despite the highly fragile and insecure context, the MFA achieved positive results at the local level on social cohesion, livelihoods and resilience. It can be argued that these achievements have prevented the further deterioration of the context, locally and in the short term. However, the assumption that local improvements in social cohesion could 'trickle up' and help to break cycles of conflict and violence at the inter-ethnic community, regional or national levels did not hold. On the contrary, ongoing power struggles and the escalation of conflict had a strong detrimental effect on many of the positive results that were achieved, undermining their sustainability.

Conclusion 2: There are limitations to the malleability of society in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and there is a gap between the policy ambitions and the sphere of influence of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the political level in The Hague, there has been a tendency to create a positive narrative and formulate priorities that fit the Dutch political context. This contributed to a discrepancy between the ambitious policy objectives on paper and the limited sphere of influence of Dutch policies and programmes in practice. The Netherlands was a relatively modest actor in the three case study countries: its diplomatic influence was relatively limited, its share of development assistance was modest, ranging from 1% to 3% of total donor

support, and its military involvement in Afghanistan and South Sudan was limited during the evaluation period (2015-2022). Although the programme durations were slightly longer than those of other donors, they were not consistent with the policy objectives and ambitions. This evaluation concludes that the ministry's diplomatic efforts for national peace processes were relatively limited, especially considering the importance of national peace and stability in ensuring sustainability for all other supported interventions.

The high-level policy objectives from The Hague were not effectively translated and operationalised at the country and programme level. Assumptions about the malleability of society in fragile and conflict-affected settings were crucial for achieving the policy objectives, but they were inherently beyond the ministry's sphere of influence. This evaluation found that most of these assumptions were invalid. For instance, stability, democratisation, inclusive political institutions and good governance are not automatically transferable to fragile and conflict-affected settings. Authorities in fragile and conflict-affected settings did not have sufficient capacity or willingness to implement the proposed reforms or programmes, and as an external actor, it was a tall order for the ministry to incentivise these changes. While the Dutch interventions in fragile contexts are based on the principles of human rights and democratic values, their ability to effectively address these issues is relatively limited.

Engaging directly with authorities in fragile and conflict-affected settings was a challenge for the Dutch government, as it has avoided supporting or engaging with regimes responsible for violence or gross human rights violations. Rapid government changes resulting from power struggles and coups further complicated the relationship with the international community, including the Netherlands. However, supporting governance processes and improving the social contract between the state and its citizens requires continuous and long-term engagement with state authorities in these countries. In addition, genuine and broad-based domestic engagement and ownership within the supported countries is crucial but often lacking in practice. Without these prerequisites, external interventions cannot contribute to legitimate stability. Moreover, the cases of Afghanistan and South Sudan have also shown that while creating and supporting parallel structures may yield short and medium-term results, this approach undermines longer-term sustainability and has negative effects on the wider political economy of the conflict.

Conclusion 3: Internal political and institutional barriers have hindered the ministry from working in an integrated fashion and effectively adapting its programmes and policies to changing contexts

This evaluation found that some of the assumptions about how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised and implemented its foreign interventions were valid. For instance, flexibility on the part of the MFA as a donor enabled efficient programming by Dutch-funded partners. Similarly, coordination efforts helped to reduce duplication, although many challenges to coordination remained in practice. However, other assumptions could not be tested. While it was assumed that localisation could help to better address the needs and priorities of affected populations, we found limited local ownership in Dutch-supported programmes in practice.

An important assumption underlying Dutch policy is that different foreign policy instruments can complement and reinforce each other. This evaluation found, however, that the operationalisation of the integrated approach was limited in the case study countries. Although the intention was for diplomacy, development and defence to complement each other, in practice, it was difficult to overcome differences in priorities and time frames. There was little coherence between different projects supported, and coordination was generally limited to specific thematic areas. Similarly, despite the ministry's ambitions to increase the effectiveness of interventions by linking peacebuilding efforts to humanitarian and development interventions, known as the 'triple nexus', such linkages have not been realised in practice. Several factors have contributed to this, including differences in funding streams, time frames and coordination mechanisms, as well as a tension between the political nature of peacebuilding and the neutrality principle of humanitarian assistance.

While the multi-annual country strategies and annual plans provided an instrument for developing coherent country strategies, the thematic structure of funding resulted in siloed financing and implementation at country level. Different thematic departments within the MFA have their own budgets and policy priorities – for which they are held accountable by parliament. As a result, Dutch programming has been largely driven by priorities set in The Hague, rather than based on context and local needs assessments.
As noted above, there is a disconnect between the ambitious policy objectives set in The Hague and the ever-changing and volatile reality on the ground. This disconnect has often gone unaddressed

due to various political and institutional barriers that impeded the flow of information from the local implementation level in the respective country to the headquarters and political level in The Hague:

1. Limited institutional memory. As a result of staff rotation, particularly in countries with two-year postings and a continuous R&R cycle such as Afghanistan and South Sudan, the ministry's institutional memory and capacity were continuously undermined.
2. Limited attention for programme management and learning. More focus is regularly placed on formulating new policies and programmes than on managing their actual implementation, reflecting on the viability of assumptions, monitoring progress and learning. This affects the ability of the MFA to process information and respond to new developments.
3. Limited access to reliable information. Staff at the ministry's HQ or at the embassies did not always have the required access to sufficiently complete and reliable data about the actual situation on the ground and the implementation of programmes or policies. Particularly in contexts with a poor security situation, the MFA was often largely dependent on information provided by implementing organisations themselves. Competition for funding can lead implementing organisations to inflate reported results, and implementing organisations may not always have access to the local level to verify their results.
4. Risk aversion of the ministry in the Netherlands. Although working in fragility and conflict inherently involves taking risks, this evaluation found that in practice the MFA is risk quite averse. Although new policy documents stress the need to be open about risks, the anticipation of negative media coverage or critical questions in parliament impeded an open flow of information about the context and progress of the implemented programmes. This led to a tendency amongst staff to avoid reporting on mistakes or disappointing results. Combined with a desire to stay committed to the formulated policy objectives, this hindered critical reflection, collective learning and adaptation of policies and programmes where needed.

Conclusion 4: There is insufficient attention to conflict sensitivity and the risk of doing harm in fragile and conflict-affected settings

This evaluation revealed that the ministry did not adequately prioritise conflict-sensitivity in its policies and programming. Although conflict sensitivity was generally discussed during the inception phase of a programme, it was rarely monitored or evaluated during or after implementation. Furthermore, the wider presence of international organisations and donors, and their role in and impact on the political economy of a conflict, was seldom considered. This evaluation identified several negative side effects of international presence on the political economy of conflicts in the three case studies. For instance, UN agencies and INGOs pay much higher salaries than the government, resulting in a brain drain from government agencies that are expected to take over service delivery and governance. In Afghanistan, large amounts of development assistance contributed to corruption, while in South Sudan, competition for access to humanitarian assistance and jobs with NGOs fuelled conflict. Although policymakers and implementing organisations discussed the potential harm of their policies, this rarely led to changes in policy and implementation.

In light of these conclusions, IOB recommends the following:

Main recommendation 1: Reassess the objectives and strategies of Dutch interventions in diplomacy, development and defence in highly fragile contexts.

In recent years, the number of fragile and conflict-affected countries has increased, and the share of the world's population living in fragile places is expected to grow. Moreover, the proportion of the world's extreme poor is increasingly concentrated in fragile places. Given that particularly fragile and conflict-affected countries are lagging far behind in achieving the SDGs, the Dutch commitment to the SDGs could warrant continued investment in these contexts. However, the findings presented in this evaluation suggest that there is a need to rethink and reconceptualise interventions in fragile contexts. It is important to have realistic expectations about the potential role of the international community and the Netherlands, especially given the complexity and structural patterns of fragility and violence in these contexts.

In addition to this main recommendation, the six recommendations below aim to provide practical strategies to guide this reassessment, accompanied by a number of concrete suggestions for their operationalisation. However, the extent to which implementation can be improved is limited by available staff capacity. Moreover, these suggestions for 'doing things better' should not detract from this main recommendation. While there is room for improvement in the way the Netherlands operationalises and

implements its stability policy in fragile contexts, improved implementation alone is unlikely to lead to the achievement of the current highly ambitious policy goals in fragile contexts. Being realistic about policy goals will also inevitably require difficult choices to be made by MFA and its political leadership.

Recommendation 2: Address the disconnect between the limited sphere of influence of Dutch foreign policy and the formulation of highly ambitious policy objectives.

In order to address this disconnect, it is necessary to be open and transparent about the objectives and time frames. Specifically, this requires the following:
- *The MFA* should translate long-terms objectives at the impact level ('the points on the horizon') into country-specific, more concrete and realistic objectives closer to the ministry's sphere of influence, at the intermediate outcome level. Ideally, these objectives should be as SMART as possible.
- There should be a coherent and logical connection between 1) the political agenda, 2) policy objectives and 3) programme objectives, with context analysis underpinning each element. This requires the articulation of concrete strategies and policy objectives within the direct and indirect sphere of influence of the ministry, and concretely describing how the portfolio of activities (political/ diplomatic and programmatic) is expected to contribute to these policy objectives.
- Prior to the implementation of projects and programmes, *the MFA* should be explicit about the intended added value vis-à-vis other interventions and national programming. The assessment should also take into account whether the objectives, time frames and financial means are realistic given the specific context.
- *The MFA and implementing partners* should use longer time frames for programming, at least 8-10 years, but with sufficient flexibility to adapt programming to changing dynamics.
- *The MFA and implementing partners* should develop realistic exit strategies and sustainability plans for programmes and projects. Given the volatility and unpredictability of fragile contexts, it is critical to review and adapt the exit strategy as a programme progresses, so the eventual exit is context-driven and not just simply because time has run out or because a particular strategy was agreed several years ago.
- *The MFA* should also look for ways to scale up interventions that have proven to be effective, preferably in cooperation with other donors and national governments.
- *MFA policy staff and political leaders* should be more open about the complexities of engagement in fragile and conflict-affected contexts and the policy dilemmas that are encountered. For example, dilemmas regarding the coherence between human rights objectives, development objectives and political objectives (see also recommendation 6).

Recommendation 3: Prioritize context specificity and local ownership.

The complex and multidimensional nature of conflict and fragility implies that interventions should be as context-specific as possible. Currently, thematic budget lines and results frameworks limit the tailoring to country-specific conditions. The fact that foreign interventions may at best contribute to local processes to improve stability and development calls for the genuine inclusion of local actors and local ownership. Specifically, IOB suggests the following:
- *The MFA and implementing partners* should make sure that policy priorities, objectives and programmes are demand-driven and based on the national context and local needs. This also implies rethinking the thematic funding structure within the MFA in favour of country-specific interventions for fragile contexts.
- *The MFA* should look for ways to delegate more decision-making power, budgets and capacity to embassies and strengthen dedicated country teams in The Hague, to better tailor interventions to local contexts. If programmes are financed through the ministry's HQ in The Hague, they should explicitly articulate the added value in comparison with embassy programming. Continued efforts are required to ensure that centrally funded activities and results are properly integrated with delegated and country-specific interventions.
- *The MFA and implementing partners* should develop mechanisms for downward accountability to better reflect local perspectives and operationalise the MFA's ambition to promote localisation. At the same time, the MFA should articulate how to deal with possible tensions between promoting the norms and values underlying Dutch interventions on the one hand, and the ambition to promote localisation on the other.

Recommendation 4: Adopt a pragmatic approach to engaging in fragile contexts

Human rights and democratic values are key principles underlying Dutch interventions in fragile contexts. While these principles are a good point of departure, the ability of interventions to effectively address these issues is relatively limited. Concretely, IOB proposes the following:

- *The MFA* should be careful with drawing red lines for engaging with governments. Given the importance of peace and stability at the national level for the MFA's broader policy objectives in fragile contexts, it is important that the MFA maintains diplomatic ties and continues to engage in (policy) dialogue with all parties and support peace processes.
- *The MFA and the political leadership* should be aware of and accept the inherent risks of operating in fragile contexts. Effective engagement in such contexts requires a long-term perspective and the political courage to maintain objectives despite challenges, such as corruption reports or coup d'états, which are indicative of the fragility that the Dutch policy seeks to address. It is crucial to continue to identify useful partners, including in government, at both the national and sub-national level. At the same time, it is also crucial that the MFA and political leaders are transparent and communicate openly about the risks from the beginning.
- *The MFA* should leverage its knowledge of effective development programming to engage in evidence-based policy dialogue with governments. By using insights gained from development projects, the MFA can inform diplomatic efforts and political objectives in fragile contexts. For instance, if a community policing project demonstrates increased trust between citizens and security providers, this evidence can be used to encourage the government to adopt similar policies.
- Enhancing the social contract requires *the MFA and implementing partners* to continue to engage with the government. One way to achieve this is by prioritising institutional reforms that demonstrate to citizens that the state is providing for them. However, it is essential to maintain realistic expectations about what can be achieved. In the event of a political decision to disengage from national government actors, the MFA should reassess its policy objectives accordingly. As successes at the local level are unlikely to 'trickle up', it is not realistic to pursue the transformation of national level governance and also decide to disengage from national authorities.

Recommendation 5: Improve the MFA's capacity for organisational learning and adaptive programming.

Fragile and conflict-affected contexts are characterised by volatility and, as mentioned in recommendation three, interventions need to be adapted to be context-specific and demand-driven. This requires a willingness and ability to constantly learn and adapt to changing conditions. While adaptive programming is identified as a key operational tool in the 2022 policy note on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, this evaluation finds that the MFA's capacity for adaptive programming to lag behind. To address this, the MFA should give greater priority to programme management and continue to integrate monitoring, evaluation and learning into the general workflow. Specifically, IOB proposes the following:

- *The MFA* should promote a culture of transparency and learning in its own organisation. This requires a working environment where policymakers and political leaders can be open about dilemmas, risk taking, mistakes, shortcomings and a lack of progress.
- *The MFA and implementing partners* should also promote such a culture with implementing partners, local partners and affected communities. To achieve this, programme proposals and reports should also be assessed for the realism of their objectives and the extent to which they are demand-driven. The current focus on ambitious targets and incentives for grantees to demonstrate success on a narrow set of key performance indicators does not encourage transparency and learning. Therefore, it is important to prioritise evidence of learning and adaptability to changing contexts and conflict sensitivity. In addition, third-party monitoring and data quality assessments should also be used.
- *The MFA and implementing partners* should ensure that policies, programmes and projects include clear assumptions, which are often still lacking. A regular assessment of these assumptions should be institutionalised as part of the programme and project cycles to improve learning and adaptive programme management.
- *The MFA and implementing partners* should invest in their capacity for adaptive programming, which not only requires protocols but also staff expertise and increases in staff capacity.
- *The MFA* should invest in longer-term specialised staff dedicated to working on conflict and fragility, and establish career paths within the organisation to support this effort. For posts with two-year assignments, staff should be allowed to extend their assignments to allow for longer-term engagement and greater continuity. In addition, the MFA should develop structural mechanisms to

facilitate the transfer of knowledge and networks during staff rotations.
- *The MFA* should invest more in scenario exercises to plan for possible scenarios in advance and enable more coherent decision-making. For instance, if the primary objective is transformation at the national level, it is crucial to formulate strategies in case national actors are unable or unwilling to cooperate. Another option worth considering is 'red teaming', whereby external stakeholders are invited to critically reflect on plans, policies and assumptions.

Recommendation 6: Improve the coherence of Dutch foreign policy

The evaluation found that the government's ambitions to coordinate the various elements of its foreign policy interventions with each other in fragile contexts lag behind in practice. To address this, IOB suggests the following:
- *The Dutch government* should be more explicit about the objectives and operationalisation of the integrated approach (3D approach), as it is often promoted as a way of working without providing details on how and to what end. The updated guidelines on the integrated approach should clearly identify the different possible modalities, so that future interventions can explicitly and clearly define the modality that best suits their specific intervention. Furthermore, the Dutch government should invest more in joint problem and context analysis and joint discussion of frameworks for action to ensure coherence of foreign interventions by different ministries.
- When national peace processes are critical to achieving political objectives, *the* MFA must allocate sufficient political attention, diplomatic staff and resources to support these processes. In addition, political engagements should be more systematically institutionalised within the MFA to ensure greater consistency between successive ambassadors. By providing adequate resources and establishing clear institutional frameworks for political engagements, the MFA can more effectively support national peace processes, achieving its broader political objectives. *The MFA and implementing partners* must make a greater effort to effectively operationalise the 'triple nexus' between peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance and development. One way to achieve this is by adopting an area-based approach, which involves identifying specific regions within a country where humanitarian assistance can be linked to development programming. In addition, the MFA should promote collaboration and coordination between the three sectors, both internally and among its implementing partners. To facilitate programming across the nexus, the MFA should consider funding mechanisms to support such initiatives.
- *The MFA* should seek to enhance its efforts to promote coherence and coordination with the wider international community, both in the integrated approach and in the triple nexus. The MFA should engage in evidence-based policy dialogues with other donors and use evidence gained from development projects to inform diplomatic efforts in pursuit of political objectives. While there are limits to the malleability of international cooperation, the Netherlands is a relatively modest actor in most fragile and conflict affected settings, and should therefore continue to actively seek coalitions with like-minded donors. An integrated approach of Dutch foreign instruments should not stand in the way of donor coordination.
- *The MFA* should continue its efforts to reduce fragmentation *in-country* by encouraging greater coordination between projects in the same geographical areas, whether financed by the Netherlands, national authorities or other donors.

Recommendation 7: Take conflict sensitivity much more seriously

The evaluation found that there was insufficient attention for conflict sensitivity. To address this, IOB proposes the following:
- *The MFA and implementing partners* should actively (and independently) monitor conflict sensitivity and the risk of doing harm during the implementation of programmes and policies. Where necessary, policies, programmes and projects should be adjusted. The MFA should require conflict sensitivity to be included in evaluations of programmes and policies. The MFA could consider establishing a monitoring fund or working with organisations that specialise in monitoring conflict sensitivity.
- *International donors and implementing partners* should reflect on the impact of the presence of international organisations and donors on the political economy of a conflict, and proactively identify ways to mitigate the negative effects.
- *The MFA and implementing partners* should include the perspective of communities targeted or affected by the programmes in determining where the conflict sensitivity risks outweigh the expected benefits and vice versa.

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Photography

Front: UN Photo/Stuart Price, 2011.
Violence renewed in disputed town of Abyei, Sudan.

Ch 1: © UN photos/Gema Cortes, 2021.
UN police patrol Menaka region in north-east Mali.

Ch 2: © UN Photo/Marco Dormino, 2015.
MINUSMA peacekeeper patrols airstrip in Kidal, northern Mali.

Ch 3: © Sanaullah Seiam/AFP, 2023.
A teacher leads a class attended by girls in a local school in Zabul, Afghanistan.

Ch 4: © Rens Willems, 2021.
Houses submerged after flooding in Bor, South Sudan.

Abbreviations

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANA TF	Afghan National Army Trust Fund
ANDSF	Afghan National Defence and Security Forces
ANP	Afghan National Police
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
CSO	Civil society organisation
DCA	Danish Church Aid
DMM	Multilateral Organisations and Human Rights Department
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
DSH	Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid
DVB	Security Policy Department
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GBVS	Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy
HDI	Human Development Index
HQ	Headquarters (i.e. the MFA in The Hague)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
IVS	International Security Strategy
LOTFA	Law and Order Trust Fund Afghanistan
MACS	Multiannual country strategy
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee
RSRTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
SRoL	Security and Rule of Law
ToC	Theory of Change
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNMISS	UN Mission in South Sudan
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
3ie	International Initiative for Impact Evaluation