



# IOB Evaluation

*Background report*

## **Inconvenient Realities**

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

**August 2023**

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## Contents

Reading guide .....	2
1. Policy reconstruction .....	3
1.1. Key policy documents.....	3
1.2. Problem analysis.....	14
1.3. Key assumptions.....	16
2. Research questions.....	22
3. Findings from the Afghanistan case .....	27
3.1. Context and general overview of Dutch engagement in Afghanistan.....	27
3.2. Effectiveness of Dutch interventions to promote stability, security and rule of law in Afghanistan.....	30
3.3. Relevance .....	34
3.4. Coherence .....	35
3.5. Efficiency .....	37
3.6. Sustainability .....	38
4. Findings from the Mali case.....	40
4.1. Context and general overview of Dutch engagement in Mali .....	40
4.2. Effectiveness of Dutch interventions to promote stability, security and rule of law in Mali.....	42
4.3. Relevance .....	47
4.4. Coherence .....	49
4.5. Efficiency .....	51
4.6. Sustainability .....	52
5. Findings from the South Sudan case .....	53
5.1. Context and general overview of Dutch engagement in South Sudan .....	53
5.2. Effectiveness .....	56
5.3. Relevance .....	62
5.4. Coherence .....	64
5.5. Efficiency .....	66
5.6. Sustainability .....	66
References.....	68

## Reading guide

This is a background document to the IOB evaluation ‘Inconvenient Realities: an evaluation of Dutch contributions to stability, security and rule of law in fragile and conflict-affected contexts’. It contains the following annexes:

- A policy reconstruction. Drawing on a brief overview of the main policy documents, it presents the main problem analysis and key assumptions that underlie Dutch interventions to promote stability in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. These assumptions are reflected on in chapter 3 of the main report.
- The research questions as formulated in the Terms of Reference. In this annex, we explain how these questions are answered and why certain questions are not answered.
- Country chapters for Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan. These chapters provide country-specific findings on the effectiveness, relevance, coherence, efficiency and sustainability of Dutch interventions in these countries. The main report presents an overall analysis and draws on these findings.

## 1. Policy reconstruction

Section 1.1 below provides a brief overview of the main policy documents that guide Dutch interventions to promote stability in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. While the evaluation period focuses on 2015-2022, we deliberately include policy notes since 2002. Not only did earlier policy notes lay the foundations for the period for the 2015-2022 period, their inclusion also illustrates the consistency of Dutch policy on promoting stability in fragile and conflict-affected contexts over the years. The policy notes describe priorities, guiding principles and approaches in broad terms. We therefore also briefly look at the Theory of Change (ToC) for the security and rule of law policy priority, which further helps explain the policy choices and underlying assumptions. We then turn to the multiannual country strategies (MACS) for the three case studies. The goal of these strategies is to further develop the broader policy objectives in a particular context and to determine the particular activities that the MFA undertakes and supports.

Section 1.2 presents the MFA's problem analysis. We look at the common thread that runs through the key policy documents and the explicit and implicit understanding of why and how the Netherlands seeks to promote stability in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

In section 1.3, we then look at the key assumptions that underlie Dutch efforts to promote stability in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. This list is not exhaustive and presents IOB's interpretation of what the key assumptions are that underlie the different types of interventions and activities that the MFA undertakes. In the report, we reflect on these assumptions based the research conducted for this evaluation.

### 1.1. Key policy documents

#### 1.1.1. Policy notes

While this evaluation focuses on the period 2015-2022, Dutch policy on promoting stability and security in fragile and conflict-affected settings predates this period. The brief description of the main policy documents below shows that there has been considerable consistency in terms of policy objectives and approaches over the years.

Two decades ago, the policy note on reconstruction described Dutch priorities and efforts in post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>1</sup> These included strengthening governance, supporting civil society, economic recovery and supporting basic services. Throughout the period **2002-2010**, the priorities and efforts remained largely unchanged, but the focus widened from post-conflict settings to also include fragile contexts.<sup>2</sup> The following key objectives were defined in fragile contexts:<sup>3</sup>

1. improving stability and security for citizens, by reducing conflict and violence, security sector reform and the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants;

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<sup>1</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wederopbouw na conflict', kst-28000 V-60, 24 April 2002.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ministerie van Defensie en Ministerie van Economische Zaken, '[Wederopbouw na gewapend conflict](#)', p. 3; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten](#)'. Strategie voor de Nederlandse inzet 2008-2011', pp. 6-10.

2. contributing to a legitimate government with sufficient capacity by building government capacity, introducing reforms and supporting transitional justice processes; and
3. creating a peace dividend and socio-economic development by promoting employment opportunities and providing basic services.

Furthermore, the policy documents stressed the need for an integrated approach and active coordination between various Dutch ministries and international actors.

In **2010**, Dutch development cooperation was restructured under Rutte-II, with security and rule of law (SRoL) becoming one of the four development cooperation priorities.<sup>4</sup> The objectives of this new policy priority were identical to those of the previous fragile states policy: 1) improving security (referred to as ‘human security’), 2) contributing to legitimate governance with sufficient capacity, and 3) creating a peace dividend.<sup>5</sup>

The objectives under this policy priority were further elaborated in the 2012 policy letter ‘**Policy priority Security and Rule of Law**’. As in the previous policy letters published since 2002, the ‘integrated approach’ was a central element. The document stated that the need to simultaneously deploy interventions addressing security, rule of law, institution building and socio-economic development required coherence between military, diplomatic initiatives and development cooperation. The letter also highlighted the importance of conflict prevention and long-term involvement.<sup>6</sup> Specific target areas mentioned were:

- human security<sup>7</sup> (preventing violence and securing peace and stability);
- a functioning 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).<sup>8</sup>

While the number of target areas was broadened from three to five, the focus of Dutch policy remained largely the same as before. The target areas were also in line with the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs) formulated in the *New Deal* in 2011: legitimate politics, security, justice, economic foundations, and revenues and social services.<sup>9</sup> The 2013 policy note of the new Minister for Trade and Development Cooperation emphasised greater coherence between the policy areas of

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<sup>4</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[Basisbrief Ontwikkelingssamenwerking](#)’, kst-32500 V-15, 26 November 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[Focusbrief ontwikkelingssamenwerking](#)’, kst-32605-2, 18 March 2011, pp. 4-7.

<sup>6</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[Focusbrief ontwikkelingssamenwerking](#)’, no. 94.

<sup>7</sup> Human security takes people’s security needs as a starting point, rather than the security of the state. While a broad interpretation of human security can include health and food security, the MFA uses a more narrow interpretation related to (threats of) physical violence.

<sup>8</sup> In 2018, this component was transferred from the Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid (DSH) to the Department of Sustainable Economic Development. However, the peace dividend still needs to contribute to stability in fragile contexts.

<sup>9</sup> The New Deal is an agreement between fragile and conflict-affected states, development partners and civil society to improve the development policy and practice in fragile and conflict-affected states. The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States was adopted at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan (Republic of Korea) in December 2011. The Netherlands co-chaired this process.

trade and development cooperation in general, but the policy priority of security and rule of law in fragile states remained unchanged.<sup>10</sup>

In 2013 the **International Security Strategy (IVS)** placed Dutch efforts to promote stability in fragile contexts within the government's broader policy on international security.<sup>11</sup> The MFA 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 IVS formulated three strategic interests for Dutch foreign security policy: 1. the defence of its own and allied territory, 2. a well-functioning rule of law, and 3. economic security. The IVS stated that growing unrest in the EU's neighbouring regions had a direct and indirect impact on our security. Increased democratisation and stability would limit the risk of illegal migration and terrorist threats. Therefore, the strategy focused on unstable regions in the vicinity of the EU. The IVS also focused on increasing European responsibility, prevention, disarmament and control, cooperation with the private sector and the integrated approach. Regarding the rule of law, the IVS emphasised the importance of a flexible multilateral system, a well-functioning UN system and the principle of the responsibility to protect.

While the argument that promoting stability in fragile contexts is in the interest of Dutch and European security had already been made in previous policy documents, the IVS placed more emphasis on this. The integrated approach as the basis for Dutch foreign interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts was already mentioned consistently in policy documents before 2013, and the IVS reemphasised the concept. In 2014, the **integrated approach** was outlined in a joint policy note of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (BHOS), the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Security and Justice.<sup>12</sup> This document defined the integrated approach as a whole of government approach, involving a combination of instruments (diplomacy, defence, development cooperation and foreign trade, justice and security) and relevant actors (the Ministry for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Justice and Security, etc.) with the aim of promoting security and stability in fragile states and conflict areas.

The MFA replaced the IVS with the **Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy (GBVS)** for the period 2018-2022.<sup>13</sup> One of the objectives mentioned in the GBVS was to strengthen international rule of law, with a focus on human security. The strategy reaffirmed the need for an integrated approach and emphasised the need for Dutch investment in peacekeeping missions and crisis operations in light of continued pressure on international rule of law and instability. The new strategy did not present any significant changes to Dutch policies on interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The document noted that the security situation had deteriorated in countries around and on the borders of Europe and therefore outlined the intention to focus more on the geographical area around Europe and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

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<sup>10</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Wat de wereld verdient](#): Een nieuwe agenda voor hulp, handel en investeringen', kst-33625-1, 5 April 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie](#)', kst-33694-1, 21 June 2013.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wereldwijd voor een veilig Nederland' - [Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022](#)', kst-33694-12, 19 March 2018.

Alongside the GBVS, the government presented its updated policy on development cooperation and foreign trade in **'Investing in Global Prospects'** (2018).<sup>14</sup> The BHOS note indicated that the SDGs were guiding principles for Dutch policy. In addition, development cooperation would focus more on unstable regions because problems such as poverty, conflict, terrorism, climate change, population growth and irregular migration had become closely interlinked and poverty was increasingly concentrated in fragile regions. Therefore, the document presented a geographical shift of development cooperation towards unstable regions in the (near) vicinity of the EU: West Africa/Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa. Conflict prevention and poverty reduction were presented as key objectives, and security and rule of law were expanded both financially and geographically.<sup>15</sup> This BHOS policy note reiterated the integrated approach as a key concept, stating that *"more so than in the past, development cooperation will thus form part of a comprehensive and integrated approach to foreign policy"*.<sup>16</sup>

The policy note **'Investing in Global Prospects'**, the GBVS and the geographical shift in Dutch policy should be understood in a political context where migration has become an important issue. These policy documents increasingly linked Dutch efforts to promote stability abroad to security at home and were presented against the backdrop of a major refugee crisis in Europe as a result of the Syrian conflict, as well as increasing flows of irregular migration.

Europe has also witnessed several terrorist attacks supported by or inspired by terrorist groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram and Al-Shabab. According to the **'Investing in Global Prospects'** note and the GBVS, armed conflict or rising ethnic tensions would make countries more insecure and politically unstable. Weak governance and corruption would undermine people's confidence and fuel conflict. It was also argued that fragile and conflict-affected countries provide safe havens for extremist and terrorist groups and for criminal activities such as drug and human trafficking. Other factors cited as contributing to instability were poverty, inequality and the effects of climate change, and the both policy documents therefore stressed the importance of addressing the "root causes of terrorism, irregular migration, poverty and climate change."<sup>17</sup>

The increased focus on migration and addressing its root causes also resulted in a geographical shift towards the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) priority region, with a high level of support for 'development approaches to forced displacement' (*Opvang in de Regio*). At the same time, efforts to contribute to stability, mitigate the effects of forced displacement and reduce poverty continued in the 'priority regions': the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. Tackling instability as a root cause was therefore included in the government's **Integral Migration Agenda** in 2018.<sup>18</sup> This cross-departmental policy note identified six pillars of Dutch migration policy. The first pillar focused on preventing irregular migration and addressing the root causes of migration.<sup>19</sup> The document identified several root causes, including economic despair, political conflict, insecurity, repression and climate change. Both the Integral Migration Agenda and the BHOS policy note considered Dutch

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<sup>14</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, **'Investing in Global Prospects'**, kst-34952-1, 18 May 2018;

<sup>15</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, **'Focusregio's voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking'**, kst-34952-33, 13 November 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, **'Investing in Global Prospects'**, p. 97.

<sup>17</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, **'Investing in Global Prospects'**, p. 8; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, **'Wereldwijd voor een veilig Nederland' - Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022'**.

<sup>18</sup> Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, et al., **'Integrale migratieagenda'**, 29 March 2018, kst-19637-2375.

<sup>19</sup> The other pillars were: regional shelter and protection of refugees and displaced persons; a solid asylum system for the EU and the Netherlands; less illegality and more return; fostering legal migration and; stimulating integration and participation.

efforts to promote stability, poverty reduction and inclusive growth as a long-term investment in combating irregular migration.

The most recent **policy note** on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (2022) largely presented a continuation of the thematic and geographical focus of Dutch development cooperation.<sup>20</sup> The objectives remained in line with the SDGs and addressing the root causes of poverty, terrorism, irregular migration and climate change. According to the document, the Netherlands had expertise in these areas and development cooperation would be invested in areas with a visible impact.<sup>21</sup> Also, the Netherlands would support peaceful, just and inclusive societies, by investing in human security, access to justice, peacebuilding and inclusive governance. The 2022 BHOS policy note was more explicit than previous policy documents about the implications of working in fragile contexts; it presented one of the dilemmas of working in contexts where a civil war ignites or a coup has taken place.<sup>22</sup> In such cases, according to the document, the Netherlands must balance the risk of an illegitimate government benefiting from Dutch development cooperation with providing support to people in need.<sup>23</sup> The document also specified the special approach to development cooperation in fragile contexts:<sup>24</sup>

- it requires adaptive programming and taking calculated risks;
- it requires an integrated approach;
- it requires a constructive but critical policy dialogue with governments; and
- it requires long-term investment.

Finally, 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 the previous policies, the strategy emphasises the importance of international peace and security for Dutch security interests, and the priorities include addressing root causes and promoting the SDGs.<sup>25</sup>

It is noteworthy that there is a high degree of consistency in the key policy objectives and guiding principles adopted in fragile and conflict-affected settings, as well as the main policy instruments used (see text box 1). The key themes and objectives can be broadly summarised as follows:

- improving the provision of justice and security to citizens (promoting human security);
- enhancing the legitimacy and capacity of governance;
- supporting local peace processes and negotiations; and
- promoting socio-economic development.

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<sup>20</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Doen waar Nederland goed in is](#)', kst-36180-1, 24 April 2022, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Doen waar Nederland goed in is](#)', p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> The previous policy note that explicitly explained the specific way of working in fragile contexts was: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten](#)'. Strategie voor de Nederlandse inzet 2008-2011', kst-31787- 1, 7 November 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Doen waar Nederland goed in is](#)', p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Doen waar Nederland goed in is](#)', p. 30-41.

<sup>25</sup> Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid en Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Veiligheidsstrategie voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden](#)', kst-2023D13646, 3 April 2023, pp. 12+23.

To achieve its aim of promoting stability in fragile contexts, the Netherlands has used a range of instruments and channels, depending on the country specific situation and the specific policy objective. In general terms, the main instruments and channels were as follows:

- financial instruments delegated to the Netherlands' embassies – spent either through governments, NGOs or multilaterally;
- financial instruments spent centrally at the MFA through centrally coordinated instruments such as the Stability Fund, ARC, Dialogue and Dissent – implemented through different channels, including multilaterals and NGOs;
- central contribution to strategic partnerships;
- central core contribution to specific nonprofit organisations;
- central contribution to multilateral organisations such as UN, WB, NATO;
- diplomatic interventions aimed at contributing to stability – ranging from country-specific diplomatic initiatives (for example, EU sanctions on South Sudan) to thematic diplomatic interventions with a (possible) effect in the case study countries (for example, enhancing the role of women in peace processes, UN Resolution 1325); and
- Dutch contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, to EU and NATO (training) missions and in-kind expertise of diplomats or Dutch experts, or other staff in missions or training programmes.

And while there are nuances in the emphasis placed by different policy notes, there is also considerable consistency in the key approaches to working in fragile and conflict-affected countries. The key approaches can be broadly summarised as follows:

- the integrated, 3D or whole of government approach as a guiding principle;<sup>26</sup>
- the need to be flexible and adaptable to changing contexts;<sup>27</sup>
- the need to work contextually, focusing on local priorities and working with local partners;<sup>28</sup>
- the need for long-term commitments;<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten](#). Strategie voor de Nederlandse inzet 2008-2011'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde](#)', kst-32605-94, 21 May 2012; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Wat de wereld verdient: Een nieuwe agenda voor hulp, handel en investeringen](#)'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie](#)'; 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'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wereldwijd voor een veilig Nederland' - [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.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten](#). Strategie voor de Nederlandse inzet 2008-2011'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde](#)'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Wat de wereld verdient: Een nieuwe agenda voor hulp, handel en investeringen](#)'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten](#). Strategie voor de Nederlandse inzet 2008-2011'; 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.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten](#). Strategie voor de Nederlandse inzet 2008-2011'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde](#)'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Wat de wereld verdient: Een nieuwe agenda voor hulp, handel en investeringen](#)'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Doen waar Nederland goed in is](#)'.

- the recognition that working in fragile and conflict-affected contexts requires taking calculated risks;<sup>30</sup> and
- the need to focus on prevention and conflict sensitivity.<sup>31</sup>

While the policy priorities remained broadly the same, there were some adjustments. One important shift was in the discourse and rationale for why the Netherlands was active in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Before 2010, there was more emphasis on the loss of life and lack of development in affected countries. After the restructuring of development cooperation in 2010, Dutch security interests became increasingly important. This has led to a shift in geographical focus towards the ‘focus regions’: the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. In the MENA region, there has been a significant increase in funding to address to forced migration.

The change in discourse has also led to a relabelling of activities; for example, vocational training, employment promotion and economic development, particularly for youth, used to be explained in terms of ‘promoting peace dividends’. After the restructuring of development cooperation, the same activities were framed in terms of addressing the economic (root) causes of migration.

While there is no clear timeline, two other trends can be identified. First, the focus on human security, or people-centred security, has led to a steady increase in attention to non-state security and justice providers in contexts alongside state actors. Second, while civil society organisations continue to be seen as service providers, they are also increasingly seen as advocates. This means civil society is increasingly supported to lobby and advocate on behalf of interest groups and to act as ‘watchdogs’ of the government.

### 1.1.2. Theory of Change for security and rule of law

The different policy notes discussed above describe the broad outlines. In **2015**, the responsible policy department at the ministry, the Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid (DSH), developed an overall **Theory of Change for the SRoL policy**, which was updated in **2018** and in **2022**. This ToC provided a more detailed explanation of the objectives, the activities undertaken in pursuit of these objectives, and the assumptions underlying the choices made. The 2015 ToC presented the promotion of ‘legitimate’ stability as the overall policy objective. The term **‘legitimate’ stability** was deliberately used to indicate that stability was not a goal in itself, as dictatorships can be stable for long periods of time.<sup>32</sup> The concept ‘legitimate’ stability referred to ‘stability that is grounded on inclusiveness of policies and service delivery, inclusive political processes and a social contract between the state and its people, and horizontal social cohesion between groups.’<sup>33</sup> The ToC was updated in 2018 and the five target areas mentioned above were grouped around three central themes: human security, strengthening the rule of law, and legitimate

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten. Strategie voor de Nederlandse inzet 2008-2011’](#); Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde’](#); Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘Wat de wereld verdient: Een nieuwe agenda voor hulp, handel en investeringen’](#); Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘SRoL ToC’, 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘Doen waar Nederland goed in is’](#).

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten. Strategie voor de Nederlandse inzet 2008-2011’](#); 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.

<sup>32</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘SRoL ToC’, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘Security and Rule of Law. Theory of Change’ ([SRoL ToC](#)), 2018.

political governance and peace processes. What was also new in this document was the formulation of some overarching assumptions for the different themes.

The MFA updated the ToC again in 2022 and while the concept of the **'social contract'** was already included in the previous version of the ToC and mentioned in the 2018 policy note on development cooperation,<sup>34</sup> it now became the central concept. The social contract was defined as the process by 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".<sup>35</sup>

### 1.1.3. Multiannual country strategies Afghanistan, Mali and South Sudan

**The multiannual country strategies (MACS)** provide country-specific policies and implementation plans for all relevant policies that contribute to stability. A MACS outlines the priorities for a specific country for a period of four years, and the specific implementation through the different channels and instruments (see text box 1) is further developed in annual plans.

#### *Afghanistan*

In its **MACS for Afghanistan** for 2014-2017, the MFA focused its efforts on the 'security and rule of law'<sup>36</sup> policy priority, with special attention for women's rights and gender.<sup>37</sup> As part of this policy priority, the Netherlands aimed to contribute to:

- human security and rule of law, e.g. through the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA) and bilateral projects in support of community policing and the judicial chain;
- legitimate governance and inclusive political processes, e.g. by supporting elections and supporting the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission; and
- peace dividends, primarily through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).<sup>38</sup>

The 2014-2017 strategy did not set an overall objective for Dutch engagement in Afghanistan. Rather, by focusing on security and rule of law, it aimed to prevent the security situation and the position of women from deteriorating.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, the 2019-2022 strategy formulated a higher level of ambition:

*"The ultimate goal of our Afghanistan policy is to help ensure that Afghanistan will be self-reliant, and to enable the country to become a safe, stable and well-governed nation. In addressing the root causes of poverty and irregular migration, the Dutch efforts will focus on strengthening the rule of law, promoting security, peace and stability, on social and*

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<sup>34</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Investing in Global Prospects](#)', p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> 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.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the policy priority Security and Rule of Law, see: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde](#)'.

<sup>37</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2014-2017' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2014). This choice meant a phasing out of 'Food Security', 'Good Governance' and 'Private Sector Development'.

<sup>38</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2014-2017'.

<sup>39</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2019-2022' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2019).

*economic development, on women's rights, tackling root causes of irregular migration, and on preventing Afghanistan from once again becoming a haven for international terrorism.”<sup>40</sup>*

The strategy also broadened the thematic areas of priority for Dutch development cooperation in Afghanistan:

- *Peace, security, stability and migration.* To promote peace and stability, the MFA aimed to support the Afghan peace process and to contribute to a stable and elected government and reconciliation. Activities included diplomatic efforts (UN, EU and Kabul) and support for civil society. Stability was promoted mainly through Resolute Support, but also through contributions to the Afghan National Army Trust Fund (ANA TF) and support for demining. Migration included working with the Afghan government to manage the return of migrants, and supporting the reintegration and resettlement of returnees.
- *International rule of law and human rights.* This included contributing to the position of women and supporting the implementation of NAP 1325, training Afghan civil servants, and engaging civil society and the government on corruption and human rights, particularly women's rights.
- *Social development.* This includes supporting government capacity in healthcare and education, and development programming through the ARTF and NGOs.

These thematic areas remain the main priorities of the **2023-2026 strategy**.<sup>41</sup> The strategy recognises that the Taliban is an actor to be dealt with and foresees a period for exploring the options for development cooperation and diplomatic relations in the new Afghanistan.

### *Mali*

Since the late 1970s, the Dutch engagement in Mali has focused on the irrigation area of the Niger River in the south of Mali, predominantly on food security. After conflict broke out in 2012 and the Netherlands decided to contribute to MINUSMA in 2013, the 2012-2015 MACS was revised. The new **MACS for Mali** covered the period **2014-2017** and introduced the theme of security and rule of law to Mali, in addition to the existing priorities of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and water and food security. Geographically, the Netherlands would now also focus on Mopti, Tombouctou and Gao in the centre and north.

The overall objective of the SRoL programme was *“to work towards the restoration of Rule of Law in Mali, with the specific aim of reinforcing the legitimacy and capacity of the government.”<sup>42</sup>*

Programming therefore focused on the justice sector, inclusive political processes and human security. In addition to improving access to justice, other peace dividends such as access to basic services and employment were to be addressed through the other priorities of the MACS, as well as by other donors.

For the period 2018-2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Security and Justice jointly identified the most relevant policy areas and priorities for Mali and the Sahel in **a pilot inter-ministerial strategy**.<sup>43</sup> These were the policy areas:

- Peace, stability and security

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<sup>40</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2019-2022'.

<sup>41</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2023-2026' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2023).

<sup>42</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Mali Multi-Annual Strategic Plan 2014 - 2017](#)', 2014, p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Pilot inter-ministerial strategy Mali/Sahel 2018-2021' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2018).

- migration
- social progress
- development, food security and water, and
- sustainable trade and investment

Within the policy areas of ‘peace, stability and security’ and ‘migration’, the strategy identified the following priorities:

- enhance the effectiveness of MINUSMA and peace operations in general;
- regional security cooperation, focusing on border areas;
- prevention of conflict and violent extremism (P/CVE); and
- effective migration management.

Subsequently, the MFA set out its objectives in a ‘**multiannual regional strategy’ (MARS) for the Sahel, covering the period 2019-2022**. This strategy *“sets policy objectives that address the consequences as well as the drivers of instability... The **theory of change** underlying this long-term vision is 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”* (emphasis added).<sup>44</sup>

However, the document did not elaborate on the basis for this ToC, how the activities could contribute to a strengthened social contract, or the assumptions underlying the steps between activities and objectives. The policy priorities for Mali were described only in broad terms – one of the priorities was peace, security, stability and migration. The MARS indicated that within this priority, it would focus on:

- *Strengthening the capacity of the G5 Sahel countries*. This included support for capacity building, such as through the EU Training Mission (EUTM) and the European Union Capacity Building Mission in Sahel Mali.
- *Enhancing the effectiveness of MINUSMA as a means of improving UN peace operations in general*. This included the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA,
- *Preventing conflict and violent extremism (P/CVE)*. This included both sensitising general development programmes in the areas of security, rule of law and water to the VE context, as well as P/CVE-specific programming in the Liptako Gourma area. The Dutch P/CVE focused primarily on preventing violent extremism through awareness-raising and addressing socio-economic factors.
- *Migration cooperation*. This included support with updating legal frameworks and capacity building of Malian border authorities.
- *Good governance and justice*. In the area of rule of law, activities aimed to strengthen the Ministry of Justice, the public prosecutor, the judiciary and the penal system. At the same time, support was given to legal clinics, including paralegal support, and out-of-court reconciliation mechanisms. In the area of governance, programming focused on anti-corruption. Local governance and decentralisation were supported through performance-based financing of local governments and by encouraging active dialogue between youth and elected officials about transparency and accountability.

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<sup>44</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2019-2022’ (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2019), p. 21.

The **2023-2026 regional strategy** remains ambitious, stating that it “is committed to address the root causes of instability, insecurity and fragility in the Sahel. These issues are addressed mainly via bilateral interventions”.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the strategy also includes a short-term strategy, with the overall objective for the next four years being to prevent further escalation of conflict and violent extremist threats, and improve stability. And compared to the previous strategy, the **2023-2026 country strategy** provides more insight into how the MFA expects to contribute to an improved social contract.<sup>46</sup> However, the steps between these sub-objectives and the activities that will be undertaken in pursuit of these objectives remain quite large.

### *South Sudan*

The first **MACS for South Sudan** (2012-2015) stated that the overall objective of the Dutch engagement was to contribute to security and stability through conflict mitigation, (socio)economic growth and development. With regard to security and rule of law, the intention was to strengthen the performance of the security sector through capacity building in a way that promotes stability, respect for human rights, and inclusiveness and democratisation. The premise was that this would result in greater confidence between the population and the Government of South Sudan, and thus lead to greater government legitimacy and internal stability. The idea was that the country would transition from vulnerability and dependence on humanitarian assistance to more sustainable development. The document mentioned the integrated approach, in which efforts in development cooperation were combined with diplomatic efforts and security sector support in policing and defence. The Netherlands’ contribution to UNMISS was part of this approach.

After violence erupted in December 2013, Minister Ploumen suspended all direct support from the Netherlands to the Government of South Sudan. As a result of the civil war and instability, the minister also decided against formulating a renewed MACS for South Sudan.<sup>47</sup> The focus of Dutch development cooperation was increasingly on promoting stability and reducing the root causes of conflict at the local level. More funds were allocated to activities focusing on reconciliation and local peace dialogues, and special attention was paid to include women in these processes (kst 22831: 105). Following the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity in April 2016, the MFA announced its intention to continue its bilateral development relationship with the central government under strict conditions. However, this decision was quickly reversed following the resurgence of violence in Juba in July 2016 (kst 29521: 320).

The MFA’s subsequent **MACS for South Sudan (2019–2022)** outlined the need for a long-term perspective, as change would take time and foreign donor influence could only be modest. The strategy included a very rudimentary ToC. The stated overall objective was to contribute to an enabling environment for peace, resilience and (food) security, which in turn could lead to less violence, less hunger, less poverty and, in the long run, less migration. However, the ToC did not mention any assumptions or intermediate steps between activities and objectives.

The strategy highlighted that the Netherlands had chosen to work on the SDGs that were most urgent in South Sudan. In addition, the document outlined its focus on stable regions to create peace dividends and achieve resilience to shocks in food security and access to water. The embassy

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<sup>45</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2023-2026’ (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2019), p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘MACS Mali 2023-2026’ (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2023).

<sup>47</sup> Instead, all Dutch financed activities in South Sudan had to perform an additional conflict sensitivity analysis to respond to the changed context and maintain a stabilising and conciliatory role.

subsequently identified four ‘hubs of stability’: Yambio, Torit, Rumbek and Bor, for which a tailored approach was developed. Overall, the MFA identified three key areas:

1. *Building an inclusive peace* that addresses rule of law, human rights, reconciliation and accountability, and ends insecurity once and for all, so that available economic resources can be used for economic growth. Women’s participation and ownership is key in this process;
2. *Alleviating humanitarian needs* (including gender-based violence, psycho-social support, the need for humanitarian access, and safety for humanitarian workers – through humanitarian diplomacy);
3. *Ensuring synergy and complementarity between humanitarian assistance and development interventions (nexus)*, with an integrated focus on rule of law, food security, water and vocational training, entrepreneurship and employment for youth and women, in close cooperation with like-minded donors.

In 2019, the embassy aimed to address the bias in the ‘hubs of stability’ approach, as all the selected hubs were in government-controlled areas, by supporting the Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience (RSRTF), which applied an area-based programming approach in areas where the conflict had recently ended –the very areas not addressed by the hubs of stability approach.

The MFA had been advocating for a (triple) nexus approach in South Sudan, which envisaged a stronger alignment between development cooperation, humanitarian action and peacebuilding. The idea was to invest in support that responded to the actual needs, and these needs may shift between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding needs, or included them all.

The **2023-2026 strategy** presents a revised overarching objective: “*South Sudan is peaceful, inclusive and resilient and has transitioned from a fragile state depending on humanitarian assistance to an emerging democracy, where inclusive and sustainable development is rooted, and human rights are respected.*”<sup>48</sup> The sectoral objectives, which are identified as sub-objectives contributing to this overall objective, are more realistic and describe the contributions that the MFA aims to make rather than an end goal. The strategy also emphasises the ambition to work on the triple nexus of humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding.

## 1.2. Problem analysis

Drawing on the above-mentioned policy documents and interviews with policymakers, we summarise the main problem analysis. This problem analysis helps to explain the rationale and objectives of Dutch interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

**The central problem analysis that underlies Dutch foreign policy and development cooperation is that fragile and conflict-affected contexts are a burden both for the people living in these contexts and for Europe and the Netherlands.** This argument is made in the two subsequent integrated security strategies, IVS and GBVS, as well as in the various BHOS policy notes.<sup>49</sup> First and foremost, fragile and conflict-affected countries face the greatest difficulties achieving the UN

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<sup>48</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘MACS South Sudan 2023-2026’ (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2023), p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie](#)’, pp. 9-12; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘Wereldwijd voor een veilig Nederland’ - [Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022](#)’; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[Investing in Global Prospects](#)’; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[Doen waar Nederland goed in is](#)’, p4 + p39.

Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>50</sup> 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. According to Dutch policy, however, fragile and conflict-affected countries can also pose risks to other countries, as they can become safe havens for extremist and terrorist groups and for criminal activities such as drug and human trafficking. In addition, Dutch policy assumes that a lack of economic opportunity drives irregular migration.

While Dutch policy considers fragile and conflict-affected settings as an obstacle to development and security, policy documents do not provide a clear definition of what constitutes as a fragile context or country. However, the 2015 ToC for SRoL refers to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) list of fragile states and the 2022 ToC refers to the OECD report 'States of Fragility 2020'. The OECD defines **fragility** "*as the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, systems and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks*".<sup>51</sup> The OECD identifies six dimensions of fragility: economic, environmental, political, security, societal and human capital.<sup>52</sup> The most fragile contexts are generally characterised by underdevelopment, environmental degradation, a crisis of governance, violence and social tensions.

To address fragility, the overarching objective of Dutch foreign policy and development cooperation is to enhance '**legitimate stability**', which is understood as 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.<sup>53</sup> The relationship between citizens and the state is viewed in terms of the '**social contract**'.<sup>54</sup> This social contract is defined in the 2022 ToC for SRoL 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".<sup>55</sup>

Essentially, Dutch foreign support in fragile and conflict-affected settings is guided by the theoretical ideal of the state as an entity with the legitimate use of violence.<sup>56, 57</sup> The legitimacy of the state authority and the equal rights of individuals are conceptualised as a social contract.<sup>58</sup> The Netherlands is not alone in this analysis, and the collective engagement of (Western) interventions in

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<sup>50</sup> OECD, [States of Fragility 2020](#), Paris, OECD Publishing, 2020.

<sup>51</sup> OECD, [States of Fragility 2020](#), p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> OECD, [States of Fragility 2020](#), p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Doen waar Nederland goed in is](#)'; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Investing in Global Prospects](#)', p. 42; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2023.

<sup>55</sup> UNDP, '[Engaged Societies, Responsive States: The Social Contract in Situations of Conflict and Fragility](#)', quoted from Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2023.

<sup>56</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2023, p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> This definition of the state was coined by Max Weber in 1919.

<sup>58</sup> Early thinkers on the social contract theory include Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

fragile and conflict-affected contexts explicitly or implicitly draws on notions of the Weberian state and a social contract.<sup>59, 60</sup>

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).<sup>61</sup> 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 fuel conflict.<sup>62</sup>

### 1.3. Key assumptions

From this summary, we identify a number of key assumptions that underlie Dutch foreign policy and development cooperation in fragile and conflict-affected settings.<sup>63</sup> The list of assumptions presented below is not meant to be exhaustive, but it is considered to be key and provide a further framework for analysis in the report.

Overall, the following assumptions underlie Dutch foreign policy on fragile contexts and conflict-affected countries:

1. Enhancing 'legitimate stability' and improving the 'social contract' in a country will help address its level of fragility.

The Netherlands has supported a range of interventions and activities that aim to contribute to its political objective of promoting legitimate stability and an improved social contract in fragile contexts. Underlying all of these interventions, in turn, are further assumptions. The remainder of this section discusses the main interventions and their assumptions.

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<sup>59</sup> The OECD refers to the social contract in its policy guidance on statebuilding in situations of conflict and fragility and suggests prioritising support for key state functions, starting with 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.

<sup>60</sup> That international donors draw on notions of the Weberian state and a social contract is also evident in their activities in fragile and conflict-affected settings. These often include peace negotiations and peacekeeping to resolve violence and restore state authority; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR) to restore the state's monopoly on legitimate violence; and building national capacities for mediation and conflict resolution to improve social cohesion and the social contract.

<sup>61</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2018, see also: OECD, *States of Fragility 2020*.

<sup>62</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2023. Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Investing in Global Prospects](#)', p18+29.

<sup>63</sup> The policy reconstruction and identification of key assumptions was carried out by IOB researchers, drawing on policy documents and interviews that were conducted between 2020 and 2022. The policy reconstruction and key assumptions were subsequently discussed and verified with the internal IOB quality control group and the external quality control group, consisting of external experts and representatives from the DSH, DVB and DMM policy departments.

National governments inevitably have a role to play in stability and the social contract. At the same time, the Netherlands is only one donor among many. Through bilateral and multilateral engagements, the MFA seeks to enlist the cooperation of other governments and donors in pursuit of its policy objective. The following assumption underlies these activities:

2. Diplomatic efforts can contribute to the political objective of promoting stability in fragile contexts and help to create conditions for the effectiveness of development programmes and military interventions.

One set of activities supported by the Netherlands aimed to directly address violence and ensure a basic level of physical security. These activities included stabilisation efforts, military engagement in peacekeeping missions, crisis management operations and demining.<sup>64</sup> The following assumption underlies these activities:

3. External stabilisation efforts (e.g. peacekeeping missions, ceasefire negotiations or crisis management operations) can provide enough stability and security to facilitate or enable development and strengthen the legitimacy of governance actors and security actors in a sustainable manner.

Another group of interventions used by the Netherlands aims to restore the legitimate monopoly of violence. This includes supporting institutional reform, building the capacity of the security and justice sector, and promoting people-centred security and civilian involvement and oversight.<sup>65</sup> Capacity building helps security and justice actors to better fulfil their responsibilities.<sup>66</sup> Institutional reforms then aim to promote civilian participation and oversight intends to ensure that the provision of security and justice is people-centred, which in turn is expected to contribute to the legitimacy of security and justice actors. The following assumption underlies these activities:

4. Externally financed security and justice reforms can influence and improve domestic people-centred security and justice provision by actors who are increasingly trusted and considered legitimate by the entire population.

A related set of interventions aims to improve governance and inclusive political processes. This again involves supporting institutional reform and capacity building. Examples include the support for decentralisation in Mali and support for elections in Afghanistan. Dutch policy documents explicitly state that external parties such as the Netherlands may influence but not determine the rebuilding of state institutions. Various assumptions underlie these activities:

5. Democratisation, inclusive political institutions and good governance (a state that accepts responsibility for its citizens, and is accountable to them) can be facilitated in fragile contexts and conflict-affected settings.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wereldwijd voor een veilig Nederland' - [Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022](#), pp. 38-39; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Doen waar Nederland goed in is](#)', p36; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2023.

<sup>65</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wereldwijd voor een veilig Nederland' - [Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022](#), p. 26; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Investing in Global Prospects](#)', p. 41; 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.

<sup>66</sup> For example, the Netherlands supported projects in South Sudan and Mali to reconstruct court buildings. In Afghanistan, through Resolute Support, the Netherlands supported training for military personnel, and in Mali a project trained judges and staff of the ministry of justice.

<sup>67</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015, p, 3.

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 its citizens, or that they can be incentivised to do so.
7. There is sufficient absorptive capacity for individual and institutional capacity building.

A fourth set of activities aims to resolve conflicts within society. This 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. Other examples include support for transitional justice and reconciliation processes, dispute resolution and peace education. These activities are linked to reforms of security, justice and governance institutions, which also aim to create and support structures through which conflicts in society can be resolved without violence.<sup>68</sup> Following are two assumptions that underlie these interventions:

8. Peacebuilding, mediation and reconciliation activities can lead to improved social cohesion between different societal groups and can improve the social contract between the state and the people;
9. Improved social cohesion at the local level can lead to reduced inter- and intra-communal 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.

A fifth set of interventions aims to promote civil society and civic space. This includes supporting civil society organisations, journalists and human rights activists, and aims to open up civic space for the free organisation and representation of different groups and constituencies. Activities may include strengthening the organisation of local and national civil society organisations (CSOs), training and supporting these organisations in lobbying and advocacy, and providing diplomatic support and physical security for human rights activists. Civil society is seen as playing an important role in advocating for the rights and needs of people – including minorities – vis-à-vis the state and business.<sup>69</sup> As such, they work on strengthening the social contract. The following assumption underlies such activities:

10. 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 groups. This, in turn, should lead to improved legitimate governance and service delivery.

Another set of activities and interventions aims to improve the delivery of social services such as healthcare, education and basic infrastructure. This can be done through direct service delivery by international organisations and NGOs, or through capacity building and supporting to government institutions.<sup>70</sup> Improved service delivery aims to improve basic living conditions and provide a basis for sustainable economic development. The following assumption underlies these activities:

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<sup>68</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘Investing in Global Prospects’](#), p. 42; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘SRoL ToC’, 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘SRoL ToC’](#), 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘SRoL ToC’](#), 2023.

<sup>69</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘Doen waar Nederland goed in is’](#), p. 36; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘SRoL ToC’](#), 2023; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [Policy framework: “Dialogue and Dissent”](#), 13 May 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘Investing in Global Prospects’](#), pp. 30-32+40; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘SRoL ToC’, 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘SRoL ToC’](#), 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [‘SRoL ToC’](#), 2023.

11. Improved delivery of social services provides a ‘peace dividend’,<sup>71</sup> thereby improving trust in society and strengthening the social contract between the state and its citizens.

A sixth set of activities aims to promote economic development. This can include support for business development, vocational training and the creation of job opportunities. The MFA has identified the lack of jobs and economic opportunity as a cause of conflict and irregular migration. Furthermore, competition for scarce resources such as land and water can lead to violent conflict.<sup>72</sup> The assumption underlying is that:

12. Economic development and equal distribution of opportunities can reduce tensions over scarce resources and, hence, reduce underlying causes of conflict.

The above assumptions primarily relate to expectations about the **effectiveness** of the interventions in terms of the overall objective of contributing to stability, security and rule of law. Below we turn to assumptions that relate to the expected relevance, coherence and efficiency and sustainability of interventions. The assumptions may not always fit neatly into distinct categories, but they are used for the sake of the analysis in the report.

First, there are a number of assumptions related to the **relevance** of interventions. For an intervention to be effective, it must be relevant to the problem for which it is being implemented and to the context in which it is being carried out. Several policy documents mention the added value of Dutch efforts<sup>73</sup> and stress the need for contextual analysis to enable context-specific programming.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, interventions are expected to be conflict-sensitive.<sup>75</sup> Regarding relevance, the following two assumptions can be made:

13. External interventions that aim 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.<sup>76</sup>

Another set of assumptions relates to the **coherence** of different interventions. In most fragile and conflict-affected contexts, there are multiple actors active, including the Netherlands. In these countries, the Netherlands aims to increase its effectiveness by coordinating and cooperating with other actors.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, Dutch policy draws on the problem analysis that fragility and conflict are complex and have multiple dimensions and therefore require a multidisciplinary response. For

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<sup>71</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde](#)’.

<sup>72</sup> 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.

<sup>73</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘Wereldwijd voor een veilig Nederland’ - [Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022](#); Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[Investing in Global Prospects](#)’; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[Doen waar Nederland goed in is](#)’.

<sup>74</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘SRoL ToC’, 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[SRoL ToC](#)’, 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[SRoL ToC](#)’, 2023.

<sup>75</sup> 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.

<sup>76</sup> Localisation is the process by which ownership and decision-making is increasingly transferred to local actors.

<sup>77</sup> 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.

this reason, one of the guiding principles of Dutch foreign policy is the integrated approach.<sup>78</sup> The following assumptions can therefore be made about the coherence of the interventions:

15. Improving the coordination and cooperation with other actors increases the efficiency and effectiveness of interventions;
16. The integrated approach allows the various instruments of Dutch foreign policy – diplomacy, development cooperation, defence and justice – to complement and reinforce each other.

A related assumption focuses on the nexus between humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peacebuilding. Humanitarian assistance aims to save lives and alleviate suffering. It is intended to be short-term in nature, providing for activities during and in the immediate aftermath of emergencies. However, in the context of protracted crises, humanitarian aid is often provided over a longer periods of time. In response to this, there has been a growing call for greater coherence among actors working to build resilience in fragile contexts and address the root causes of humanitarian challenges.<sup>79</sup> In 2016, the World Humanitarian Summit resulted in the Grand Bargain, which, among other things, called for strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus.<sup>80</sup> Since then, the Netherlands has prioritised the nexus approach and strives to improve coherence between the programming of humanitarian action, development cooperation and peacebuilding, also referred to as the triple nexus.<sup>81</sup> The following assumption underlies these activities and interventions:

17. 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 humanitarian-development-peace ('triple') nexus.<sup>82</sup>

Another set of assumptions relates to the **efficiency** of interventions. The OECD-DAC distinguishes between economic efficiency, operational efficiency and timeliness.<sup>83</sup> As discussed above, interventions are expected to be context-appropriate. As conflict and fragile contexts are unpredictable and constantly in flux, there is a need for a certain level of flexibility and the ability to adapt when these contexts require it.<sup>84</sup> In terms of efficiency, the following assumption can be made:

18. Adaptive programming and flexibility can improve effectiveness of Dutch foreign policy and development support in fragile and conflict-affected settings;

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<sup>78</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie](#)', pp. 3+21-22; Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie en Ministerie van Defensie, '[Leidraad Geïntegreerde Benadering](#)', p10; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wereldwijd voor een veilig Nederland' - [Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022](#)', p24; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Investing in Global Prospects](#)', pp. 42-43; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Doen waar Nederland goed in is](#)', p40; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2023.

<sup>79</sup> OECD, '[The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Interim Progress Review](#)', Paris, OECD Publishing, 2022.

<sup>80</sup> The attention for the connection between humanitarian aid and development cooperation was not new. In the 2008 policy note 'Security and development in fragile states', the MFA already stressed the need to connect humanitarian action to reconstruction efforts. See: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Veiligheid en ontwikkeling in fragiele staten](#)', p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Humanitaire Hulp en Diplomatie 2019-2020](#)' kst-34952-108, 13 March 2020, p. 10.

<sup>82</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2023.

<sup>83</sup> OECD, '[Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully](#)', Paris, OECD Publishing, 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Doen waar Nederland goed in is](#)', pp. 35+40; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[SRoL ToC](#)', 2023

Finally, there are assumptions related to the **sustainability** of interventions. The Netherlands is committed to the SDGs and aims to have a sustainable impact.<sup>85</sup> Recognising that a long-term perspective is necessary in the context of fragile and conflict-affected countries, it explicitly prioritises longer-term programming to achieve impact.<sup>86</sup> In terms of sustainability, the following assumptions can be made:

19. The results and benefits of external interventions make a sustainable 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.

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<sup>85</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Investing in Global Prospects](#)'; 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.

<sup>86</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Wereldwijd voor een veilig Nederland' - [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.

## 2. Research questions

This annex describes how the research questions from the Terms of Reference are reflected in the report. For the sake of readability, the report does not provide answers question by question. However, the chapters do follow the structure of the OECD-DAC criteria along which the research questions are categorised. Not all questions are answered in the report, and we provide an explanation below.

### Descriptive

- 1) *How has Dutch policy on security, stability and rule of law developed in the period 2015-2020?*
- 2) *What instruments, financing modalities and channels did the Netherlands use to achieve its objectives, and what explains the choices made over the years?*
  - a. *How has the Integrated Agenda on Migration influenced these choices?*
- 3) *What were the most important diplomatic interventions of the Netherlands in South Sudan, Mali and Afghanistan?*

Questions 1, 2 and 3 guided the policy reconstruction. The policy reconstruction can be found in this background document (Chapter 2).

### Relevance

- 4) *Are the Theories of Change underlying the policies and interventions regarding security, stability and rule of law based on valid assumptions?*

This question resulted in the identification of the key assumptions presented in the policy reconstruction (Chapter 2 of this background document). These assumptions are used as a framework for analysis, and a reflection on these assumptions is provided in Chapter 3 of the report (see also questions 7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21 and 22 below).

- 5) *What does the available evidence tell us about what works and what does not work in interventions contributing to stability in fragile contexts?*

To answer this question, IOB commissioned a meta-review of evaluations from Mali and South Sudan, building on an earlier meta-review of evaluations from Afghanistan.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the evaluation team drew on the evidence gathered by 3ie in its *Building Peaceful Societies Evidence Gap Map*.<sup>88</sup> Throughout the report, findings from these sources are used to reflect on and triangulate findings from the case studies.

- 6) *What was the added value of Dutch interventions vis-à-vis other actors and stakeholders?*

This question is answered in section 3.2 of the report.

- 7) *Were the interventions (co)financed by the Netherlands based on a valid context analysis, and did they respond to changes in the context? Do the interventions effectively address the drivers of conflict?*

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<sup>87</sup> 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.

<sup>88</sup> 3ie, *Building Peaceful Societies Evidence Gap Map*, 18 June 2019.

This question is answered in section 3.2 of the report and also draws on the following assumptions from the policy reconstruction:

- External interventions that aim to promote stability and security focus on the key drivers of conflict and fragility;
- Localisation in development and humanitarian programmes helps to better address the needs and priorities of affected populations.<sup>89</sup>

8) *What lessons can be learned from the Netherlands' response to Covid-19 for its policies and programmes related to security, stability and rule of law?*

This question is not answered, as it there have been few significant changes in policy and programming as a result of Covid-19. There were delays, and Covid-19 limited field monitoring.

### **Effectiveness**

9) *What are the results (output, outcome, impact) of the interventions contributing to stability that were implemented, financed or co-financed by the Netherlands in selected regions in South Sudan, Mali and Afghanistan and for the Stability Fund?*

This question is answered in section 3.1 of the report, which also draws on the following assumptions from the policy reconstruction:

- External interventions can play a role in breaking the vicious cycle between (ethnic) tensions, armed conflict, instability and weak governance. More specifically, development cooperation, diplomatic efforts and military interventions can contribute to legitimate stability and an improved social contract in fragile contexts, thereby addressing what are considered the root causes of violent conflict, terrorism, irregular migration and poverty.
- Enhancing 'legitimate stability' and improving the 'social contract' in a country will help address its level of fragility.
- These interventions can provide enough stability and security to facilitate or enable development and strengthen the legitimacy of governance actors and security actors in a sustainable manner.
- Externally financed security and justice reforms can improve the provision of domestic, people-centred security and justice by actors that are increasingly trusted and considered legitimate by the entire population.
- Elements of (foreign) governance institutions and core values such democratisation, inclusive political processes and good governance (a state that accepts responsibility for and is accountable to its citizens) are transferable to fragile contexts and conflict-affected settings.<sup>90</sup>
- There is a sufficient level of 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.
- There is sufficient absorptive capacity for individual and institutional capacity building.
- Peacebuilding, mediation and reconciliation activities can help improve social cohesion between different societal groups and improve the social contract between the state and the people.

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<sup>89</sup> Localisation is the process in which ownership and decision-making is increasingly transferred to local actors.

<sup>90</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'SRoL ToC', 2015, p. 3.

- Improved 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.
- Support to civil society enhances the engagement between government institutions and citizens and improves advocacy for people’s needs, including those of minority groups. This, in turn, should lead to improved legitimate governance and service delivery.
- Improved delivery of social services provides a ‘peace dividend’,<sup>91</sup> thereby improving trust in society and strengthening the social contract between the state and its citizens.
- Economic development and equal distribution of opportunities can reduce tensions over scarce resources, thereby reducing the underlying causes of conflict.
- 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.<sup>92</sup>

*10) Did the interventions achieve different results for women and men and boys and girls?*

This question is not answered. Many project reports did not systematically report on different results for these groups. The case studies were unable to find sufficient evidence to fill this gap or to verify the reported results for those projects that did differentiate for these groups.

*11) Did the interventions have unintended effects (positive and negative), and, if so, what were they?*

This question is answered in section 3.2 of the report. The question is examined with a focus on the extent to which policies and programmes include conflict sensitivity.

*12) To what extent were the diplomatic interventions aligned with the project/programme interventions, and what can be said about the effects?*

This question is answered in section 3.1 of the report.

## **Efficiency**

*13) To what extent was efficiency a point of discussion between implementing organisations and the MFA/Netherlands embassies in the preparation and implementation of the interventions?*

*14) Was the planning of the interventions realistic, adaptive and well-thought out, and when was it most successful? What lessons can be learned from this?*

*15) Were the interventions adequately resourced in terms of policy staff and budget to achieve the desired results?*

Questions 13, 14 and 15 are answered in section 3.4 of the report, and also draws on the following assumptions from the policy reconstruction:

- Adaptive programming and flexibility can improve the effectiveness of Dutch foreign policy and development support in fragile and conflict-affected settings;

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<sup>91</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[Bief speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde](#)’.

<sup>92</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[SRoL ToC](#)’, 2023.

- There is a (political and bureaucratic) will to take risks when intervening in fragile and conflict-affected settings, although there is a risk that illegitimate actors can benefit from Dutch support.

## Coherence

- 16) *To what extent did the MASPs and MACSs contributed to the coherence of the stability policy?*
- 17) *Was the ‘integrated approach’ as a key concept understood by all relevant stakeholders and operationalised in practice?*
- 18) *What mechanisms and funding modalities were in place to ensure (internal, vertical and horizontal<sup>93</sup>) coherence among stability interventions? Did these mechanisms contribute to the coherence of stability interventions?*

Questions 16, 17 and 18 are answered in section 3.3 in the report and also draws on the following assumptions from the policy reconstruction:

- Improving the coordination and cooperation with other actors increases the effectiveness of interventions.

Questions 17 and 18 are answered in section 3.3 in the report and also draws on the following assumptions from the policy reconstruction:

- Through the integrated approach, the various instruments of Dutch foreign policy – diplomacy, development cooperation, defence and justice – can complement and reinforce each other.

- 19) *What mechanisms and funding modalities were put in place to ensure coherence between stability, poverty reduction, migration and humanitarian interventions?*

Questions 19 is answered in section 3.3 of the report and also draws on the following assumptions from the policy reconstruction:

- 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 humanitarian-development-peace (‘triple’) nexus.<sup>94</sup>

- 20) *Have gender issues been effectively mainstreamed in the design and implementation of stability interventions?*

This question is not answered. Many project reports did not systematically report on gender mainstreaming. Project proposals often do mention gender mainstreaming, and project implementers report on the persistence of key institutional barriers and cultural biases that limit their ability to achieve gender mainstreaming in their interventions. However, the case studies did not find sufficient evidence to draw conclusions.

## Sustainability

- 21) *Were meaningful exit strategies developed? Did the strategies take into account local ownership by target groups and stakeholders, capacity building and political commitment?*

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<sup>93</sup> Internal coherence refers to coherence within the MFA between policy departments and the embassies, vertical coherence refers to coherence within the Netherlands between different ministries, and horizontal coherence refers to coherence with other donors and host countries in a specific context.

<sup>94</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘[SRoL ToC](#)’, 2023.

22) *Have the results of completed Dutch (co-)financed stability interventions led to sustainable results?*

Questions 21 and 22 are answered in section 3.5 of the report and also draws on the following assumptions from the policy reconstruction:

- The results and benefits of external interventions make a sustainable 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.

## 3. Findings from the Afghanistan case

### 3.1. Context and general overview of Dutch engagement in Afghanistan

After the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the United States (US) retaliated against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan with Operation Enduring Freedom.<sup>95</sup> The US-backed Northern Alliance took Kabul in November 2001 and overthrew the Taliban. Dutch military involvement in Afghanistan started in 2002 in support of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom and as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).<sup>96</sup> In December 2001, the UN Security Council gave ISAF a mandate to secure the capital Kabul and facilitate the formation of a transitional government. Hamid Karzai was named interim president in 2002, and the focus of donors in Afghanistan shifted to reconstruction. 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).<sup>97</sup> In 2004, the Netherlands opened an embassy in Kabul, and in 2006, the MFA designated Afghanistan as partner country for development cooperation.<sup>98</sup>

In 2003, ISAF came under NATO command and began to extend its control over the whole country. At the same time, the war in Iraq diverted attention away from Afghanistan. Like the US in Operation Enduring Freedom, ISAF worked with so-called Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT), combining military personnel, diplomats and development experts to support reconstruction efforts. The Netherlands had a PRT in Baghlan between 2004 and 2006, and, together with Australia, in Uruzgan between 2006 and 2010 as part of Task Force Uruzgan. Subsequently, the Netherlands ran the 'integrated police training mission' in Kunduz between 2011 and 2013.<sup>99</sup>

From 2006, Taliban resistance grew again, gaining control of territory in the south. In response, US President Obama ordered a substantial troop increase ('the surge') in 2009 to counter the Taliban offensive, and stated that the surge troops would be home again within 15 months. The troops stayed, however, and 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 the responsibility for the country's security to the Afghan authorities. ISAF was succeeded by Resolute Support in 2015, a new NATO-led non-combat mission that aimed to help rebuild the Afghan army and police.

2015 saw the emergence of groups in Afghanistan that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State - the most prominent being the Islamic State of Khorasan Province. In response, the Taliban stepped up their attacks and seized more territory. In 2018, under the recently elected American president Trump, the US began official negotiations with the Taliban. These talks led to a US-Taliban deal in 2020, in which the US unilaterally agreed to withdraw its troops in 2021 in exchange for concessions from the Taliban. Most notably in the form of security guarantees and the Taliban's willingness to

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<sup>95</sup> Operation Enduring Freedom ended in 2014, after which US-led military operations in Afghanistan continued under the name Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS).

<sup>96</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [Terroristische aanslagen in de Verenigde Staten](#), kst 27925-32, 11 December 2001.

<sup>97</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken en Ministerie van Defensie, '[Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme](#)', kst-27925-95, 25 June 2003.

<sup>98</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, [OS Resultaten Afghanistan](#), May 2020.

<sup>99</sup> IOB, [Op zoek naar draagvlak: de geïntegreerde politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan. Post-missiebeoordeling](#), The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2019.

agree to intra-Afghan peace talks. Intra-Afghan peace talks commenced later in 2020 but never reached any sustainable agreement.

Subsequently, NATO coalition countries decided to withdraw, at a time when the Taliban launched a military offensive, claiming that the US had violated the US-Taliban agreement by not withdrawing its troops by May 1. Fighting between the Taliban and the Afghan government – backed by international forces – continued, and from May 2021 the Taliban quickly gained territory and control of key cities. On 15 August, the Taliban entered Kabul and President Ghani fled the country. Chaos erupted at the international airport as Afghans tried to flee and NATO partners tried to evacuate their citizens and vulnerable Afghans.<sup>100</sup> The last US plane left on 30 August, leaving the Taliban in control of the country.

The Dutch government announced its contribution to the NATO-led RSM in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif and Kunduz in 2014. Although this mission was not an integrated Dutch mission, the Article 100 letter indicated that it was part of the international community's integrated approach in Afghanistan, in which political, development and military efforts would complement each other as well as possible.<sup>101</sup> The policy letter, and subsequent Article 100 letters, stated that the contribution to RSM was in both the Afghan and Dutch interest. Reasons given included solidarity with NATO partners, preventing that Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorist organisations, and contributing to a reduction of irregular migration to Europe.<sup>102 103</sup> In 2018, the Netherlands decided to extend the Dutch contribution until the end of 2021 and increase it by 60 military personnel.<sup>104</sup>

Despite its more modest military contribution after 2010, the Dutch priorities in development and security programming continued to be highly ambitious. In its multiannual country strategy for 2014-2017, the MFA focuses its efforts on the 'security and rule of law'<sup>105</sup> policy priority, with special attention for women's rights and gender.<sup>106</sup> The strategy did not set an overall objective for Dutch involvement in Afghanistan. Rather, it aimed help prevent the security situation and the position of women from deteriorating between 2013 and 2018.<sup>107</sup> In a joint policy letter on the Dutch approach in Afghanistan between 2018 and 2021, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Justice and Security stated that combating terrorism and addressing the root causes of irregular migration were the main reasons for the continued Dutch presence in the country. The letter noted that without support of partners such as the Netherlands, the progress made would likely be undone. The letter

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<sup>100</sup> These included Afghans who had worked for NATO or embassies, e.g. as interpreters or security guards, as well as NGO staff and minorities.

<sup>101</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Artikel 100 brief Resolute Support](#)', kst-29521-254, 1 September 2014; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken en Ministerie van Defensie, '[Nederlandse bijdrage Resolute Support Afghanistan](#)', kst-27925-541, 19 June 2015.

<sup>102</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken en Ministerie van Defensie, '[Artikel-100 Grondwet: Verlenging Nederlandse bijdrage aan Resolute Support en inzet voor de Brussel Conferentie over Afghanistan](#)', kst 27925-601, 30 september 2016; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken en Ministerie van Defensie, '[Nederlandse bijdrage Resolute Support Afghanistan](#)'.

<sup>103</sup> IOB, '[Tussen Wens en Werkelijkheid - Evaluatie Nederlandse bijdrage aan de Resolute Support-missie in Afghanistan 2015-2021](#)'. The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2023.

<sup>104</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ministerie van Defensie en Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, '[Kamerbrief over Nederlandse inzet in Afghanistan 2018-2021](#)', 15 June 2018.

<sup>105</sup> For more on the policy priority Security and Rule of Law, see: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Brief spreekpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde](#)'.

<sup>106</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2014-2017'. This choice meant phasing out 'Food Security', 'Good Governance' and 'Private Sector Development'.

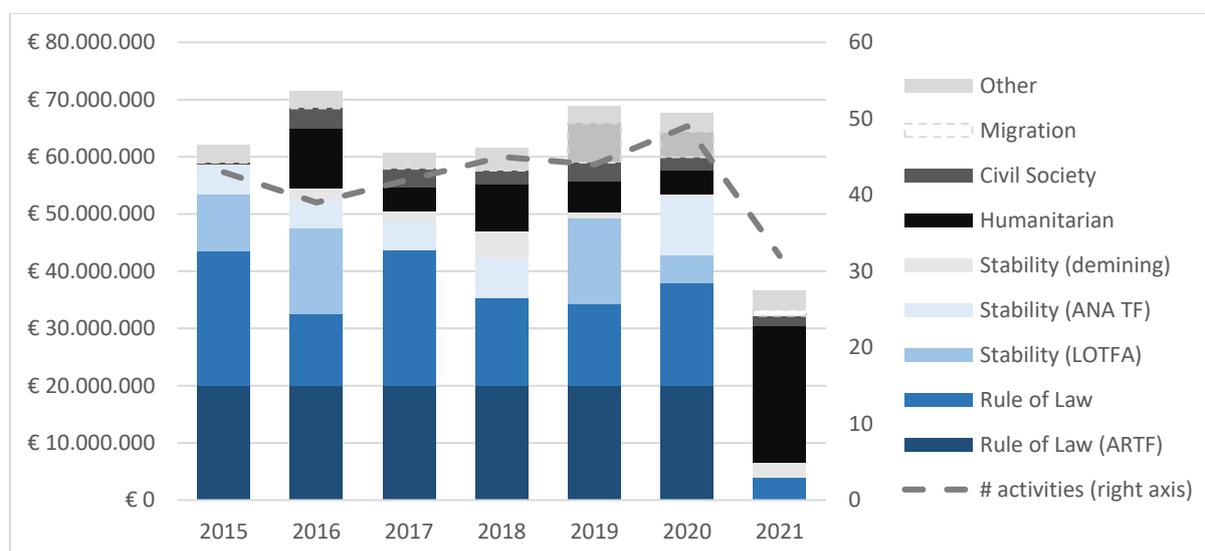
<sup>107</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'MACS Afghanistan 2014-2017'.

indicated that as part of the integrated approach in the country, the Dutch development cooperation priority would continue to be ‘security and rule of law’.

The multiannual country strategy for the period 2019-2022 formulated a rather high level of ambition to help Afghanistan “to become a safe, stable and well-governed nation.”<sup>108</sup> During the evaluation period, the types of activities supported remained broadly the same:

- *Peace, human security and rule of law.* To promote peace and stability, the MFA aimed to support the Afghan peace process, contribute to a stable and elected government, and contribute to reconciliation. Activities included diplomatic efforts (UN, EU and Kabul) as well as support to civil society. Stability was supported mainly through Resolute Support, but also included contributions to the Law and Order Trust Fund Afghanistan (LOTFA) and the Afghan National Army Trust Fund (ANA TF), as well as support for demining. The Netherlands also increasingly focused on migration, working with the Afghan government on the orderly return of migrants and supporting the reintegration and housing of returnees.<sup>109</sup>
- *Human rights.* This included improving the position of women and supporting the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) 1325, supporting the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, training Afghan civil servants, and engaging civil society and the government on corruption and human rights, in particular women’s rights.
- *Social development and peace dividend.* This includes supporting government capacity in relation to healthcare and education, and development programming through the ARTF and NGOs.

Figure 1. 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.

<sup>108</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘MACS Afghanistan 2019-2022’.

<sup>109</sup> Increased attention for migration was in line with the EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward agreement (JWF) that was negotiated in 2016, in response to the ‘refugee and migrant crisis’.

### 3.2. Effectiveness of Dutch interventions to promote stability, security and rule of law in Afghanistan

#### Supporting stability, governance and rule of law

Multi-donor trust funds have received the largest share of Dutch funding in Afghanistan. These are pooled funding mechanisms, usually set up for a specific purpose and generally managed by international organisations. The main arguments for using these trust funds were that they enabled the coordination of development activities, that they were managed by trusted international agencies and, finally, that they required relatively little staff capacity. In Afghanistan, the Netherlands supported three large trust funds: the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), and the Afghanistan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund.

The ARTF was established in 2002 to support the reconstruction of Afghanistan and is managed by the World Bank. An important consideration was that a large trust fund would help to avoid the common problems of aid fragmentation and many extra-budgetary projects. The ARTF was fully aligned with the government's strategic priorities and aimed to improve development outcomes and living standards for all Afghans and contribute to economic growth. The trust fund contributed to the operating costs of the Afghan government and funded several development projects. Direct stakeholders saw the ARTF as a key programme to keep the government afloat, as it contributed directly to service delivery and government salaries. Over the years, the ARTF financed an impressive number of infrastructure projects. Given the ARTF's relatively weak monitoring and evaluation system, not much is known about the achieved outcomes and impacts.<sup>110</sup> Despite donors' hopes that the ARTF would increase government capacity and stimulate economic growth, there is little evidence that it has done so.<sup>111</sup> For example, an external review of the ARTF concluded that a lack of political and policy commitment from the Afghan government led to disappointing results in the USD 350 million Capacity Building Facility.<sup>112</sup>

The most notable results were accomplished by the ARTF's flagship, the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). Evaluation reports indicate that the NSP contributed to improved service delivery, such as access to water. The NSP led to a slight increase in positive attitudes towards sub-national and national governments, but only in areas with a relatively good security environment.<sup>113</sup> However, the evaluation also found that the overall effect of the NSP on perceptions of government performance deteriorated after the completion of NSP-funded projects.<sup>114</sup>

The LOTFA was established in 2002 to support the establishment, payment and training of the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the prison system, and was managed by the UNDP. Initially, the fund focused on paying police salaries and setting up a payroll system. There were problems with 'ghost police', i.e. pay checks being paid to non-existing police officers, but evaluation reports confirmed that the payroll system had been improved.<sup>115</sup> Due to these problems, the Netherlands

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<sup>110</sup> 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.

<sup>111</sup> Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper](#)'.

<sup>112</sup> Scanteam, '[Taking Charge: Government Ownership in a Complex Context](#). External Review ARTF', Oslo, December 2017.

<sup>113</sup> Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper](#)'.

<sup>114</sup> A. Beath, F. Christia and R. Enikolopov, '[Can Development Programs Counter Insurgencies?](#) Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan', Working Paper, World Bank, 2017.

<sup>115</sup> 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. 17.

suspended its payments in 2017 and 2018, and made a final contribution in 2019. Towards the end of 2018, UNDP expanded LOTFA to include the entire judicial chain with an increased focus on anti-corruption. By the end of 2020, however, no projects were funded under the justice and anti-corruption working groups.<sup>116 117</sup>

The ANA Trust Fund was a mechanism to support the Afghan National Army with equipment, services, engineering projects, and training in and outside of the country. It was formally managed by NATO, but through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) administered by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), which received about 90% of the funds. Most of these resources were used for physical infrastructure, such as providing electricity to army bases, and equipment, such as medical supplies. There are no evaluation reports available to assess the results and impact of the ANA TF. In 2021, an audit report concluded that the DOD did not monitor or account for ANA TF funds.<sup>118</sup> Overall, the trust fund provided only a small part of the total financial support to the Afghan army (USD 3.4 billion), with the majority of funding for the Afghan army coming directly from the DOD (USD 88.3 billion).<sup>119</sup> In financial terms, the Netherlands' contribution of EUR 42 million was relatively modest, representing 1.2% of all ANA TF funds, which was approximately 0.05% of all funds allocated to the ANDSF. Respondents considered the main success of the ANA Trust Fund to be the creation of a burden-sharing mechanism among NATO members, and the political message of solidarity and political unity that this conveyed.

In addition to the trust funds, the MFA financed several smaller projects that were implemented by INGOs, UN agencies and Afghan NGOs. As IOB was not able to independently assess project results on the ground, the findings presented in this study are limited by the availability and quality of individual project evaluations. Several projects did contribute to improved security at the local level where activities were implemented. However, in a context with ongoing violence and political struggle, these combined efforts did not result in wider security, stability and improved governance. Here are a few examples to illustrate the nature of the results achieved:

- A demining project cleared land of mines and explosives and helped educate communities about mine risk. The project helped prevent injuries and deaths, returned land to local communities, and increased people's resilience.<sup>120</sup>
- A project 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 safety and incident reporting.<sup>121</sup>
- The evaluation of another project that aimed to build the capacity of Afghan justice sector professionals found that participants had improved their skills and knowledge to handle cases more easily. However, the benefits were mostly evident at the individual level, while

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<sup>116</sup> UNDP, '[Annual Report for the Afghanistan LOTFA MPTF for the period 1 January to 32 December 2020](#)', May 2020.

<sup>117</sup> While UNDP presented one draft project report for the Anti-Corruption window, there were still ongoing discussions and no agreement had been reached with the Attorney General's Office.

<sup>118</sup> The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) 22-04 Audit Report SIGAR, '[NATO Afghan National Army Trust Fund: DOD Did Not Fulfill Monitoring and Oversight Requirements, Evaluate Project Outcomes, or Align Projects with the Former Afghan Army's Requirement Plans](#)', 22-04 AR, 15 October 2021.

<sup>119</sup> 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. By comparison, since 2002, the U.S. Congress had earmarked USD 88.3 billion to train, equip and sustain the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). See: SIGAR, '[Quarterly Report to the United States Congress](#)', 30 April 2021, p. 35.

<sup>120</sup> Samuel Hall, '[Global HALO Trust Mine Action](#) Projects with Multiple Spheres of Change', Evaluation report, 2021.

<sup>121</sup> B. Rodey, 'Afghanistan Urban Peacebuilding Programme 2015-2018', End-of-Programme Evaluation, 2019.

improvements at the level of the Ministry of Justice and the Afghan Independent Bar Association remained at risk due to limited financial resources.<sup>122</sup>

- The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) was supported to promote human rights campaigning, education and raising human rights issues at the government level, but there is no external evaluation to assess its effects on human rights protection.

## Economic development

Support for economic development activities improved the livelihoods of beneficiaries but did not result in sustainable economic development. The MFA funded various economic development activities through smaller projects aimed at promoting increased economic activity and the ARTF. Through the ARTF, the MFA contributed to services and improvements in basic infrastructure. The meta-review shows that these efforts contributed to improved livelihoods and strengthened coping mechanisms, but that they did not lead to sustainable economic growth that translated into jobs or income opportunities – with poverty and unemployment being one of the root causes of conflict according to Dutch policy.<sup>123</sup> In addition to these larger trust funds, the MFA has also directly supported projects implemented by NGOs. Evaluations of these projects show similar results. For example, the evaluation of an employment promotion project found that it was fairly effective in achieving its output-level objectives, but fell short on most of its outcome-level indicators, such as job creation and enterprise growth targets.<sup>124</sup> These findings are consistent with the observations of MFA staff, who have noted that private sector programming has been relatively successful on a small scale at the grassroots level, but that contributing to wider economic development – where poverty is seen as a root cause of conflict – is more difficult to achieve.

## Education

The MFA funded a small number of projects focusing on education. One project supported community-based education, and improved access to education increased the enrolment of children in remote areas of the country.<sup>125</sup> The Netherlands has also been supporting the National Agriculture Education College (NAEC) since 2011, and the project trained Afghans to teach in agricultural schools and improved agricultural education curricula.

In addition to these individual projects, Dutch support to the ARTF has also contributed to education in Afghanistan. The meta-review concludes that aid in the education sector has resulted in better access to education, for both boys and girls.<sup>126</sup> However, impressive results were reported in terms of schools built and increased enrolment, the quality of education remained poor.<sup>127</sup> SIGAR also reported high levels of absenteeism and found that the enrolment figures also included ‘ghost students’ and ‘ghost teachers’.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> IDLO, [‘Evaluation of the project "Afghan Justice Institutions Strengthening \(AJIS\)"](#), The IDLO-International Development Law Organization, 2018.

<sup>123</sup> Zuercher, [‘Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper’](#), p. 8.

<sup>124</sup> Aleph Strategies, ‘Endline Evaluation of the Bright Future Programme’, Afghanistan, Cordaid, 2022.

<sup>125</sup> Afghanistan Center for Training and Development (ACTD), End of Project Evaluation of Partnership for Peace, November 2016.

<sup>126</sup> Zuercher, [‘Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper’](#), p. 20.

<sup>127</sup> S. Shah, and C. Zuercher, [‘Meta-Review Afghanistan. Part 2: Country-Level Evaluations’](#), p. 2.7

<sup>128</sup> 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, p. 15; SIGAR, [‘Primary and Secondary Education in Afghanistan: Comprehensive](#)

## Health

The Netherlands supported health services through the ARTF. The meta-review concludes that support to the health sector has significantly improved health indicators such as infant and maternal mortality.<sup>129</sup> Overall, health interventions increased the availability of health services, their quality and the use of services.<sup>130</sup>

## Gender

Promoting women's rights was effective on a small scale, but it was difficult to contribute to changing prevailing gender norms during the evaluation period. The promotion of gender equality has been an important cross-cutting theme for Dutch development cooperation in general, including in Afghanistan. Women's and girls' access to services such as education and health improved significantly during the evaluation period.<sup>131</sup> The meta-review finds that there have been some pockets of success: for example, projects promoting female literacy and women-specific economic activities helped improve women's livelihoods.<sup>132</sup> Evaluations of MFA-funded projects show that women's participation in local governance bodies has helped to raise awareness of women's rights, and women beneficiaries have felt more empowered. In addition, Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) and small business support helped to improve women's position of women within their families.<sup>133</sup>

On the other hand, changing prevailing cultural norms about gender roles and relations proved much more difficult. An evaluation of an MFA-funded project concluded that the women's advocacy groups that had been formed were not sustainable and that the project's four-year timeframe was too short to bring about structural change.<sup>134</sup> And for another project, the principle assumption did not hold; empowerment at the individual level did not lead to a visible reduction of violence against women. The evaluation also finds evidence of some unintended consequences, including cases of backlash against women beneficiaries by men.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, the meta-review suggests that more ambitious projects aimed directly at changing gender norms had no impact, and that there was little Afghan ownership of gender programming outside of Kabul and the more liberal cities.<sup>136</sup>

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[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.

<sup>129</sup> Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper](#)', p. 21.

<sup>130</sup> 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. 27.

<sup>131</sup> Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper](#)', p20; Shah, Sylvester and Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan. Part 2: Country-Level Evaluations](#)', p19; SIGAR, '[What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction](#)', SIGAR 21-46-LL, August 2021, p. 25.

<sup>132</sup> 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. 18-22; Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper](#)', p. 20.

<sup>133</sup> MDF, 'Final evaluation of the FFP programme. Care Netherlands', Ede, 2016.

<sup>134</sup> MDF, 'Final evaluation of the FFP programme. Care Netherlands'.

<sup>135</sup> J. Corboz et al., 'Women for Women International, [FLOW project final evaluation report](#)', 2021.

<sup>136</sup> Interviews with embassy staff and partner organisations; Shah, Sylvester and Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan. Part 2: Country-Level Evaluations](#)'.

### 3.3. Relevance

There was no overarching ToC for the joint Dutch efforts in Afghanistan that made explicit the assumptions underlying the policy. Moreover, many of the (reconstructed) assumptions were invalid. The multiannual country strategies for Afghanistan did not explicitly state the key assumptions underlying policy and programme choices. In particular, the most recent strategy (2019-2022) set an ambitious objective without making explicit how the selected activities are expected to contribute to this objective. Similarly, the joint policy letter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Justice and Security, which outlined Dutch efforts in Afghanistan for the period 2018-2021, did not explicitly link the supported political, security or development interventions to an overall objective.

Generally, Dutch contributions in Afghanistan were part of the international community's efforts to support security and development. According to SIGAR and the meta-review, the strategies adopted by the international community were generally formulated in a top-down manner, timelines were often supply-driven, and objectives were not aligned with Afghan priorities and culture.<sup>137</sup> Several (reconstructed) assumptions underlying the efforts of the international engagement, including the Netherlands, did not hold:

- Capacity building of governance and security actors did not improve governance. A certain level of political will and absorptive capacity was assumed, but political conflicts between groups and actors prevented this.<sup>138</sup>
- It was assumed that improved service delivery and technical support to government and security actors would overcome political divisions and trickle up to a national political dialogue. This was not the case.
- Support was expected to contribute to improved gender relations. The findings suggest that addressing gender norms was not very effective. The short timeframes are particularly problematic. Although such projects can contribute to change over a longer period of time, the short duration and expectation of results within the time frame of a project can contribute to unrealistic timelines.<sup>139</sup>
- Fragile contexts are by definition volatile, and can therefore deteriorate despite efforts to strengthen their contribution to development and security. However, policy and programming have largely focused on the best possible outcome, and there have been few contingency plans, either operational or programmatic, for other scenarios. For example, the scenario of a Taliban takeover towards or in the wake of the withdrawal of troops was not considered the most likely in the short term and therefore not proactively prepared for by the MFA.

These discrepancies between the reality on the ground in Afghanistan and the perception of Afghanistan in The Hague can be partly explained by the fact that too little effort has been made to critically assess these underlying assumptions. There are several factors that hinder critical reflection on strategies and assumptions. The MFA's information and monitoring position in Afghanistan was limited. Short two-year contracts, R&R and staff rotations limited the capacity and retention of

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<sup>137</sup> Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper](#)'; SIGAR, '[What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction](#)', p. xi .

<sup>138</sup> Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper](#)'; SIGAR, '[What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction](#)', p. xi.

<sup>139</sup> Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper](#)'

knowledge at the embassy.<sup>140</sup> Although the extent to which security restricted traveling for embassy staff varied considerably between 2015 and 2021, it was a limiting factor throughout. As a result, the MFA was often relatively dependent on information provided by implementing partners (trust funds, NGOs, NATO). Competition between organisations for limited funds gives implementing partners incentives to demonstrate positive results. Implementing partners commit themselves to (too) ambitious project results within short timeframes. In addition, lead organisations often work with several local partners, and may themselves not always have the necessary access to information.<sup>141</sup>

In addition to access to information, critical reflection on strategy and assumptions is also hampered by the incentive at the political level in The Hague to create a positive narrative and formulate priorities that fit with the Dutch political context. Many programmes and projects in Afghanistan were supply-driven; the political decision had been taken that the Netherlands would remain active in Afghanistan, and there a strong political desire to showcase the results of Dutch interventions in Afghanistan. Domestic preferences in the Netherlands – of political parties, NGOs, interest groups, etc. – influenced the programmes and objectives for Afghanistan, even if these were sometimes unrealistic in the Afghan context. Intervening in a context such as Afghanistan with (unrealistic) high ambitions automatically increased the likelihood that the intended results could not be achieved due to developments beyond the sphere of influence of the implementing organisations.

The fact that the Netherlands operated in Afghanistan and the specific objectives of its programmes implied a certain risk appetite that did not exist in practice. The anticipation of negative media coverage or critical questions in parliament impeded an open flow of information about the Afghan context and the progress of the implemented programmes. Several policy officers indicated that a deterioration in the security situation or a lack of results in the supported programmes could be misinterpreted by parliament as a failure of the programmes. As a result, there was a reluctance in the upper echelons of the MFA to share reflections on the lack of success of the international interventions and the deteriorating situation on the ground.<sup>142, 143, 144</sup>

### 3.4. Coherence

#### The integrated approach

The experience of working in Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which combined military personnel, diplomats and development experts in Baghlan and Uruzgan between 2004 and 2010, shaped the

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<sup>140</sup> Staff were stationed in Kabul for a maximum of two years and worked on a schedule of four weeks on/four weeks off.

<sup>141</sup> Interviews with embassy staff, DSH, DAO, partner organisations.

<sup>142</sup> The post-mission evaluation of the integrated police training mission in Kunduz had similar findings.

<sup>143</sup> One illustrative example is of a respondent who recalled that a draft report on Afghanistan to parliament mentioned that the security situation was improving. After objecting to this statement with figures that the number of civilian casualties was increasing, indicating that the security situation was getting worse, it was changed to stating that the security situation was 'mixed'. Another respondent said: "what can you tell about war? Dilemmas, risks, security, integrity of the Afghan government. How much do you explain about this? There is the fear that if you are too difficult, Parliament will say: we don't want to do this anymore." 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 had been sidelined.

<sup>144</sup> Our findings are in line with those of the KUNO evaluation, which highlighted that this positive narrative was also closely linked to the fact that the Netherlands had (military) missions in Afghanistan. Once the green light had been given by parliament, the political leadership was in constant need of positive stories showing incremental progress. See, P. Heintze and J. Kamminga, '[Balanceren tussen ambitie en wensdenken](#).' *Leren van 20 jaar Nederlandse inzet in Afghanistan*. KUNO, 2023.

Dutch interpretation of the integrated approach in Afghanistan.<sup>145 146</sup> While Resolute Support was not seen as an integrated Dutch mission, the Netherlands did aim to integrate these military and police training efforts with development and diplomacy.<sup>147</sup> However, this did not really happen in practice: Resolute Support was a mission in its own right, and the military contribution could 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. At best, staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence kept each other informed of their activities.

The main objective of Dutch diplomacy through the embassy in Afghanistan was to reinforce the objectives of Dutch development support and military engagement. Bilateral engagement was primarily concerned with building relationships with Afghan counterparts and using these relations to promote stability and development. At the multilateral level, efforts were made to coordinate the political messages to Afghan military and political actors within the donor community. Nevertheless, other countries had a much greater role and stronger influence, with the US being the most dominant player. Regarding the withdrawal of its troops, the US increasingly followed its own course without involving other donors, NATO partners or the Afghan government.

### Coordination

Compared to the Netherlands' partner countries, Afghanistan received a relatively large share through multi-donor trust funds. Channelling funds from different donors can facilitate effective donor coordination. The aim of the ARTF was to provide a vehicle for coordinated aid financing to build state capacity for the delivery of basic public services in the country, while avoiding fragmentation problems. Most large donors in Afghanistan provided much of their funding through the ARTF. Indeed, it has served as an important mechanism for aid coordination in the country. An internal World Bank evaluation found that that the ARTF was a valuable alternative to individually managed projects.<sup>148</sup> Donors also confirmed that it improved the harmonisation and coordination of aid.<sup>149</sup> Allocating Dutch funds to these trust funds therefore contributed to a coordinated donor response in Afghanistan.

The effectiveness of the steering groups and the management of the trust funds was complicated by the fact that donors had different priorities.<sup>150</sup> One of the key issues that affected LOTFA's performance, for example, 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.<sup>151</sup>

The Netherlands was a relatively small donor; between 2015 and 2021 the Dutch official development assistance (ODA) ranged between 0.9% and 2.3% of total ODA in Afghanistan.<sup>152</sup> The

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<sup>145</sup> C. Malkasian and G. Meyerle, '[Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How do we know they work?](#)', Strategic Studies Institute, 2009.

<sup>146</sup> For example, see J. van der Lijn, '[3D "The Next Generation" Lessons Learned from Uruzgan for Future Operations](#)', Clingendael, 2011.

<sup>147</sup> 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](#)'.

<sup>148</sup> T. Haque and C. Sassif, '[Evaluation of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund](#). Recurrent and Capital Cost Operation', Washington DC, World Bank 2021.

<sup>149</sup> S. Shah and C. Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan. Part 2: Country-Level Evaluations](#)'.

<sup>150</sup> Interviews embassy staff and partner organisations.

<sup>151</sup> R.H. Langan and T. Nasary, (2018) '[Mid-term Evaluation of the LOTFA-SPM Project](#)', UNDP, 18 March 2018.

<sup>152</sup> OECD, '[Creditor Reporting System](#)', 2023.

Dutch pledge of USD 60 million for the ARTF for 2018-2020 represented about 2% of the total commitments for this period.<sup>153</sup> However, the coordination in the Nordic+ helped to strengthen the position of the Netherlands and the like-minded Nordic countries vis-à-vis the wider donor group. The effectiveness in influencing policy within these large trust funds was sometimes hindered by the limited capacity on the part of the MFA.

Donor and aid coordination beyond these trust funds appeared to be more difficult, however. A mid-term review of LOTFA, found that projects supported through LOTFA, and managed by UNDP were not coordinated with the rest of UNDP's Afghanistan Access to Justice Programme. The review found that projects from both programmes had existed within their own silos, even though both focused on strengthening the justice sector in Afghanistan.<sup>154</sup>

There were several aid coordination mechanisms in place, including the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board and the National Priority Programme (NPP) Development Councils, and there were biennial donor conferences mobilise funding and political support for Afghanistan's development. An external review of the ARTF in 2017 concluded that the larger aid coordination bodies were generally not effective, while the donor-led state-building working groups were too ad hoc and fragmented.<sup>155</sup>

### 3.5. Efficiency

Evaluations rarely assessed whether the programmes supported in Afghanistan were economically efficient. . Therefore, it was difficult to conclude to what extent the supported programmes offered value for money. In terms of operational efficiency, an important finding is that due the complex and difficult working environment made it difficult for the embassy 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 knowledge and experience was further limited by frequent staff rotation in Kabul, where staff is deployed for only two years, with a continuous R&R schedule.

These issues are not unique to the Netherlands. SIGAR also notes in its lessons learned report from 2021 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.”*<sup>156</sup> Short postings hinder institutional memory and learning. They also contribute to short – and sometimes unrealistic – time frames for results, with staff aiming to achieve results within the period of their posting.<sup>157</sup>

Difficulties in monitoring programmes and capacity limitations created an incentive for the MFA to contribute to large multi-donor trust funds. This was based on the assumption that a few financially robust programmes would require less management than many smaller projects and that these funds would be managed by trustworthy organisations with adequate fiduciary systems in place. Over the years, however, concerns have grown about these organisation's quality of monitoring. In the case of the ARTF, for example, donors had serious concerns about the quality of monitoring and

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<sup>153</sup> The United States, by comparison, committed USD 900 million and the United Kingdom 339 million.

<sup>154</sup> Langan and Nasary, [‘Mid-term Evaluation of the LOTFA-SPM Project’](#)

<sup>155</sup> Scanteam, [‘Taking Charge: Government Ownership in a Complex Context’](#). External Review ARTF, Oslo, December 2017.

<sup>156</sup> SIGAR, [‘What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction’](#), p. x

<sup>157</sup> Interviews embassy staff, DSH, DAO and partner organisations

lack of insight into results achieved.<sup>158</sup> ARTF's results on schools were found to include 'ghost students, LOTFA's results included 'ghost police' (see section 3.2), and reports on support for the Afghan army included 'ghost soldiers'.<sup>159</sup>

To some extent, large trust funds have facilitated relatively effective coordination of aid within the funds and have therefore contributed to a more efficient use of the resources. They have prevented problems of donor fragmentation and duplication of efforts. However, the downside was that these trust funds were large and bureaucratic entities with little connection to the grassroots level. An external review, for example, concluded that the ARTF used banking procedures where the time required for planning and management hindered the flexibility and caused frustration among partners.<sup>160</sup>

### 3.6. Sustainability

The international effort in Afghanistan lacked a clear long-term political strategy and paid insufficient attention to sustainability. No clear long-term strategy was developed for international engagement in the country. Analysts have criticised the US for underestimating the time and resources needed to rebuild Afghanistan, leading to short-term solutions and effectively 20 one-year strategies for Afghanistan, rather than one 20-year effort.<sup>161</sup> The Netherlands could not have set a strategy for Afghanistan on its own, as it depended largely on the US and NATO. Nevertheless, the Netherlands did not have a clearly articulated strategy. Again, the short rotations also played a role here, as they disincentivise longer-term planning.<sup>162</sup>

The lack of a clear long-term strategy meant insufficient attention was paid to sustainability. For example, LOTFA had many more police on the payroll than the Afghan government could afford, and the salary envelope steadily increased over the years, even further impeding sustainability. While the ARTF infrastructure and service delivery improved, the Afghan government was not capable of maintaining it without external support. Afghan government capacity building was often successful during the evaluation period.<sup>163</sup> The absorptive capacity was generally limited and further exacerbated by frequent changes in key government staff. At high levels of government, political appointees regularly changed positions. And at the operational level, attracting qualified staff was hampered by high salary disparities between positions in the government and international organisations. The lack of a clear long-term strategy, short time frames and pressure to show results increasingly led to the substitution of government capacity with costly external consultants and contractors. Furthermore, without government capacity to take responsibility for service delivery,

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<sup>158</sup> SIGAR, '[Afghanistan reconstruction Trust Fund: The World Bank needs to Improve How it Monitors Implementation, Shares Information, and Determines the Impact of Donor Contributions](#)', 18-42-AR, April 2018; Popal and Zuercher, '[Meta-Review of Evaluations of Development Assistance to Afghanistan, 2008 – 2018. Part 3: Summary of Selected SIGAR Reports](#)'; Shah, Sylvester and Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan. Part 2: Country-Level Evaluations](#)',

<sup>159</sup> IOB, '[Op zoek naar draagvlak: de geïntegreerde politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan. Post-missiebeoordeling](#)'; SIGAR, '[What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction](#)', p. viii.

<sup>160</sup> Scanteam, '[Taking Charge: Government Ownership in a Complex Context](#)'.

<sup>161</sup> SIGAR, '[What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction](#)', p. viii.

<sup>162</sup> Interviews embassy staff, DSH, DAO, partner organisations.

<sup>163</sup> Zuercher, '[Meta-Review Afghanistan, Chapeau Paper](#)'. This study concludes that *"taken together, the 148 evaluation reports suggest that capacity-building measures were mostly not successful. In the few instances where progress was made, it remained confined to small silos, not translating into more overall state capacity, and/or it was mainly borrowed from the so-called 'second civil service' consisting of well-paid Afghan returnees or international consultants"*.

and largely dependent on donor funding, trust funds created parallel structures that were not sustainable. As a result, it became increasingly more difficult to phase out or end support. After the Taliban seized power, international donors withdrew most development assistance. Since then, the collapse of the Afghan economy has also been compounded by natural disasters. But the deterioration of government services and the inability to pay the salaries of the remaining civil servants show that the institutions and initiatives put in place by donors relied on the assumption of political will to maintain them and needed a strong international presence to function.

## 4. Findings from the Mali case<sup>164</sup>

### 4.1. Context and general overview of Dutch engagement in Mali

Since the late 1970s, Dutch engagement in Mali has focused on southern Mali and the Niger River Basin, mainly on water and food security. Since the 2000s, the focus has broadened to include basic education and healthcare – specifically sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Tensions between the nomadic Tuareg people and the Malian government have existed for decades, and the First Tuareg Rebellion (1962–1964) started shortly after the country's independence in 1960. Following the Tuareg Rebellion of 2012, in which several armed groups fought for the independence of the northern region of Mali known as 'Azawad', and the subsequent overthrow of President Amadou Toumani Touré by the army, the country entered 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 on to the capital Bamako,<sup>165</sup> this triggered the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) and the French military intervention Serval (predecessor of Operation Barkhane).

Deteriorating circumstances in the country and the Sahel region, and a changing political agenda with an increased emphasis on the perceived threats to European stability, terrorism and irregular migration, resulted in a shift in the Dutch engagement in Mali. In 2013, the Dutch government decided to contribute to the UN stabilisation mission MINUSMA, which replaced AFISMA. The Dutch contribution to MINUSMA focused on the Gao region along three pillars: military (centring on intelligence services), police (centring on community policing and access to justice) and civilian (centring on protection of civilians and rule of law).<sup>166</sup> At the same time, in its revised Multiannual Strategic Plan (MASP) for Mali for 2014-2018, the MFA introduced the thematic policy priority of security and rule of law (SRoL), with the intention of aligning efforts with the contribution to MINUSMA. Initially, the focus was mainly on the rule of law and access to justice. The programmes supported aimed to combat discrimination and exclusion, and develop inclusive governance and institutions, thus contributing to the overarching goal of inclusive development.<sup>167</sup> Over time, the focus of SRoL programming has broadened to include human rights and governance – 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.<sup>168</sup>

In 2015, a peace agreement was signed between rebel pro-independence groups (Coalition des Mouvements de l'Azawad, CMA), pro-Bamako groups (Platform coalition) and the government. While the peace agreement was expected to bring greater stability, the period that followed was characterised by a downward spiral of communal violence. Jihadist insurgents expanded and embedded themselves in communities in central Mali, while international attention focused on

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<sup>164</sup> IOB wrote this report based on the final report that it commissioned from the Clingendael Conflict Research Unit. See Chapter 1.3 of the main report.

<sup>165</sup> R. Valdmanis and D. Lewis, '[Mali Islamists suffer split as Africans prepare assault](#)', *Reuters*, 14 January 2013.

<sup>166</sup> 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, pp. 20 + 23-24.

<sup>167</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Bamako Annual Plan, Review 2016/Results 2017' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken), p. 6.

<sup>168</sup> Interviews embassy staff and DAF.

stabilising the northern parts of the country. As a result, Mali's central regions of Mopti and Segou witnessed an escalation of violence through armed attacks, scaled-up military operations and increased targeting of civilians.<sup>169</sup> This increase in violence correlates with the emergence of Katiba Macina – a regional, pre-dominantly Fulani insurgent group that was subsumed into a conglomerate of the al-Qaeda-affiliated jihadist insurgent group Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in 2017.<sup>170</sup> Two other non-state armed groups have emerged since its creation: the (at times) state-sponsored self-defence militia Dan Na Ambassagou and the jihadist rival Islamic State in the Greater Sahel<sup>171</sup>. Ethnic armed groups have been responsible for a rise in ethnically motivated massacres of civilians. The Dogon-majority self-defence group Dan Na Ambassagou increased attacks against Fulani villages in Ogassagou (central Mali) in both 2019 and 2020, whereas the Tuareg Daoussahak self-defence group MSA-D increased attacks against Fulani in the Mali-Niger border area.

The MFA's recognition that Mali's challenges were transnational and cross-border and led to the development of a multiannual regional strategy for the Sahel for 2019-2022.<sup>172</sup> This Dutch strategy for the Sahel merged the objectives of three main policy frameworks developed in 2018: the Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy (GBVS), the policy framework for development cooperation and foreign trade 'Investing in Global Prospects', and the Comprehensive Agenda on Migration. Drawing on these policy frameworks, the multiannual strategy identifies five policy priorities for Mali:

- Peace, security, stability and migration
- European cooperation
- Sustainable trade and investment
- Sustainable development, food security, water and climate
- Social progress

The strategy "sets policy objectives that address the consequences as well as the drivers of instability... The theory of change underlying this long-term vision was that a strengthened social contract between governments and the population would 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".<sup>173</sup> However, the document did not elaborate on the logic behind this ToC, nor on how the activities could contribute to a strengthened social contract, nor on the assumptions underlying the steps between activities and the five policy priorities for Mali.

Throughout its diplomatic and programmatic interventions, the Netherlands' ambition was to strengthen security, stability, and the rule of law with both institutional support to state and local authorities and to CSOs engaged in the justice and security sectors. However, over the past ten years of engagement, the Dutch policy in Mali has undergone significant changes – in terms of broadening geographic and thematic focus. Geographically, Dutch policy and programming aligned with the shifting conflict dynamic. Its main stabilisation engagement – in particular through SROl and governance programming – originally focused on the northern regions with the beginning of conflict in 2013, and increasingly focused on the central regions from 2016 onwards.

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<sup>169</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (Acled), '[Mali: Any Endo to the Storm?](#)', 2020.

<sup>170</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (Acled), '[Mali: Any Endo to the Storm?](#)'

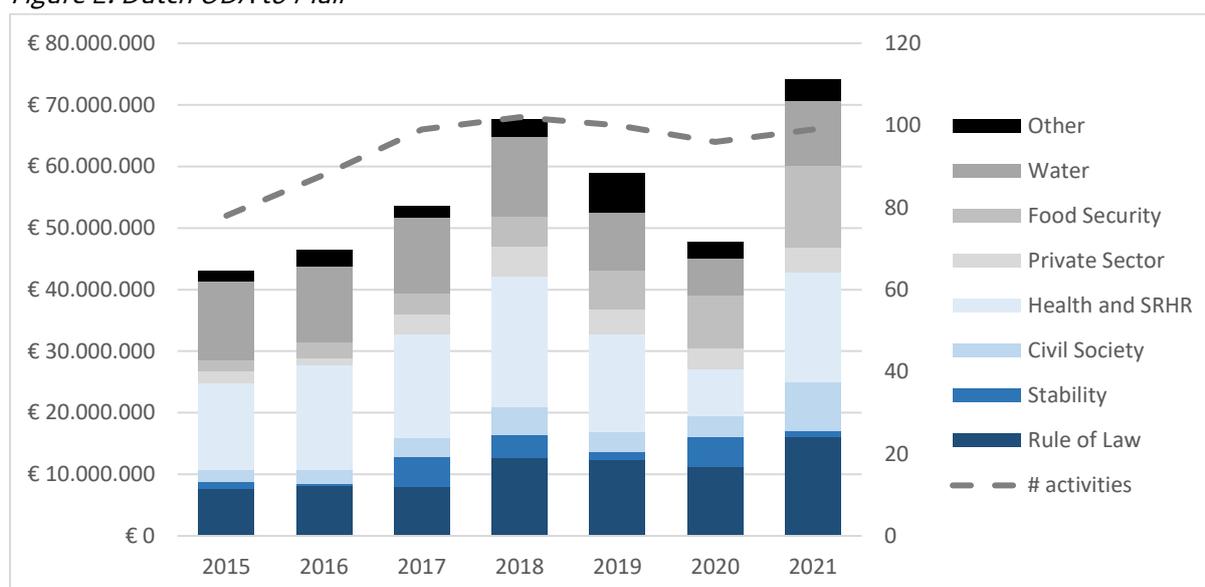
<sup>171</sup> In 2022 renamed into the Islamic State Province Sahel.

<sup>172</sup> Prior to this, a pilot inter-ministerial strategy was developed for the period 2018-2021. See policy reconstruction.

<sup>173</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2019-2022', p. 21.

Thematically, the engagement shifted from a primary focus on *state institutions and infrastructure* to one centred on the concept of *legitimate stability*, which was translated to a focus on the *social contract* subsequently from 2018 onwards. The initial integrated focus on rule of law merged into a multi-layered support to state capacities and the civil society in the field of justice, security and, defence, and health. Institutional programming that resulted in successive failures of interventions in the north led to a thematic shift in Dutch policy and programming towards governance and social cohesion. It increasingly extended support to various civil society organisations and NGOs working in areas that were once the State's prerogative, the idea being to bring non-state authorities and actors into the social contract, and to increase governance capacity from below to rebuild the social contract.

Figure 2. 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.

## 4.2. Effectiveness of Dutch interventions to promote stability, security and rule of law in Mali

### MINUSMA

In its evaluation of the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA, IOB concluded that the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA was of high quality and innovative in the UN context, but the intelligence contribution provided only limited support to the mission's decision-making and did not strengthen the intelligence chain in a sustainable manner.<sup>174</sup> The objectives set for the contribution by the police and the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee were only partially achieved, mainly because they were not based on a realistic assessment of the institutional environment and the operational context. Although the Netherlands aimed to apply an integrated approach, this was not effectively operationalised as there were multiple interpretations of what this should entail in practice. The

<sup>174</sup> IOB, *Een missie in een missie. De Nederlandse bijdrage aan de VN Multidimensionale Geïntegreerde Stabilisatie Missie in Mali (MINUSMA) 2014-2019*.

contribution of civilian experts and advisers, while valuable on a small scale, was relatively fragmented and detached from the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA.<sup>175</sup>

The military, police and civilian contributions to MINUSMA in the period of 2014-2019 were the most central to Dutch efforts to support stabilisation in Mali. The IOB evaluation of MINUSMA shows that it has largely failed to deliver on its mandate to strengthen stability in Mali. The Dutch contribution resulted led to stability only to a very limited and mostly indirect extent. This was partly due to the nature of the chosen priority for the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA (intelligence capacity), and partly due to the fact that the silo structure of MINUSMA undermined the ability of the Dutch components within MINUSMA to work together. Despite being a central pillar of Dutch support for stability in Mali, IOB concluded that the mission lacked a political and strategic definition.

The Netherlands has contributed to the MINUSMA Trust Fund and has a seat its steering group. The aim of the Trust Fund was to support the objectives of the UN mission and to contribute to the reconstruction and stabilisation of northern and central Mali, where insecurity makes it difficult to carry out long-term development projects. The effectiveness of the MINUSMA Trust Fund has been limited. The meta-review notes that stabilisation can only be achieved if state institutions are gradually redeployed and regain confidence. Representatives of the subnational government indicated that the government's role was not sufficiently emphasised by the MINUSMA Trust Fund's projects. Furthermore, the Fund focused on short-term recovery projects, which did not always reflect the priorities of the population.<sup>176</sup>

### SRoL and governance programming

Projects supported by the Netherlands achieved positive results in small areas or for individual participants of the project. This evaluation shows that many of the sampled projects achieved positive results in relation to their original objectives. For example, projects supporting the Malian prison system helped to improve prison conditions. Through training and capacity building, the skills of prison staff and prison administrators were improved. This, combined with the refurbishment of prisons, helped to improve the living conditions of prisoners. Projects also helped to improve prisoners' access to justice.<sup>177</sup> At the community level, projects helped to strengthen the capacity of communities and civil society in peacebuilding. For example, exchanges were organised to support the process of drawing up local development plans in Mopti. Findings from our fieldwork indicate that several projects in Mopti strengthened the capacities of community leaders, the media and religious leaders to develop and implement action plans, which helped to resolve some local conflicts. Despite these positive results at the local level in Mopti, the positive results achieved haven't trickled down to the sub-national level.

The Mopti region is still affected by conflict. In this context, the evaluation cannot link the positive results achieved by the individual projects to increased stability. None of the projects achieved sufficient results at their level to contribute to a nationwide impact. It is important to note that in most cases the objectives of these projects were not to promote nationwide stability. However, the assumption underlying Dutch policy was that the combined efforts of projects at the local level would improve stability at the national or sub-national level. The problem can also be traced back to

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<sup>175</sup> IOB concluded that the ministries and officials involved tended to present a positive picture of the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA, while reporting on challenges was limited.

<sup>176</sup> C. Zuercher et al., '[Impacts of Development Aid to Mali 2008–2021. Part II.](#)' Country level Evaluations' The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2022.

<sup>177</sup> Interviews with project staff, embassy staff and site visits.

a lack of understanding of the concept of stabilisation and the absence of a clear Theory of Change for Dutch policy, which would detail how projects should address policy objectives. Moreover, external factors, such as increased insecurity and inter-community tensions, undermined the implementation of projects and particularly their effectiveness on the ground.

### Government capacity building

Government capacity building had little effect, particularly at the national level. Several projects provided training in conflict prevention and resolution for local government actors. A few projects trained staff from the Ministry of Justice and police departments and supported reforms to promote an inclusive and participatory governance of the security sector. One project trained military actors in topics such as human rights, conflict prevention, transitional justice, security sector reform, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, and gender. The fieldwork conducted for this evaluation revealed that in some projects the skills acquired helped beneficiaries to obtain better jobs or positions.<sup>178</sup> For example, one project improved the capacity of Ministry of Justice staff, judges and court staff. The fieldwork found that only in a few cases was the training also able to contribute to results beyond the level of the individual beneficiary and have an effect on improved governance or service delivery.<sup>179</sup> This included a project where capacity building of government staff was connected to activities that helped to reduce the gap between citizens and local institutions. Overall, however, the impact of capacity building and institutional reform on improved governance and service delivery has been limited, particularly at the national level. For example, the overall results of a security sector reform programme were limited and insufficient to address the deep-rooted causes of conflict in the security sector.<sup>180</sup> As a result of frequent staff rotations at the Ministry of Justice, any progress made by this project on reform and capacity building was quickly undone with each change of staff.

This is consistent with the meta-review, which finds no evidence that capacity building and government reforms to promote good governance in Mali have been effective at the level of central government.<sup>181</sup> This conclusion was based on the review of a number of evaluations covering a wide range of interventions in different areas, such as public resource management, fiscal decentralisation, political decentralisation, rehabilitation of government infrastructure, capacity building for government officials, strengthening the relationship between citizens and public authorities, and creating spaces for public debate. However, the review did identify some areas of success where international donor capacity building has been effective. These were mainly in the health sector and in highly technical, a-political areas at the sub-national level, such as education, rural development and health.<sup>182</sup>

Decentralisation interventions in Mali supported by international donors, including the Netherlands, were also unsuccessful. After the 2015 peace agreement, donors saw administrative decentralisation as a way to promote stability and better governance, so many donors supported decentralisation. This did not lead to substantial results, mainly because there was no political buy-in from the central government; which saw decentralisation as strengthening the political position of the North.

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<sup>178</sup> Interviews.

<sup>179</sup> Interviews with project staff, embassy staff and site visits.

<sup>180</sup> Among other things, 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.

<sup>181</sup> Zuercher et al., [Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States](#).

<sup>182</sup> Zuercher et al., [Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States](#).

## Rural development and food security

Rural development was a key priority for Dutch development cooperation in Mali, both before the conflict and after violence erupted in 2012. Several of the projects supported by the MFA promoted food production and income generation, thus helping to resolve the underlying drivers of violence, such as the lack of social and economic opportunities. Following are some examples from the fieldwork:

- One project effectively improved the onion and fish value chains as well as actors' access to quality inputs in the onion and fish sectors in the Mopti region. This increased the availability and accessibility of high-quality products. However, the lack of access to financing for fish farming in the region limited scale-up investments and higher returns from these income-generating activities.
- Another project supported income-generating activities and food production for people in the Mopti region through the improved use of water and seeds. As a result, 3,500 households increased their food production and income. It also supported conflict resolution and the effective management of water resources through the signing of conventions and peace agreements.<sup>183</sup>
- Another project financed by the MFA supported a network of Malian parliamentarians in their fight against malnutrition and actively pushed for the 2017 revision of the constitution to recognise food and nutrition as a right. This led to changes in the law that recognise the need to grow fruit and vegetables (not just cotton and rice) and earmark funds for fruit and vegetable production. However, as the draft constitutional revision is still pending, the coalition has opted to include the right to food and nutrition in the development programmes at the decentralised levels (regional, local and municipal).<sup>184</sup>

These findings are broadly consistent with those of the meta-review, which concludes that interventions focused on rural development, such as rural credit, cash and in-kind transfers, saving associations, introduction of new crops, and irrigation projects, have been somewhat effective in increasing agricultural production.<sup>185</sup> The review also notes that cooperation on rural development between donors and the Malian government was satisfactory; and that capacity building and training of government officials at the sub-national level in technical areas related to rural development was effective. However, despite these positive results, rural development interventions aimed at increasing productivity beyond subsistence farming were rarely successful.<sup>186</sup>

## Gender and SRHR

Previously, the ministry contributed directly to Mali's five-year Health and Social Development Programme (PRODESS) III.<sup>187</sup> Currently, the embassy contributes to the World Bank's Multi-Donor Trust Fund 'Mali Universal Health Coverage' to improve the quantity and quality of reproductive and sexual health services. It has also supported a number of individual projects aimed at promoting sexual and reproductive health. In Mali, the political and cultural context made it difficult to make tangible progress on women's rights and gender equality. The MFA supported several projects that aim to promote sexual and reproductive health. The field research showed that these projects can help to improve elected officials' knowledge of SRHR and mobilise community leaders to participate

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<sup>183</sup> Project analysis by Malian consultants.

<sup>184</sup> Project analysis by Malian consultants.

<sup>185</sup> Zuercher et al., [Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States](#).

<sup>186</sup> Zuercher et al., [Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States](#).

<sup>187</sup> Hera, [Revue du soutien du royaume des pays-bas au systeme de sante au Mali](#), 2021.

in the debate on sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>188</sup> The team of Malian researchers found that a project in Mopti was effective in disseminating information on family planning and contraception, and on harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage. However, in one community, the researchers also found that project implementers used a financial reward system to discourage people from female genital mutilation, which raises questions about the sustainability of the project's results.<sup>189</sup>

The meta-review finds that while there have been results in terms of legislative changes – for example, donors, including the Netherlands, have pushed for the adoption of a law setting a 30% quota of women in the parliament and a draft law on gender-based violence – it is unlikely that this has helped to improve gender equality through actual implementation.<sup>190</sup> More effects were visible in projects that aimed to deliver tangible benefits to women. For example, village savings and loan associations helped to improve women's economic status. Interventions aimed at improving educational outcomes for girls generated concrete results. Finally, reports found that the removal of health user fees increased women's access to healthcare.<sup>191</sup>

## Diplomacy

Despite its long-term engagement in Mali, the Netherlands is a relatively small diplomatic player in a region where France has traditionally played a dominant role. Nevertheless, the embassy staff have played an active role in donor coordination meetings. For example, the Netherlands participates in the regular meetings between bilateral donor governments, multilateral actors and the Malian government actors responsible for socio-economic development (the so-called 'troika') – and chaired these meetings in 2018. The 'troika' meetings are supported by a range of thematic working groups, in which the Netherlands has participated as well and chaired, for example, the working groups on justice and on governance. The challenge is to move such meetings beyond an exchange of information to real cooperation.

While several donors have been focusing on 'hard' security and counter-terrorism measures in response to the conflict, the Netherlands has advocated with other donors and international organisations to also include 'softer' elements in multilateral support, such as justice, human rights and governance. A good example of this is the effort to broaden the scope of the international debates on the Sahel to include attention for human rights and justice.<sup>192</sup> The EU/G5 agenda for the region has been very much driven by a security angle, and the EU/G5 summits in Brussels have focused on security, terrorism and organised crime (including human trafficking). The Netherlands, in cooperation with Denmark, made diplomatic efforts to bring 'softer' components such as justice and human rights into the debate – for example by organising side events to the summits on these issues. Eventually, they managed to engage the defence ministers of the five Sahel countries in an ongoing conversation on human rights with their European counterparts. By increasingly focusing part of its development engagement in the Liptako-Gourma region on human rights, a stronger link

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<sup>188</sup> Interviews.

<sup>189</sup> Interviews. It was not possible to check whether anything similar happened in any other area of implementation.

<sup>190</sup> IOB, *Premises and Promises: A study of the premises underlying the Dutch policy for women's rights and gender equality*, The Hague, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), 2015, p. 86.

<sup>191</sup> Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*.

<sup>192</sup> 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.

has been established between the diplomatic and development efforts.<sup>193</sup> In addition, the Netherlands – together with Belgium and Luxembourg – funded the establishment of a UN International Commission of Inquiry for Mali in 2018, which investigated allegations of abuses and violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including allegations of conflict-related sexual violence in Mali between 2012 and 2018. The Commission reported back to the UNSG and the UN member states at the end of 2020, which was subsequently discussed in parliament (2021).<sup>194</sup> The Netherlands has thus carved out a niche for itself in the field of human rights. In terms of results, it is not possible to say that the Dutch efforts have led to fewer human rights abuses in the region – but they have led to better documentation of human rights abuses, to making the issue a standard point of discussion in meetings and to increased funding for justice programming.

### 4.3. Relevance

The political narrative for Dutch engagement in Mali is largely driven by the perceived threat of instability in the Sahel to stability in Europe and to the Netherlands. According to the 2019-2022 policy framework for Dutch engagement in the region, Europe is facing an ‘arc of instability’ on its southern borders, where the risks of instability have increased to a fragility that is “most profound in the Sahel”.<sup>195</sup> These threats to European stability are identified as: international criminal activity, irregular migration to Europe and security concerns for Europe arising from jihadist insurgent groups.<sup>196</sup> MFA policy officers found themselves having to translate political discourse into development programming that balanced international security interests with the needs of the Malian citizens. In practice, these efforts were hampered by difficulties in setting clear priorities among different interests and agendas.

Engagement in Mali was guided by three main policy frameworks, but the multiannual strategy did not prioritise or operationalise the objectives of these different policy frameworks. In response to the question why the Netherlands is engaged in the Sahel, the multiannual regional strategy refers to the Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy (GBVS), the policy framework for development cooperation and foreign trade ‘Investing in Global Prospects’, and the Comprehensive Agenda on Migration.<sup>197</sup> However, the multiannual strategy fails to prioritise one over the other or clarify how the three are operationally linked. As a result, there is once again no unified political-strategic objective for Dutch engagement in the Sahel region, leaving the various stakeholders involved to form their own answers to the question of why the Netherlands is engaged in the region in the first place. This affects the possibility of operationalising an integrated approach – and limits the possibilities of presenting results in a common way.

The contribution to MINUSMA was also supply-driven, rather than demand-driven. The evaluation of MINUSMA underlines the added value of the niche expertise in intelligence that the Netherlands

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<sup>193</sup> Interviews with embassy staff and DAF.

<sup>194</sup> UN, ‘[Report of the International Commission of Inquiry for Mali](#)’, New York, UN, 2020.

<sup>195</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2019-2022’, p. 6.

<sup>196</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2019-2022’, pp. 6-7.

<sup>197</sup> See Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2019-2022’, p. 3 + pp. 6-7. 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 they provide the foundation 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.

<sup>197</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2019-2022’, p. 21.

brought to the military component. However, it also finds that the contribution led to very limited sustainable change because the knowledge, skills and set-up of the Dutch contribution did not match with the absorptive capacity of MINUSMA, which prevented a sustainable transfer of competencies. For instance, the police contribution was intended to bring added value in the area of community policing, but the evaluation finds that the concept of community policing does not translate well into the Malian political and cultural context.<sup>198</sup>

Two assumptions underlying the objective of contributing to an improved social contract appear to be flawed. First, strengthening the social contract between the population and the state assumes that the authorities have an interest in strengthening the social contract – whereas the government’s unwillingness to provide services to its population and to invest in accountability for human rights abuses by its security forces, the security interventions resulting in abuses against the civilian population and the deepening divide between the state and citizens seem to indicate otherwise. Second, it assumes that the Dutch have the instruments and clout to influence this process – something that MFA actors recognise has not been the case in practice.<sup>199</sup> This raises the question of whether a foreign actor can reconnect a foreign state with its population without a major shift in the mode of governance (or lack thereof) that has led to the loss of trust.

The stated objective of Dutch engagement in Mali is an improved social contract, but it is not clear how activities contribute to a strengthened social contract in the Malian context. The Theory of Change underlying the multiannual regional strategy “is 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.”<sup>200</sup> However, the document does not elaborate on the basis for this ToC, how the activities might contribute to a strengthened social contract, or the assumptions underlying the steps between activities and objectives. Key informants interviewed indicated that such information was not written down and was understood in different ways by different stakeholders. Based on a scenario exercise, the strategy identifies four structural risk factors that exacerbate the fragile situation in the Sahel region: the lack of economic prospects; demographic trends, climate change and conflict over natural resources, and poor governance. While these risk factors are targeted by Dutch project interventions in Mali, they have not been analysed in relation to the Malian context. This means the interventions did not rely on an explicit rationale and detailed steps linking the roots of the conflict and project implementation, which undermines their relevance to the local context. In most of the sampled projects, the analysis of conflict drivers was the responsibility of the implementing partners. Most policy officers thus relied on the analysis of conflict drivers mentioned in project proposals, which creates a conceptual dependence on implementing partners and reduces the Dutch agenda-setting capacity.

The lack of a clear and context-specific theory of change hinders adequate impact monitoring. The interviews made it clear that not all policymakers working on the Dutch contribution to stabilisation share the view that an overarching theory of change is necessary. In a context characterised by constant change, some policy staff felt that the lack of a theory of change allowed policies to be flexible and adapt to changing circumstances. For instance, in response to increased conflict and tension in the north, the central region of Mali saw a proliferation of local peace and conflict resolution initiatives funded by the Netherlands and other development partners. This adaptability,

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<sup>198</sup> IOB, *Een missie in een missie. De Nederlandse bijdrage aan de VN Multidimensionale Geïntegreerde Stabilisatie Missie in Mali (MINUSMA) 2014-2019*, p. 59.

<sup>199</sup> Interviews.

<sup>200</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ‘Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2019-2022’, p. 21.

is a positive aspect of the Dutch intervention. However, the geographical shift in programming from the north to the centre was not backed by a common analytical framework within the ministry or the embassy that would allow the impact on stabilisation to be monitored.<sup>201</sup> In discussions with policymakers in Bamako and The Hague, it became clear that theories of change are largely considered a tool for project implementation, with individual projects including their theory of change in their project proposals.

Insufficient attention to the context and local needs resulted in unintended consequences. In Bandiagara, the field researcher found a project that was primarily targeting members of the Dogon community, to the detriment of the members of the Fulani community, which reignited tensions between these two groups. In addition, in the locality of Djénné, tensions also arose within the Dogon community over the management of water points.<sup>202</sup> This could have been avoided if the conflict analysis at the project level had taken into account the distribution of roles and activities in this specific area. At the policy level, a thorough conflict analysis and corresponding theory of change can also help monitor the conflict sensitivity of programmes and policies. For example, if the multiannual strategy promotes agricultural expansion, it fails to take into account that the expansion of arable land is at the root of increased resource competition.<sup>203</sup>

#### 4.4. Coherence

The coherence of the Dutch engagement in Mali can be evaluated on three levels: 1) the internal coherence of Dutch-funded projects and bilateral (diplomatic) actions at the MFA level, 2) the coherence of the integrated approach at the intra-ministerial level, 3) and the external coherence of Dutch interventions with those of other actors in Mali (national and international actors). We discuss these three levels below.

The multiannual strategies did not provide clear definitions and objectives. This hampered their contribution to the coherence of MFA's activities. The multiannual strategies for Mali and the Sahel enabled the Dutch MFA to collate various policy and political priorities in specific framework documents, but they did not result in concerted and coherent stabilisation strategies. The respondents point to the fact that this is the result of the MFA's thematic rather than country-driven approach, which they say results in silos between thematic priorities and a supply-driven approach – and lacks strategic guidance from MFA's senior management. The different thematic departments were required to spend their individual budgets (with individual requirements to achieve and demonstrate these results) in a limited number of priority regions (the Sahel being one, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the Horn of Africa being the others). As a result, departments have pushed their own priorities into the multiannual strategy. These institutional bottlenecks to integrated working prevented the multiannual strategy from being jointly designed, resulting in a 'Christmas tree' of priorities and interests, rather than a truly integrated approach. The strategy thus became a collection of different priorities for action rather than in a tool for defining joint action.

Furthermore, the multiannual strategy did not treat countries equally in the regional approach and did take into account country specificities. As a result, the strategy remained mostly a collection of

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<sup>201</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Portfolio review, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Mali Sub-Saharan Africa Department (DAF)' (Internal policy document, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, May 2022).

<sup>202</sup> Interviews.

<sup>203</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Multiannual Strategy Sahel region 2019-2022', p. 21.

priorities, partly driven by existing programming and policy narratives and frameworks (e.g. counterterrorism and tackling irregular migration). Furthermore, there was no comprehensive and overarching analysis of the main drivers of instability and conflict in Mali – either at the level of The Hague or at the level of the embassy in Bamako.<sup>204</sup> Rather, the analysis and understanding of the drivers of instability was individualised and the responsibility of individual project managers.

Nevertheless, efforts are being made to improve coherence at MFA, particularly at the embassy level. At the embassy level, there have been notable efforts to increase complementarity between projects. This has mainly been achieved through the work of thematic focal points, who have been identified by project implementers as key intermediaries at the embassy. For example, the SRoL focal point organised regular meetings between project implementers to enhance the coherence and cooperation between projects. The embassy focal points and other staff also sought to engage multiple/higher levels of government in Mali to increase their involvement in Dutch-funded SRoL projects. However, the geographical spread of interventions posed a challenge in aligning interventions implemented in different regions of the country, such as Bamako and Mopti, especially in the justice sector. The field research also identified challenges pertaining to vertical coherence between the ministry in The Hague and the embassy in Bamako, particularly in cases where the embassy coordinated with NGOs on design and implementation, while funding came from The Hague. This is particularly evident in migration-related projects. The Dutch cabinet identified Mali as a priority country in the area of migration, which was reflected in regional priorities for the Sahel and which translated into the funding of various programmes implemented by national actors and international organisations on migration management, as well as the financing of Dutch projects on this topic.<sup>205</sup> However, these thematic interventions on migration were treated as stand-alone and were not effectively integrated with other projects within the 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.

The implementation of the ‘integrated approach’ and coherence between ministries was limited. In Mali, the contribution to MINUSMA led to the inclusion of the ‘security and rule of law’ development priority and a shift in the geographical focus. Looking at the integrated approach from an inter-ministerial perspective, it is clear that the military engagement in MINUSMA trumped all other engagements in terms of the political attention. Parliamentary debates on the Dutch engagement in Mali were focused on the contribution to the mission – and all other Dutch engagements were politically presented in this light. IOB’s evaluation of MINUSMA showed that the integrated approach was undermined by the lack of a common strategic objective for the Dutch contribution and by the accommodation of political narratives (e.g. on migration), even if these were not in line with the actual mandates of the activities undertaken. While the 2013 Article 100 Letter on MINUSMA refers to coherence between the Dutch contribution to the mission and Dutch bilateral efforts (specifically, SRoL programming) on the one hand, and coherence with other international efforts in the field of security and stability on the other, in practice policymakers have mainly focused on strengthening coherence within MINUSMA and the coherence of the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA. From the perspective of the embassy staff in Bamako, the integrated approach refers to “different projects together working towards the global goal of stabilisation”.<sup>206</sup> Notable efforts were made by embassy staff to increase the coherence of SRoL interventions – for example, by aligning MINUSMA and SRoL project interventions, promoting an integrated approach with external partners

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<sup>204</sup> Interviews with embassy staff and DAF.

<sup>205</sup> These particular projects were excluded from the portfolio due to their relative size in the overall Dutch project portfolio.

<sup>206</sup> Interviews.

and encouraging synergies between project implementers. For example, efforts have been made to align development assistance with 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.<sup>207</sup> However, this could not compensate for the lack of an overarching political strategy for Mali.

The MFA has made efforts at the operational and diplomatic levels to increase the coherence of stability interventions with other donors. This can be seen, for example, in the Dutch participation in 'troika' meetings and thematic working groups or in the Steering Group of the MINUSMA Trust Fund - paired with a financial contribution to the Trust Fund. The embassy sought synergies with international partners, for example through donor coordination groups such as the EU Heads of Mission meetings, Groupe Exécutif de Coopération (GEC), the Cadre Stratégique pour la Relance économique et durable (CREDD), and the Team Europe Initiatives (although these are still in their infancy).<sup>208</sup> At present, international policymakers do not share a common understanding of the term 'stabilisation'. Some countries have a more security-focused approach, while others have a more governance-focused understanding. Moreover, there is no shared or agreed analysis in the donor community of the current political context and the responses that need to be prioritised. As a result, the challenge is for donor meetings to move beyond an exchange of information to real cooperation. However, the Netherlands has developed a good level of cooperation with some European partners, such as Germany, Denmark, Luxembourg and Switzerland. This is visible at the technical level through co-financing, joint engagement with Malian institutions and mainstreaming of certain aspects of project implementation (e.g. per diem rates), and shared thematic interest in human rights, SSR, gender aspects of SSR, youth employment, decentralisation and the fight against corruption.<sup>209</sup>

#### 4.5. Efficiency

The Netherlands is considered a flexible and knowledgeable donor that facilitates efficient implementation by partners. A consistent feedback was that implementing partners appreciated the flexibility to adapt projects when the context required it. In particular, at the embassy level, staff is considered to be very accessible, engaged and knowledgeable. The embassy set up regular consultations between implementing actors in the justice sector, which promoted convergence and synergy of efforts in providing assistance to prisoners and actors in the criminal justice chain. Furthermore, the mid-term evaluation requirements facilitated the reorientation of certain interventions in the light of security and pandemic challenges. Implementing partners also appreciated the fact that, compared to other donors, the Netherlands relatively often provided substantial and multiannual funding, which helped to improve the efficient longer-term planning and financing of programmes. However, at the headquarters level, programme managers were perceived as less available and less knowledgeable, which at times hindered a constructive dialogue about programming decisions. And while the MFA was considered efficient and reliable in disbursing funds, local implementing partners in consortia often complained about the transparency of project funding and the timeliness of payments on the part of the lead implementing partners.

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<sup>207</sup> Interviews with embassy staff and DAF.

<sup>208</sup> Interview with embassy staff.

<sup>209</sup> Interviews with embassy staff.

## 4.6. Sustainability

Overall, the sustainability of the supported projects is limited and the projects lack adequate exit strategies. Several projects were of relatively long duration and benefited from additional funding for second phases, which allowed promoters to build on earlier results. However, the projects remain limited in time and struggle to achieve sustainable results in the complex Malian context. According to interviews with implementers, most of the initiatives that benefited from Dutch funding cannot be continued or expanded without additional funding. While many projects relied heavily on training and capacity building, the field research indicates that this is insufficient to remedy the main constraints to good governance in Mali, including the lack of human, material and technical resources, as well as the volatile political and security situation.

The field research found that the projects reviewed lacked specific exit strategies during their implementation. This suggests that the Dutch policy analysis and strategy did not identify transfer mechanisms to local actors (civil society, state institutions and local authorities). As a result, the sustainability of project outcomes is at risk, especially in the areas of capacity building and technical training. While the formulation of clear transfer strategies is particularly difficult in such a fragile and changing context, the question of relevance and ownership by local actors is fundamental to ensuring some level of continuity after financing is discontinued.

## 5. Findings from the South Sudan case

### 5.1. Context and general overview of Dutch engagement in South Sudan

After decades of civil war and political and ethnic conflict, Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) signed a peace agreement in 2005. This marked the beginning of a six-year transitional period leading up to elections in 2010 and a referendum on self-determination. After the unexpected death of SPLA leader Garang, the elections were won by Salva Kiir, and in the referendum South Sudan voted for independence: on 9 June 2011 it became an independent country with Kiir as president and Machar as vice-president. The challenges facing the world's newest country were enormous: it ranked among the lowest on most development indicators, with high maternal mortality and poor access to safe drinking water.<sup>210</sup> The country's chronic underdevelopment was exacerbated by a weak state with limited capacity. Oil revenues were the country's main source of income.<sup>211</sup> The government spent relatively little of its national budget on services for its people, channelling the overwhelming bulk of its budget into maintaining patronage networks and paying salaries to the army and state officials.<sup>212</sup> Meanwhile, the South Sudanese population remained largely dependent on development and humanitarian assistance.

The Netherlands had been an active donor in Southern Sudan since the 1970s and played an active political role in the country's peace process leading up to its independence. After South Sudan became independent in 2011, the embassy in Juba was opened in 2011 and the first multiannual strategic plan (2012-2015) stated that the overall objective was to contribute to security and stability through conflict mitigation, (socio)economic growth and development. The intention was to strengthen the security sector and to contribute to stability, respect for human rights and democratisation, which would increase confidence in and legitimacy of the government. To support the transition from dependence on humanitarian aid to sustainable development, the multiannual plan for the period 2012 to 2015 already outlined the intention to implement a 'comprehensive approach', combining development cooperation with diplomatic efforts and security sector support in policing and defence, such as the Dutch contribution to UNMISS.

Peace did not last long for the world's youngest country; however. After Machar announced his intention to challenge President Kiir's leadership, he was sacked in July 2013, and conflict broke out between troops allied to both. As (ethnic) violence spread across the country, donors, including the Netherlands, agreed that it could not be business as usual and suspended support to government systems and increased humanitarian assistance through international organisations.<sup>213</sup>

Minister Ploumen suspended all direct support from the Netherlands to the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) in 2014, stating that the country's oil revenues were not being used to provide any support or services to the people of South Sudan.<sup>214</sup> The minister also decided not to formulate a

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<sup>210</sup> The World Bank, [World Development Indicators](#), 2023.

<sup>211</sup> International Crisis Group, ['Oil or Nothing: Dealing with South Sudan's Bleeding Finances'](#), Africa Report N°305, Brussels, International Crisis Group, 6 October 2021.

<sup>212</sup> A. Day et al., ['Assessing the Effectiveness of the UN Mission in South Sudan \(UNMISS\)'](#), Oslo, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2019.

<sup>213</sup> J. Hemmer and N. Grinstead, [When Peace is the Exception: Shifting the Donor Narrative in South Sudan](#), CRU Policy Brief, June 2015.

<sup>214</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ['Verslag van een bezoek aan Zuid-Sudan \(1-4 September\)'](#), kst-22831-102, 13 October 2014; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ['Nederlandse inzet in Zuid-Soedan'](#), kst-22831-105, 8 May 2015.

new multiannual plan, and the focus became increasingly on promoting stability and reducing the root causes of conflict at the local level. More funds were allocated to activities focusing on reconciliation and local peace dialogues, and special attention was paid to the inclusion of women in these processes, in line with the Dutch commitment to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (UNSCR 1325).<sup>215</sup>

A slow peace process led to the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) in 2015, which created the Transitional Government of National Unity. It included the establishment of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) and its sub-institution, the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM). The Netherlands gave political support to the peace process, and the ministry announced that it would resume its bilateral development relations with the central government under strict conditions. However, the peace was short-lived and violence flared up again in 2016.<sup>216</sup> As a result, the MFA once again decided to suspend its development relationship with the GoSS.<sup>217</sup>

Under the leadership of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the warring parties signed the Revitalised ARCSS (R-ARCSS) in 2018.<sup>218</sup> Like its predecessor, it remained largely a power-sharing agreement. It included ambitious reform packages aimed at institution building, including the security sector and the rule of law architecture. The agreement led to the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity in South Sudan in 2019, with elections initially scheduled for 2022. However, the implementation of the peace agreements has been very slow.<sup>219</sup> The transitional period was extended by two years in 2022, with elections scheduled for December 2024. Meanwhile, the security situation remains fragile with high levels of intercommunal violence.

Shortly after the R-ARCSS was signed, the MFA formulated a new multiannual plan (2019-2022). On the one hand, the document states that donors must take a long-term perspective and that their influence can only be modest. On the other hand, the strategy also points out that Dutch interventions can help build resilience to shocks, leading to less violence, hunger and poverty, and ultimately less migration. In line with the triple nexus approach, the document identifies the following three priority areas:

1. Building an inclusive peace that addresses rule of law, human rights, reconciliation and accountability, and ends insecurity once and for all, so that available economic resources can be used for economic growth. Women's participation and ownership is key to this process.
2. Addressing humanitarian needs (including gender-based violence, psycho-social support, the need for humanitarian access, and safety for humanitarian workers – via humanitarian diplomacy).

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<sup>215</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Nederlandse inzet in Zuid-Soedan](#)'.

<sup>216</sup> In October 2015, Kiir had issued an executive order dividing the 10 states of South Sudan into 28 states, and later into 32 states. This became a highly contested decision, and arguably contributed to the resurgence of violence in 2016. In February 2020, Kiir decided that the country would return to the previous 10 states.

<sup>217</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Nederlandse deelname aan vredesmissies](#)', kst-29521-320, 28 July 2016.

<sup>218</sup> The violent conflict has led to nearly 400,000 deaths between 2013 and 2018 and over 4 million people have been displaced, of which almost 2 internally, see: 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.

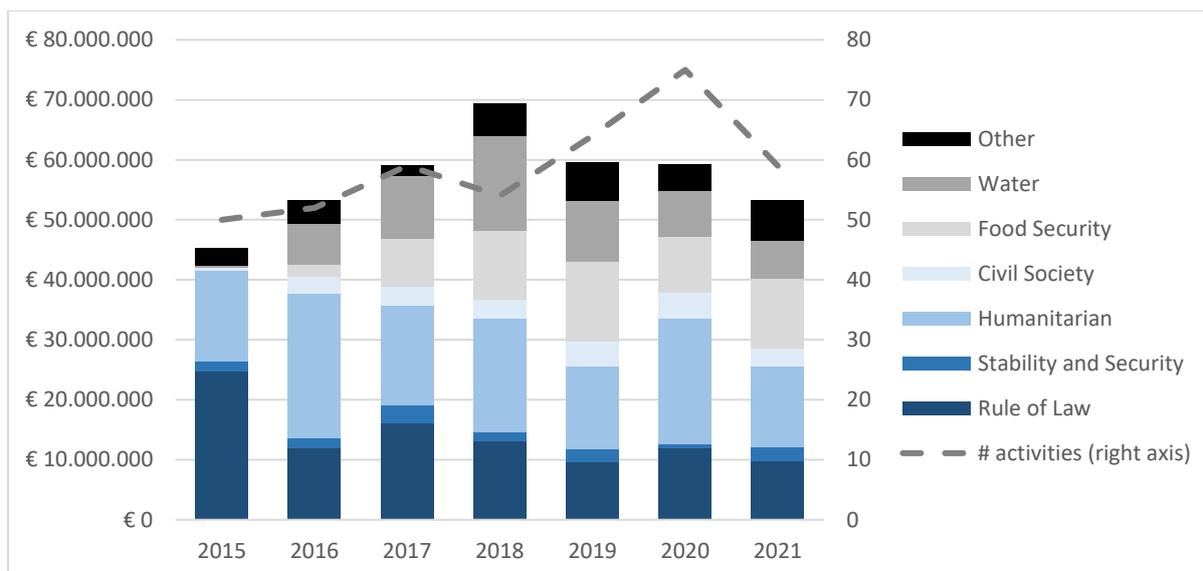
<sup>219</sup> In June 2021, GoSS launched a revised National Development Strategy (NDS) Plan for 2021-2024. In August of 2021 the Transitional National Legislative Assembly was sworn in and 2022, Kiir and Machar reached an agreement on the unified command structures of all organised armed forces.

3. Ensuring synergy and complementarity between humanitarian assistance and development interventions (nexus), with a focus on rule of law, food security, water and vocational training, entrepreneurship and employment for youth and women.

Some objectives in the MACS focused on the national level, particularly those related to the peace process, rule of law and human rights. Other activities, such as those related to local dialogue or food security, were implemented at the local level. To improve focus, achieve greater synergy and strengthen the connection between humanitarian aid and ‘regular’ development cooperation and peacebuilding, the embassy decided to allocate more funds to certain stable regions: the *hubs of stability* approach. The intention was to create peace dividends in these areas and build resilience to shocks in food security and access to water. The embassy identified four hubs: Yambio, Torit, Rumbek and Bor. In 2018, the donor community in Juba established the Partnership for Resilience and Recovery (PfRR) as a coordinating mechanism for donors, UN agencies and NGOs. The embassy was an active member and part of its steering group. Area-based programming was also one of the leading principles of the PfRR, which focused on seven areas, including the four ‘Dutch’ hubs. The four selected hubs of stability were all located in government-controlled areas, and none of the selected areas was in opposition-controlled territory. As a result, embassy staff soon realised that the chosen approach was not conflict-sensitive because it favoured the population in government-controlled areas over opposition territory. To address this, the ECN pledged USD 10 million to the Reconciliation, Stabilisation and Resilience Trust Fund (RSRTF) in 2020. The RSRTF is a joint initiative aimed at bringing together CSOs, NGOs, UN agencies and UNMISS through area-based programming in South Sudan. The intention was that the fund would remain flexible and focus on areas where the conflict had recently ended – precisely the areas not covered through by *hubs of stability* approach.

The latest multiannual country strategy (2019-2022) presented an in-depth needs assessment and SWOT analysis of the Netherlands’ engagement in South Sudan. Based on this, the document presented the most urgent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for South Sudan, in which the Netherlands has proven experience and added value. The formulated Theory of Change, however, was not accompanied by any underlying assumptions. The ToC worked towards ‘an enabling environment for peace, resilience and (food) security, which in turn can lead to less violence, less hunger, less poverty and in the long run less migration.’ The strategy also failed to establish a viable link between the supported activities, the overall objective and the needs assessment.

*Figure 3. 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.

## 5.2. Effectiveness

### Access to justice, rule of law and human rights

It was very difficult for the MFA to contribute to improved access to justice, rule of law and human rights between 2015 and 2021, and few tangible effects can be demonstrated. The Netherlands wanted to contribute to access to justice and rule of law in South Sudan through UNDP programmes. Through the Addressing Root Causes Fund and various strategic partnership progress, the ministry in The Hague also financed activities aimed at improving the rule of law and human rights in South Sudan.<sup>220</sup>

The fieldwork conducted for this evaluation suggests that while communities appear to be beginning to trust local institutions, access to formal legal services remains a problem. Through UNDP, the MFA has financed activities to support legal assistance for SGBV survivors, for example, or to set up mobile courts. However, the coverage of such activities remained low, especially in rural areas. Beneficiaries of some of the strategic partnerships also indicated that there were activities, such as three-day training sessions on human rights, which were not proportionate or relevant to the main issues facing communities. It is unlikely that local authorities and CSOs will continue the activities implemented through UNDP or the strategic partnerships beyond donor support.

The embassy was the largest contributor to UNDP's Access to Justice and Rule of Law Programme (2013-2017), which aimed to deliver a legal framework for the provision of legal aid services and improve government capacity in the rule of law.<sup>221</sup> The project led to the establishment of three

<sup>220</sup> Through its own country programme, UNDP supported capacity building for institutions such as the National Legislative Assembly, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the National Audit Chambers and the National Elections Commission.

<sup>221</sup> Numerous activities were financed through this programme. In 2017 alone, the programme financed 78 activities in South Sudan. Activities including the building of infrastructure such as prisons and a vocational training centre, community policing (over 600 police and community members), trauma management (over

Justice and Confidence Centres, which provided mediation and referral services, and a Rule of Law Forum. According to the police, community policing led to a reduction in crime. However, the external evaluation found that the implementation of the programme was seriously affected by the crises of 2013 and 2016. While improvements were made to the legal and institutional framework, overall progress remained limited; transitional justice mechanisms were not implemented, case management systems and referral mechanisms were not fully functional and mobile courts were not in place. The evaluation also found that there was limited coordination and a risk of duplication with other projects.<sup>222</sup>

The embassy also contributed EUR 11 million to the second phase (2017–2020) of this programme, which had a similar objective. The external evaluation found that in terms of upstream work on policy and legislation development, the project achieved most of the intended results: four strategic documents were developed, including the Strategy for Joint Integrated Police; three laws were reviewed, including the Local Government Act; and two bills were drafted. However, some results could not be achieved due to weak government capacity or political will; for example, the draft Legal Aid Bill was enacted into law. The evaluation concludes that the project could not address the root causes of the lack of rule of law and weak justice system, which are fundamental governance challenges, but it did address critical transitional justice needs for the most disadvantaged. The evaluation concluded that some of the results may not be sustainable because there is little political will to increase financial allocations to the sector and, as a result, there has been no attempt to replicate or scale up any of the project's interventions.<sup>223</sup>

The meta-review concludes that little has been achieved in terms of good governance and rule of law. There have been some pockets of technical success, but these have not translated into broader institutional improvements.<sup>224</sup> Based on nine evaluations and six country reports, the meta-review concludes that a lack of political will to improve governance has hindered improvements in institutional strength.

### Peacebuilding initiatives

The MFA has supported various organisations in South Sudan that have established or revitalised local peace committees or similar structures that promote peace or reconciliation. These peacebuilding initiatives have yielded positive effects locally, but these have tended to be at an interpersonal or very local level. Often the interventions were unable to address the wider security situation. Various projects visited during the fieldwork for this evaluation included such peacebuilding initiatives:

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1,000 people), vocational training for inmates and returnees (over 500 inmates) and the dissemination of studies for customary leaders (over 500 chiefs).

<sup>222</sup> C. Collin G. Batali, '[Final Evaluation of UNDP South Sudan Access to Justice and Rule of Law Project](#)'.

<sup>223</sup> 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.

<sup>224</sup> Zuercher mentions two examples of such technical successes; one project aimed at strengthening key elements in the annual budget process; unfortunately, progress was undermined by the disintegration of the government. See: M. Cox and K. Robson, '[Mid-Term Evaluation of the Budget Strengthening Initiative](#)', Agulhas Applied Knowledge, 2 July 2013. Another example of 'success' is a programme designed to help establish State Revenue Authorities (SRAs), and train tax officers and legislators in public financial management. The project improved the capacity of SRAs and may have increased the collection of taxes in the provinces in which it was rolled out, but it is not clear whether the gains were sustained. See: M. Foon, '[Summative Evaluation of Public Financial Management Project](#)', Umu Yatama Global Consultants, 8 November 2020.

- One project established community action groups (CAGs) to address community conflicts in and around Torit, such as theft or robbery. The groups also contributed to several peace dialogues and peace initiatives.<sup>225</sup>
- The Inter Church Committee (ICC) successfully reconciled host communities and returnees in Agoro and Pajok over land issues.
- Another project organised cross-border dialogues with Ugandan and Kenyan communities to achieve peaceful co-existence. Not all communities maintained peaceful co-existence., as some resolutions were violated along the Kenyan border.
- Conflict resolution committees set up by a project in Bor were in practice mainly used to settle minor conflicts, such as marriage issues. These committees rarely handled communal issues such as ethnic conflicts or revenge killings.

The sustainability of these committees was often limited, as the peace structures created struggled to continue after funding ended. This was also the case with the above-mentioned CAGs in Torit; members of these groups were given small incentives to facilitate their work. The supporting CSO tried to maintain the CAGs after the project ended without a budget. However, less than two years later, only two out of the seven groups were still active. The other groups became inactive due to lack of incentives, funding, insecurity or displacement.

The fact that the deteriorating security situation led to the dissolution of some of these CAGs illustrates a broader conclusion: at the local level, peacebuilding activities can achieve some success, often at the interpersonal or grassroots level. While there are some examples where these this type of activity has helped to resolve intercommunal conflicts, on the whole, most of the results achieved through this type of activity haven't trickled up to affect larger security trajectories in the country. In addition, the limited civic space and political dynamics in the country made it difficult for many CSOs to participate meaningfully in national peace processes.

The meta-review concludes that there is no evidence that such interventions have had a significant impact on reducing latent or actual tensions or violence in South Sudan. It also concludes that that many of these interventions target conflicts within communities, while the lines of conflict are often between communities and ethnic groups.

### Water, food security and entrepreneurship

Many of the supported programmes have contributed to improved livelihoods at the individual level. However, these results often did not 'trickle up' beyond the direct beneficiaries to create sustainable development at the community level. As a result, the activities did not result in broader peace dividends or long-term resilience to shocks. Although some outputs and intermediate results were achieved, many of these were at the grassroots level. Some examples from the fieldwork include:

- One supported organisation rehabilitated feeder roads in Eastern Equatoria. This was an important result for farmers in Magwi as it improved their access to markets.
- To help manage water resources along the Kinneti catchment, a project installed nine hydrological monitoring gauging stations, eight of which are still operational after the project ended. The project also rehabilitated boreholes and constructed sanitation facilities in schools.

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<sup>225</sup> Similar findings have emerged from various existing evaluations. For example, the evaluation of the Freedom from Fear project found that it contributed to a reduction in night-time robberies and youth gangs because the supported youth clusters worked together with local authorities. See: See: R. MacLeod, P. Vernon and F. Karanàsou, 'Evaluation of the Freedom from Fear Strategic Partnership', Intrac, 2021.

- Several projects contributed to the agricultural and agribusiness skills of beneficiaries. One organisation in Bor County distributed agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertiliser and farming tools, helping beneficiaries to become more self-sufficient.
- One programme rehabilitated a vocational training centre in Torit, where many students have received training in beekeeping and carpentry. However, there were some mixed signals, as some beneficiaries claimed that the vocational training was insufficient and that they did not receive start-up kits after completing the training.

The scale of many of the supported programmes and projects was relatively modest, especially considering the enormous needs in the country. The results achieved through these activities made a positive difference to the lives of the individuals that received the support. For example, the vocational training centres of the Youth Employment Programme helped unemployed youth to acquire vocational and entrepreneurial skills. These are tangible results for the direct beneficiaries, but the programme results remain a drop in the ocean compared to the huge need for jobs and skills training across the country. Similarly, various supported organisations trained farmers in good agricultural practices and aimed to improve their linkages to the market. This benefited individual farmers, but failed to deliver indirect benefits to the wider community.

At times, these livelihood programmes contributed to social cohesion among beneficiaries or with community members, but again this was mostly between individuals. Some farmers in Torit, for example, united and continue to work together on crop production. As a result of the rehabilitated boreholes, more community members have access to safe drinking water, and that has reduced tensions in Torit over limited water points. On the other hand, the fieldwork also provided some anecdotal evidence that the selection of beneficiaries can create tensions between beneficiaries and other community members – there were some instances where local implementing organisations were accused of nepotism and discrimination.

Zuercher et al. (2022) concluded that rural development projects in South Sudan, including those related to food security, livelihoods, water and sanitation, and small infrastructure, were reasonably effective in improving coping strategies and resilience. However, the review also found that there was no evidence to suggest these interventions have improved productivity beyond subsistence levels.

### The integrated approach

The Netherlands aimed to integrate its development cooperation with diplomatic interventions and defence, but in practice this was hardly the case. This was partly the result of the limited role that the Netherlands played in South Sudan in UNMISS. The political and diplomatic objectives of the Netherlands in South Sudan focused mainly on the (implementation of) the peace process, whereas most development projects and programmes in the country focused on building resilience and delivering services to the South Sudanese population.

### Defence

The Netherlands has supported UNMISS since its inception in 2011 with a modest contribution of 30 staff.<sup>226</sup> In 2015, the Dutch contribution of individual police officers was suspended due to the UN's

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<sup>226</sup> The initial Dutch contribution consisted of a maximum of 30 staff, including individual police officers, military staff, military liaison officers and civilian staff. See: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Nederlandse bijdrage aan United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan \(UNMISS\)](#)', kst-29521-172, 30 September 2011; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Nadere informatie inzake de Nederlandse bijdrage aan UNMISS](#)',

inability to meet the required medical conditions outside of Juba, and from 2016 onwards, six Dutch staff officers were deployed to UNMISS' headquarters in Juba.<sup>227</sup> The decision to end Dutch support to UNMISS was made in 2019 by the Ministry of Defence, even though the embassy in Juba was in favour of continuing direct support to UNMISS.<sup>228</sup> Through the RSRTF, the embassy continues to contribute financially to UNMISS. Two recent evaluation reports assess the performance and effectiveness of (parts of) UNMISS:

- The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs conducted an evaluation on UNMISS' effectiveness between 2014 and 2018. The report found that in many cases, UNMISS has played a limited and indirect role in the overall development of the country and can only be considered as one contributor among many working towards sustainable peace. According to the report, UNMISS helped prevent a far worse trajectory by providing physical protection to over 200,000 people. Police officers have also helped to reduce crime rates around the 'protection of civilians' sites. However, the evaluation notes that this should be put in the context of the many deaths that occurred during the civil war. Among the many challenges faced by UNMISS were the systematic obstacles to the freedom of movement that impeded protection and humanitarian mandates.<sup>229</sup>
- The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) published an evaluation of the contribution of the UNMISS Civil Affairs Division (CAD) to reducing local conflict. It found that the CAD played a pivotal role in reporting early warning at the sub-national level, effectively acting as the 'eyes and ears' of UNMISS. CAD's activities had a positive effect on preventing the recurrence of conflict. However, the evaluation mentions that CAD's efforts between 2015 and 2017 did not take place in the areas where most cattle-related fatalities occurred; while Jonglei had the second highest number of cattle-related fatalities in that period, it only received the second lowest among of funding of all states.<sup>230</sup>

## Diplomacy

The main diplomatic objectives have been either to support the country's peace process or to promote the implementation of the ARCSS and the R-ARCSS. Support to the peace process has mainly taken the form of support for IGAD. Together with Canada, the Netherlands co-chairs the IGAD Partners Forum. Through its support to IGAD, the MFA has helped to monitor the peace process through membership and support to the JMEC, later the R-JMEC, and the CTSAMVM.

The Netherlands is well-respected in South Sudan as a long-term and stable partner, both by the government and the international community. Nevertheless, direct engagement with the government is a red line for the MFA, and there is no real policy dialogue between the Netherlands

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kst-29521-177, 22 December 2011. Prior to 2013, Dutch staff were mostly deployed for training and mentoring of the police, but after the change of mandate, Dutch individual police officers were mostly deployed in the 'protection of civilian' sites. See: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Verlenging Nederlandse bijdrage aan UNMISS](#)', kst-29521-255, 19 September 2014.

<sup>227</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Verlenging Nederlandse bijdrage aan UNMISS](#)', kst-29521-311, 12 February 2016.

<sup>228</sup> After political discussions with the Minister of Defence in January 2019, Minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Blok announced that the Dutch contribution to UNMISS would be terminated in September of that year. One argument given for this decision was the limited freedom of movement of the mission as a result of the authorities and the opposition, which meant that UNMISS was often unable to protect citizens, especially outside the cities. Another argument for ending the support was that medical conditions outside of UNMISS locations in Juba were inadequate. See: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, '[Beëindiging van de Nederlandse bijdrage aan UNMISS en recente ontwikkelingen in Zuid-Sudan](#)', kst-29521-375, 8 February 2019.

<sup>229</sup> Day et al., '[Assessing the Effectiveness of the UN Mission in South Sudan \(UNMISS\)](#)'.

<sup>230</sup> M. 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;

and the GoSS. Diplomatic objectives were not always linked to the development portfolio, which focused more on building resilience and delivering services to the South Sudanese population. Donors have also not been consistent in their policy strategy or public statements, and the EU does not play a major role in the country.

Overall, the Netherlands has played a relatively modest and passive political role in the country and in the peace process as an observer. South Sudan is not a political priority in the Netherlands and, as a result, it has been difficult for embassy staff to generate political interest from The Hague, either for the country or the IGAD-led peace process. There was little guidance from HQ and a lack of a comprehensive diplomatic and political strategy for South Sudan. Diplomatic initiatives depended on the individual views of the staff; different Dutch ambassadors in Juba have, over time, adopted different approaches to the role of the Netherlands in IGAD.<sup>231</sup>

Some of the diplomatic results achieved include:

- The Netherlands had already advocated for an arms embargo, and 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 including sexual and gender-based violence as a separate criterion in the sanctions regime and in Resolution 2417, which is relevant to South Sudan because it recognised the deliberate starvation of civilians as a method of warfare;
- Although the EU does not play a big role in South Sudan, the Netherlands is an active member state when it comes to South Sudan in the EU, and in 2018 the EU imposed sanctions on three Sudanese individuals.

## Demining

During the evaluation period, the MFA centrally funded various demining programmes in South Sudan. According to the relevant evaluations, demining activities have generally produced positive and tangible results, particularly at the output level of explosive ordnance clearance.<sup>232</sup> However, one evaluation pointed out that the assumed relationship between outputs, such as decontaminated land, and broader outcomes, such as improved security or improved access to resources, was not always clear. As an example, the study mentions that the target population had fled the area due to conflict, which meant that decontaminated land was not used.

## Humanitarian assistance

Following the outbreak of conflict in 2013, humanitarian needs in the country were enormous and humanitarian assistance became the dominant sector in South Sudan. This remains the case today.<sup>233</sup> More than half of the total ODA (55%) in South Sudan was allocated to humanitarian assistance. The Netherlands was one of the key donors that did not reallocate the large majority of

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<sup>231</sup> South Sudan field notes.

<sup>232</sup> 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.

<sup>233</sup> The country continues to have huge humanitarian needs: in August 2022, OCHA estimated that 7.7 million people are acutely food insecure and require emergency food aid – this is 63% of the country's population. There are about 2.2 million internally displaced people in South Sudan and, in addition, the country also hosts roughly 337,000 refugees, mostly from Sudan. Staple food prices in the country increased dramatically in 2022 as a result of the war in Ukraine.

its aid portfolio to humanitarian support, but continued to fund development and peacebuilding activities. Nevertheless, a large share of Dutch funding for South Sudan is directed towards humanitarian assistance. The MFA contributed through two main channels: OCHA's South Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SSHF) was supported with USD 53 million between 2015 and 2021; the South Sudan Joint Response (SSJR), implemented by the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), received EUR 53 million from the MFA in the same period.<sup>234, 235</sup> In addition, the MFA also contributed to the humanitarian programmes of the ICRC and WFP and various FAO programmes that included emergency response seed distribution.<sup>236</sup>

Zuercher and his colleagues<sup>237</sup> conclude that humanitarian assistance has been relatively effective in alleviating humanitarian needs in the country, a conclusion consistent with IOB's evaluation of humanitarian assistance.<sup>238</sup> The SSHF was commended for its ability to absorb large grants and to use contributions in a strategic yet flexible way. Evaluations of the SSJR indicate that it was also effective and achieved the planned objectives, contributing to saving lives and alleviating suffering.<sup>239</sup> Despite the positive achievements, many evaluations of humanitarian programmes found that the effects on long-term resilience were small; while beneficiaries valued the assets received, progress in strengthening market access and value chains was limited.<sup>240</sup>

### 5.3. Relevance

#### Working with the government

Committing to funding the government is a red line for many donors in South Sudan, and some international organisations are also reluctant to build government capacity. The MFA also stopped working directly with the South Sudanese government after the conflict flared up again in 2016. The policy of not working with or through national structures did not change after the signing of the Revitalised Peace Agreement, mainly due to the slow implementation of the R-ARCSS. As a result, it has been very difficult to make a meaningful contribution to institutional strengthening in South Sudan and, ultimately, to improving relations between government and citizens. Work on improving the rule of law or state capacity has mainly been done through UN agencies such as UNDP or organisations such as VNG International. There was very little direct engagement between the embassy and the relevant political actors. As a result, the project activities were not accompanied by a policy dialogue between the embassy and the South Sudanese authorities.

At the same time, the GoSS is failing to provide basic services to its population, and donors have created an entirely parallel system for service delivery. The international community delivers services

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<sup>234</sup> The SSHF was established in 2012, and since then it has provided around USD 922 million in humanitarian assistance to the county. During this period, the Netherlands was the third largest donor, after the United Kingdom and Sweden. In 2021, the Netherlands was elected as a member of the Advisory Board of the SSHF.

<sup>235</sup> The DRA is a consortium of Dutch NGOs that aims to deliver humanitarian aid through collaboration, led by Save the Children. The response includes food security and livelihoods, WASH, protection and multi-purpose cash.

<sup>236</sup> The MFA has also provided unearmarked funds to the UN and the ICRC, indirectly also contributing to humanitarian assistance in South Sudan.

<sup>237</sup> Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*.

<sup>238</sup> 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.

<sup>239</sup> 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.

<sup>240</sup> Zuercher et al., *Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States*.

to the South Sudanese population without interference from the government.<sup>241</sup> The South Sudanese Ministry of Finance and Planning had very limited information on donor programmes (R-NDS 2021-2024). Our fieldwork revealed that this was also the case at the sub-national level, as line ministries were often unaware of the programmes and projects implemented by (I)NGOs and CSOs in their region. There is no strategy in place for the government to fulfil its legal responsibility as the representative of the South Sudanese people. The current parallel system is not sustainable without the involvement of (local) authorities. Meanwhile, the parallel systems help to further undermine the legitimacy of the GoSS, conflicting with the MFAs intention to strengthen the social contract between the government and the people. Restrictions on working with local authorities have complicated the work of some supported organisations, for example in community policing.

Most government officials receive very low salaries, especially compared to the South Sudanese working for (I)NGOs. The salaries of drivers working for (I)NGOs are generally higher than those of ministers at state level. The resulting 'brain drain' to the humanitarian and development sector may further undermine state capacity, making it more difficult to build institutions and strengthen the social contract between the state and the population even more difficult.

## Localisation

At the MFA and across implementing organisations in South Sudan, there is an increased call for 'localisation', both in humanitarian and in development programming.<sup>242</sup> However, there have been challenges in operationalising localisation in practice. Many CSOs in South Sudan are organised along ethnic lines and primarily serve their own constituencies. In order to work effectively with these organisations, donors and (I)NGOs need to have a very thorough understanding of the local context and the different sensitivities involved. This has not been the case because the embassy does not have sufficient capacity to actively monitor the implementation of its activities and ensure conflict sensitivity and 'do no harm'. The long chain of organisations and (sub)contractors from HQ down to the grassroots level creates incentives for reporting arrangements that tend to inflate achievements. In addition, the lack of hands-on knowledge and monitoring of the local situation may have undermined conflict-sensitive work. There is evidence from the fieldwork for this study that the selection of CSOs and beneficiaries may have exacerbated existing feelings of mistrust among the population.<sup>243</sup>

In addition, much of the decision-making power remains with the (I)NGOs. More established national NGOs were not actively involved in formulating the programme proposals. Often these organisations would prefer to receive direct funding from the MFA. Capacity building training for local CSOs and national NGOs was not always useful. Similar patterns emerged in the relationship

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<sup>241</sup> This is recognised in the Revised National Development Strategy (R-NDS 2021-2024), which indicates that most social protection and education activities in the country are being funded by donor contributions.

<sup>242</sup> 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 has 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'. See: V. Barbelet et al., '[Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation](#)', HPG literature review. London: ODI, 2021.

<sup>243</sup> The selection of beneficiaries has created tensions between beneficiaries and community members, and local implementing organisations have been accused of nepotism and discrimination by community members.

between national NGOs and their local counterparts or the local population. When national NGOs operated directly from Juba without a field presence in the areas of operation, they were unaware of what was happening on the ground. According to local CSOs, there was little transparency about the timelines and budgets of the broader programmes they were contracted to implement. There are also indications that many of the supported projects did not move out of the towns into rural areas and counties, even though the needs are often greater in rural areas.

## 5.4. Coherence

### Coordination

There is a lack of coordination at all levels: between donors and the government, among donors and between sectors (see next section). There is little engagement between donors and the government, which is often unaware of the specific programmes being implemented. There is fragmentation and non-alignment among donors. Donors also meet infrequently, and many of the working groups have relied on personal energy. Donors in South Sudan generally have their own development priorities in the country, and there is no unified political strategy. Although the Partnership for Resilience and Recovery was established in 2018 as a coordination mechanism for donors, UN agencies and NGOs, divergent donor interests have prevented substantial progress. While the humanitarian sector is relatively well coordinated compared to regular development cooperation, there is no system to effectively link humanitarian assistance to peacebuilding and regular development cooperation.

To address the fragmentation within its own development portfolio, the embassy developed its 'hubs of stability' approach. The rationale was that working within confined geographical areas would help to reduce fragmentation and increase the focus and synergies. However, at the local level, there was no real strategy on how to connect the different supported activities to each other, and coordination within the hubs was not actively encouraged. As a result, there were several individual programmes were implemented in the same areas, but few synergies were achieved. Many implementing organisations aimed to deliver an 'integrated approach' within a single project or programme, but without coordinating with the activities of others. Coordination of centrally funded programmes was generally even more difficult, as embassy staff were sometimes unaware of the Dutch-funded activities in the country. The lack of coordination led to inefficiency, duplication and even inconsistent programming in the field. Some examples include:

- A centrally funded NGO intended to set up peace committees and community dialogues in and around Torit but found out on-site that three other organisations were also being funded by the MFA to carry out similar activities. In Bor, some individual members were part of several peace committees supported by different organisations.
- The MFA centrally funded an organisation to support the capacity of WASH departments in Eastern Equatoria. At the same time, the embassy supported a UN organisation to also implement a large WASH programme in the same area. The two programmes had different approaches and did not actively cooperate at the field level.
- Cooperation and synergy at field level between UNDP's Access to Justice Programme and UNDP's Peace and Community Cohesion Programme was weak. Both programmes were implemented in the same states and carried out more or less similar activities.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> R.M. Chiwara and G. Batali, 'Final evaluation of the Access to justice and Rule of Law project', 2019, UNDP South Sudan.

## The triple nexus

The MFA has been advocating the (triple) nexus approach in South Sudan, seeking alignment between development cooperation, humanitarian support and peacebuilding activities. The support would respond to actual needs, shifting between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding, or including them all. Current programmes supported by the Netherlands, such as the RSRTF and FAO's Food & Nutrition Security Resilience Programme, also explicitly aim to connect development programming, humanitarian support and peacebuilding.<sup>245</sup> However, the link between the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors is often not operationalised in practice.

- The humanitarian and the development sectors in South Sudan largely consist of different organisations and operate in silos.<sup>246</sup> At the MFA, humanitarian support is organised separately from regular development cooperation. With different budget lines, narrow objectives and strict frameworks and criteria for humanitarian assistance, it has been difficult to link the humanitarian programmes to 'regular' development programmes. The link between humanitarian and development programmes is often framed in terms of 'building resilience'. While there are some organisations active in the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) that provide both humanitarian and medium and long-term development programmes, the organisations are often managed internally by different teams with no intention of linking the programmes. Our fieldwork revealed that emergency assistance and medium and long-term development assistance can be complementary, but also undermine each other; for example, the provision of untargeted free (emergency) seeds to the entire population in Torit undermined the effectiveness of 'regular' development programmes to support farmers' productivity through training and start-up kits.<sup>247</sup>
- The peacebuilding and development sectors have been somewhat easier to integrate. There are cases where UNMISS or demining programmes have actually facilitated the work of development actors, for example by clearing land that could be used for agriculture. At times, this has been done on an ad hoc basis rather than as part of a wider integrated strategy. Demining programmes were funded centrally from The Hague, and there was little connection between the demining programmes and other activities that were supported by the embassy. An evaluation of one demining project concluded that the activities supported were not consistently linked to other development activities, either by their own organisation or by other actors.<sup>248</sup>
- Operationalising the nexus between the humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors has been difficult in South Sudan. The sectors are interconnected: violent conflict has been a major driver of humanitarian needs, and at the same time, lack of livelihoods and competition for scarce resources can lead to grievances and conflict. Humanitarian principles of

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<sup>245</sup> The RSRTF aims to maximise synergies and promote alignment between the many actors in the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus. An early-stage evaluation commended its approach as 'potentially ground-breaking' and stated that it filled an important gap in terms of transitional funding, especially to the underserved areas. At the same time, the evaluation also noted that the RSRTF had not yet contributed much to strengthening 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.

<sup>246</sup> 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; O. Wilkinson, F. de Wolf and M. 'The Triple Nexus and Local Faith Actors in South Sudan: Findings from Primary Research. Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities', 2019, Copenhagen: Danish Church Aid.

<sup>247</sup> To the dissatisfaction of some these farmers, the emergency seed distributed was purchased from neighbouring countries.

<sup>248</sup> Tana Copenhagen, '[Evaluation of DCA Humanitarian Mine Action & Cluster Munition 2016-2020 programme](#)', 2021.

independence, neutrality and impartiality guide the humanitarian sector. However, the reality of working with government authorities, armed groups and community leaders to secure permits and access in South Sudan means that humanitarian aid can never be completely neutral. And humanitarian actors are often not perceived and/or treated as neutral; both government and opposition forces have created many obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian aid.<sup>249</sup> Between 2013 and 2021, an alarming 126 humanitarian workers were even killed. There are reports that claim a ‘conflict-blind’ approach to humanitarian assistance may have actually exacerbated the drivers of conflict.<sup>250</sup> Indeed, there are several examples of humanitarian assistance contributing to conflict.<sup>251</sup> This is consistent with the meta-review’s findings that conflict sensitivity was rarely considered in the design of humanitarian programmes or in M&E.

## 5.5. Efficiency

Evaluations of the programmes supported in South Sudan have rarely considered the ‘value for money’ of the programmes. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions about the efficiency of the activities supported. Section 5.4 provided some evidence that a lack of coordination has led to inefficiency, duplication and inconsistent programming in the field. Most new embassy staff have relatively little experience with the South Sudanese context, and it often takes time to get accustomed to the country, the context and the programmes. Short contracts of embassy staff and the R&R of international staff have hampered efficient programme management; as projects usually outlast the two-year contracts of international staff, virtually all activities will eventually be handed over to successors.

On the positive side, the MFA and the embassy provide more flexible and longer-term support than most other donors in the country. The embassy has allowed implementing organisations to adjust programmes as needed, which is especially important in a constantly changing context such as South Sudan. The long(er) term perspective of the Netherlands also stood out compared to other donors. This was crucial for demining organisations, as the Netherlands is the only donor that provides longer-term funding, while other donors only provide support for six months or one year.

## 5.6. Sustainability

Many of the results achieved and described depended largely on continued funding from external sources and on the absence of shocks. The parallel system of service delivery established by the international community relies entirely on continued donor funding, and there is no long-term strategy in place on how to make the GoSS (more) accountable to the affected population.

With limited follow-up by implementing organisations, it has often been difficult to sustain results, even in the short term. For example, our fieldwork found that of the 27 boreholes repaired during an ongoing project in Eastern Equatoria, 7 had already broken down. Some projects set up community committees to safeguard the results. But as many of these committees struggle to continue their activities after project support ends, 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

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<sup>249</sup> 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.

<sup>250</sup> UN OCHA, [‘South Sudan: UN condemns killing of one aid worker and attack against humanitarian convoy in Unity State’](#), News and Press Release, 23 May 2021.

<sup>251</sup> J. Craze and A. Luedke, [‘South Sudan: Why Humanitarians Should Stop Hiding Behind Impartiality’](#), *The New Humanitarian*, Geneva, 22 August 2022.

for the boreholes. Our fieldwork has revealed that this was also often the case with established peace committees, community committees or road maintenance committees.

There is no strategy in place for the government to take over, even though the current parallel system is unsustainable. At the same time, donor fatigue with South Sudan is growing in many donors' home countries. Continued funding is not a given. The UK's budget cuts of 49% on ODA to South Sudan and the Health Pooled Fund, for example, led to the immediate suspension of funding to 220 of the 797 health facilities in 2022.

This is relatively consistent with the findings of the meta-review. Zuercher and his colleagues point out that many of the results reported in the evaluations were not sustainable.<sup>252</sup> However, there were some successes in the livelihoods sector, where capacity building led to improved agricultural skills and income-generating activities.

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<sup>252</sup> Zuercher et al., [Impact of Aid in Highly Fragile States](#).

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