CONFLICT STABILITY AND SECURITY FUND (CSSF) FRAMEWORK

Q5: (1.3.1): Part 1: In this first section we will explain <u>our approach to Project and Programme Management:</u> British Council delivers a project portfolio on behalf of a range of donors and clients, comprising over 80 projects and with a turnover of over £180m p.a (f/y17/18). These projects vary from large, multi-year / multi-country actions of £20m+, to smaller scale interventions of less than £200k. Whatever the size or funding source, we have a consistent, embedded **programme and project management approach** applied through our tried and tested **Project Management Framework (PMF).** This Framework underpins the successful design, delivery and management of all our projects and programmes. It was developed from the externally accredited APM (Association for Project Management) body of knowledge and MSP (Managing Successful Programmes) methodology and has been contextualised and tailored to (i) the specifics, spectrum and type of projects/programmes we manage – often in fragile contexts and, (ii) learning from our track record of successful delivery – confirmed by the fact that we are long-term contractors for large UK and international donor agencies - delivering significant repeat business.

The PMF sets the standards and processes that **operationalise our 18 core corporate policies** including: Anti-fraud and corruption, Counter Terrorism and Anti-Money Laundering, Child protection, Environment, Equality, Freedom of information, Financial Management and Reporting, Risk Management, Information Security and Privacy, Adults at Risk and Records Management. It is owned, controlled and updated within our in-house specialist **Centre of Excellence (CoE)** unit which provides both an on-line portal of support and learning materials and identifies advisers/trainers from our network to support and advise peer project teams. It also provides **'how-to" toolkits and guidance** on areas such as **Value for Money (VfM), Theory of Change (ToC), Grant management and Gender Mainstreaming** which are continually updated and refreshed as learning from the project portfolio is fed in. It also provides an extensive library of resources such as templates, best practice examples and pre-vetted processes to **support consistently high-quality project design, set-up and delivery**. Finally, it supports our **Communities of Practice** in Project Management, Evaluation and specific thematic areas such as Gender, Building Resilience and Strengthening Civil Society - where knowledge and learning is discussed, distilled and disseminated across the global portfolio. This approach:

- reduces risk of failure to our clients by setting global standards by which all projects must be delivered irrespective of where in the world they are implemented
- ensures the quality of our delivery and full compliance with client contractual requirements
- supports individual professional development and learning for both in-house and third-party project personnel
- ensures that learning from project delivery is embedded in projects across the global portfolio and in new project designs
- provides efficiencies for our clients by ensuring that existing project templates, tools, systems and processes that have already been tried and tested in our global portfolio can be quickly used to set up new projects

The PMF is sub-divided into three core elements to support each stage of project delivery and these are **(i) policies and standards (ii) guidance tools and templates** and **(iii) quality assurance requirements**. These core elements are framed around a variation of the standard project lifecycle and provides guidance, positive examples, lessons and templates for use at each of the stages of **positioning: design and pursuit: inception: implementation: evaluation: closure**.

At each stage of the project cycle, the PMF, Centre of Excellence and associated thematic Communities of Practice are vital in ensuring that projects are delivered **efficiently, effectively, to clearly agreed corporate standards and in a way which is economically advantageous to the client** by building on pre-existing learning and practice. If we use the inception period as a specific example, unlike many such approaches, you can also see that our **PMF and CoE put particular attention on the inception phase** as a stand-alone stage, deliberately prioritising beyond the standard implementation phase definition. We do this because– particularly for donor-funded projects in fragile contexts – we recognise that the inception phase is the critical "make or break" period for projects, even for long-term interventions. It is the most intensive period where, often within a 3 month period, we: (i) **mobilise project team** members and embed the project ethos and governance within the team; (ii) **establish project presence** and **build relationships** on the ground with beneficiaries and counterparts (often in official structures); (iii) **re-test the project design with key counterparts** and make any necessary changes to the originally agreed **theory of change, project plan** and **logframe**; (iv) set-up all **project tools** such as the evaluation strategy/framework and the project activity plan/schedule and represent these in a well-written, clear, logical inception report for client approval (v) identify, contract and **deploy all local support staff** such as interpreters and admin personnel and (vi) set-up all **project financial systems, administration, logistical and security procedures** for the project.

Given the critical and intensive nature of this stage, the ability to (i) work to established standards and practice through the PMF and (ii) call on pre-existing tried-and-tested best practice process and tools, and (iii) call on learning and advice from peers in related areas and contexts through the CoE – are massive **value for money and quality assurance benefits** to our clients. We are not re-inventing processes and charging staff time to do so – instead we are rolling out **tried-and-tested tools, processes, administration practice, templates, contracting practice, financial systems, reporting systems, risk management systems and governance arrangements** – this saves money and it saves time. It also enables all deployed project and technical personnel to immediately focus on actions that **deliver the project outcomes** - not wasting valuable time on re-inventing entirely new project systems, tools and governance processes.

To further demonstrate the robustness of our project design and management approaches – as well as our project and governance systems, processes and controls - British Council has been successfully pillar-assessed as an organisation for European Commission PAGoDA contracts (Pillar Assessed Grant or Delegation Agreements). During the assessment, EC auditors formally assessed British Council's project and programme management systems in areas such as risk management, procurement and quality assurance. They declared that our systems were at least equal to those of the EC against c**ore areas of internal control systems, accounting, independent external audit, grant processes and procurement**. This pillar assessment granted British Council a privileged partnership with the EU. Very few organisations have such a status (only DFID and NICO in the UK) and it enables the EU to transfer funds to us directly, single-source and enables us to co-create programming with the EU – advising on "where", "why" and "how best to" achieve development objectives.

Finally, linking to the specific **CSSF Programme Management Cycle**, any British Council team managing a CSSF-funded project will use **project reporting and dashboarding -** informed by the PMF and using best practice templates - to fully demonstrate and feedback: (i) learning from the project and the operating environment (ii) results of risk management mitigation/actions (iii) progress against KPIs at milestones and (iv) impact achieved to date. This will enable each CSSF-funded project we manage to contribute to the <Monitoring and Review> stages of the CSSF programme management cycle – ensuring that our CSSF clients are able to use our reporting to demonstrate impact against broader CSSF and NSC strategic objectives and help inform future project decision making.

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Part 2: In this second section we will highlight **specific elements of our project and programme management approach:** We recognise that effective programme and project management goes beyond a system of robust tried and tested approaches, systems and networks of expert-practitioners. There are specific technical requirements and expert, specialist knowledge areas that must be in place to ensure CSSF-funded projects successfully deliver their objectives and do no harm. As the first such example, our in-house staff and trusted associates have significant experience of the **Theory of Change** (ToC) approach, from a technical and managerial perspective. We understand and recognise the multiple roles of a ToC (i) as a product *and* as a process (ii) as a tool to set out objectives at the start of an intervention *and* as a tool for continuous review, and (iii) to clearly demonstrate overall objectives *and* show different pathways of change and areas of flexibility. Our in-house experts and practitioners have already demonstrated their practical understanding of ToC and its application within CSSF and other HMG programming by (i) designing ToCs that are now integrated within CSSF and other HMG / donor funded projects and (ii) delivering ToC sessions, including training, to project teams, beneficiaries and a range of stakeholders. As an example, in **Ethiopia,** for the **Civil Society Support Programme (CSSP) (Phase 1: €37m, 50% DFID funding, 2011-17 and Phase 2:17m 2018-2021)** the combination of using the ToC as both product and process are demonstrated in how we adapted our approach over time in light of challenging changes to the operating environment (including legislative and security) while ensuring that during project adaptations we remained focussed on the core 'hard to reach' objective at the heart of the programme's original ToC.

Gender sensitivity is another such area and is: (i) incorporated and demonstrated in all our project and programme design and delivery processes as standard practice (ii) supported and enforced through our corporate values, policies and compliance reporting, and (iii) required for internal reporting to HMG for our ODA spend and gender targets, consistent with the UK government's UK International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014. Inclusion in project design and implementation is verified at the individual project level through the Management Control Check and Project Peer Review processes, with oversight written into the SRO role. We also ensure that gender sensitivity is **meaningfully** included, going far beyond just counting numbers of women reached, to deep engagement on wide and deep types of exclusion, whomsoever they may affect. Our approach focusses on achieving: (i) increased awareness and agency of women and girls (ii)fairer access to resources and opportunities (iii)supportive legal and policy environments (iv)challenging discriminatory attitudes, beliefs, practices and social norms and (v)dialogue, collaboration and collective action to promote gender equality. Specifically relevant to CSSF, we recognise that conflict impacts on men and women differently and can exacerbate gender inequalities. We also recognise that disrupting gender norms and power relations can lead to negative consequences, so we actively identify key risks of backlash and ensure that these risks are mitigated in project design and delivery. As an example, through our delivery of DFID-funded **Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (DFID, £30m, 2012-2017),** our ToC recognised the different impacts of conflict on men and women and the role that women have in building sustainable peace. Our **resulting project approach mainstreamed** action in this area by (i) supporting the development and adoption of Federal and state level action plans on UN resolution 1325 (ii) supporting the establishment of women, peace and security networks in each focus state and building their capacity (iii) setting-up observatories linked to the WPS Networks to monitor violence at community level and, (iv) providing safe spaces to empower young women and girls as well as men and boys to discuss and address violence against women and girls at community level and in personal relationships.

The British Council's approach to **conflict sensitivity** is embedded into each of our project designs and includes the following: (i)taking a politically aware and adaptive approach to programme management, adjusting projects where necessary to avoid having to take a high-risk course of action – also enabling flexibility in what are complex, fast changing environments (ii)conducting annual conflict analyses in each focus country while integrating ongoing monitoring and risk assessment into delivery (iii)conflict sensitivity assessment of partners and the provision of conflict sensitivity training for all staff working full time on the project (iv)application of the seven steps of the do no harm framework to understand and mitigate the potential for our interventions to cause harm or violence between groups, and (v) integrating conflict sensitivity indicators into our monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The **Active Voices project (€3.3m: 2015-2018)** adopted a common set of values for all project actors focussed on countering conflict drivers and which guided our conflict-sensitive approach. Inception activities included a detailed conflict mapping in communities in each of the four countries of intervention (Syria, Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan) in order to identify indicators of conflict and marginalisation; assess risks; identify local stakeholders and partners; and understand relationships and dynamics within and between groups. This provided deep insight into the current reality of the communities in which displaced Syrians live, and enabled the project team to refine appropriate thematic issues and geographies for the implementation phase. This conflict-sensitive approach meant the intervention was able to absorb the needs of vulnerable host communities and promote cohesion between Syrian and host community actors.

We build effective **monitoring and evaluation (M&E)** into all our interventions through the PMF to (i) ensure the quality of our project delivery and risk management (ii) to report results appropriately to our clients, demonstrating and evidencing impact, and (iii) to demonstrate value for money and return on investment for our clients and the UK taxpayers. We also specifically recognise, understand and apply the particular challenges of M&E in FCAS (especially conflict) environments, where we know that even something as simple as asking a badly phrased research/evaluation question can lead to damaging consequences for the project or participating beneficiaries/partners. Reflecting increasing priority from our clients and ICAI, in 2017 British Council launched a new evaluation policy, which establishes the principles and evaluation standards - **to OECD DAC quality standards** - which every project delivered by British Council must apply. It also defines the methodological rigour, proportionality of evaluation effort, use of external third-party quality assurance and the requirement that monitoring and evaluation be built into all project budgets and rolled-out immediately and in parallel to the start of project actions. We have adopted the DFID evaluation competency framework and the principle of evaluation accreditation at Level 3+ for all evaluation advisory staff. The evaluation policy also makes it mandatory for all evaluations to include gender analysis. We have strengthened our specialist in-house monitoring and evaluation function, including the appointment of regional evaluation advisers - with specific expertise in donor-funded project evaluations - and who are available for project deployment. We have also established an Evaluation Community of Practice for our global network of practitioners to capture best practice and learning. Again with best practice examples and guidance available via the CoE.

We are also committed to **embedding learning and professional development** as fundamental for successful project management. Our CoE and PMF supports learning through a 5-stage process starting with "planning" and ending with "reporting and sharing". PMF/CoE tools designed to support this area include (i) Lesson Capture reports (ii) Lesson Management Plans (iii) the formal quality assurance approaches e.g. peer review and management control checks which have specific sections on lessons learned, and (iv)the formal Project Closure Process and Reports, again which feature specific triggers and sections on lessons learned . With regard to on-going **professional development in project management,** we see this as a complementary area. It is offered to all relevant staff (in-house and third party) and

elements include (i)gaining a **professional qualification** from the Association for Project Management (APM) or completing the Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) course (ii)attending the in-house **Applied Project Management** course which provides training on the PMF and the Centre of Excellence tools and templates (iii)using the CoE guidance, tools and templates themselves (iv) learning from others - for example by engaging in the peer-review quality assurance mechanism or joining one of our global practitioner **Communities of Practice** (e.g. on Gender, Evaluation or Resilience Programming) (v)online learning through the British Council's My Learning portal and/or (vi)specific sector or thematic driven courses such as training delivered by our Gender team on the Gender Sensitivity toolkit.

British Council **financial management** and disbursement mechanisms are underpinned by a comprehensive policy and governance framework and robust operating procedures and controls. They apply to all employees and flow-down to all consultants, partners and suppliers. Our **delegated authority framework** defines responsibilities, authorities and standards by individual. Our global market-leader financial system (SAP) enforces these limits and also ensures separation of financial duties for all transactions. Fiduciary risk is minimised through risk assessments and formal **due diligence** checks of all third party organisations, partners and sub-contractors. Compliance is assured through the British Council's **monthly Financial Control and Compliance Framework (FCCF),** where each project is checked for compliance with these financial standards, specifically identifying risks to budget ceilings, forecasted spend projections, anti-fraud measures, payment processes, balance sheet items, debtor and creditor trends and financial accounting standards. Any exposure is dealt with and escalated as necessary via a project-country-region-HQ hierarchy. All our systems comply with strict charity and NAO requirements due to British Council's status as a registered charity and Non-departmental Public Body (NDPB). We use SAP to manage income and expenditure across projects with financial data and reporting available instantly in real-time around the world. This provides further financial control via master data controls such as approved vendors and user access rights. Our automated global payment process minimises local risk and delivers an efficient and effective payment mechanism, which, when coupled with our often permanent presence on the ground, ensures that payments can be made quickly and in a way which adheres with local practice, legislation, regulations and other requirements – removing the expense of costly bespoke set-up for new projects. **Value for money (VfM)** is also prioritised as an overarching principle as we strive to maximise impact for the UK tax payer and programme beneficiaries. Our approach brings together political economy, a cycle of lesson learning and continuous improvement – alongside familiar **economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity** metrics. This is particularly relevant in FCAS contexts where costs may be higher due to security requirements but VfM may still be high due to the value, impact and equity of the benefits delivered. We have developed a **VfM toolkit** which defines this approach and provides practical guidance for its application through the project lifecycle. This VfM toolkit, case studies and how-to guide from the CoE cover both the measurement AND management of VfM. In other words, how programmes can also build VfM into standard programme processes and culture, and so demonstrate VfM through everyday practice. For example, in **Sudan** our **Kulana Liltanmia Programme (KLP) (DFID, £10m, 2014-18)** is driving value for money through their Value for Resources (VfR) strategy which prioritises monitoring and reporting VfR indicators, enabling better understanding of the value of results achieved and supports evidence based programming decisions. This helps KLP to invest proportionately in order to create efficiencies of scale. In 2015, KLP reduced the cost per beneficiary from £1,400 to £1,000, and in 2016/17 made savings of almost £140k.

Effective and clear **project governance and resourcing** is an essential element of strong project management. We ensure there is a Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) allocated for each project within a governance structure with clear roles, responsibilities, task analysis and accountabilities. This includes clear decision making and escalation of risks and issues. Again, the PMF provides the standards and approach and the CoE provides **tried-and-tested, best practice** templates, approaches, ToR, role profiles, SRO and project board responsibilities etc. for use by global project teams. We also ensure that our clients are fully aware of any governance structure and aware of the direct route to register any concerns or complaints, especially where any escalation outside project structures may be required. On resource planning, the deployment of the right people, with the right skills, knowledge and experience, to the right projects, at the right time – is essential. We review staff resourcing throughout the project lifecycle, ensuring we are delivering VfM - modifying inputs as projects flex and adapt. We use a timelogging system (through SAP) and in-house staff utilisation rates are managed and tracked in real-time through our resources management tool, RETAIN. This enables us to plan and deploy in-house experts, alongside specifically contracted third-party suppliers, quickly and effectively when projects require additional support and to the short timescales required for CSSF call-downs.

We have comprehensive **risk management** systems in place for all projects. Our corporate policy conforms to HMG and NAO standards, and is operationalised at project level through the PMF. We have corporate, regional and programmatic assessments of risk which cover all possible areas (operational and systemic) and the individuals we work with, especially the most at-risk and vulnerable. These are recorded online in our **corporate risk management system, JCAD**, to enable the review of risks and any necessary escalations from the project level. Tried and tested risk management frameworks (and best practice examples) are again accessible to managers globally through the CoE online portal and incorporate learning and best practice. For CSSF, every call-down will first go through our formal **Contract Approval Process (CAP),** which involves an assessment of any potential risks associated with security, environment and duty of care (DoC) - ensuring they are an integral and important element of our overall risk assessment. Specific DoC requirements are in place for roles in FCAS including SAFE and SAFE+ training to support staff in their personal security management and awareness and our in-house security team provides a full security briefing as a part of the deployment process. We also undertake risk assessments to highlight the risk profile and security arrangements specific to that country or region. On-going security updates are also communicated to all staff to facilitate and ensure responsiveness to fluid security environments. On **information security and privacy** specifically, we ensure that all data we hold is held securely and safely for the different environments we work in and in line with our corporate policy – and operationalised through the PMF. All projects are required to complete privacy impact assessments and reviews are conducted so we can assure individual project compliance, for example, in line with the new GDPR law. All staff must also undertake information security training and pass an online course.

The combination of these approaches enables us to deliver an **agile and adaptive programme management approach** – which is particularly relevant to projects in FCAS contexts. As a final example, our award-winning DFID-funded Pyoe Pin programme in Myanmar, now in its third phase **(Pyoe Pin 1 and 2 (£23 million, 2007 – 2017) and Pyoe Pin 3 (£4 million, ongoing),** is a global leader in 'issues-based programming' and has been recognised as successfully adapting to a challenging, shifting environment, turning emerging political/contextual challenges into drivers for change. For example, in light of recent shifts in Myanmar's political landscape, building on positive impact delivered to date, Pyoe Pin adapted to build on results in services such as education and legal aid, and from livelihoods action in sectors such as rice and fisheries - to focus on actions contributing to improving conditions for peace in Myanmar -by understanding and addressing contests over natural resources – as a key driver of conflict in the country - in Myanmar's areas of contested governance.