UK Principles for Stabilisation Organisations and Programmes

Stabilisation Issues Note

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The Stabilisation Unit (SU) is an integrated civil-military operational unit which jointly reports to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Department for International Development (DFID), and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). It is designed to be agile, responsive and well-equipped to operate in high threat environments. It combines in-house staff expertise with the ability to draw on a larger pool of civilian expertise for specialised, longer term or larger scale taskings. It ensures lessons from practical experience are captured as best practice and used to improve future delivery by Her Majesty's Government (HMG).

Stabilisation Unit publications are designed to inform strategic and operational choices made by HMG and its international partners with regard to activities in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). They are to be read in the policy and resource context of HMG's Building Stability Overseas Strategy; Conflict Pool; Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF);[1] UK Approach to Stabilisation; UK Principles for Stabilisation Operations and Programmes (this document); and other relevant guidance from the FCO, MOD, and the DFID. They are aimed primarily at the SU's own practitioners and consultants, and those of other HMG Departments. They are not a formal statement of HMG policy.

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[1] Announced in June 2013, for FY 2015-16, the £1 billion CSSF, (the successor to the Conflict Pool) pools new and existing resources across Government to prevent conflict and tackle threats to UK interests that arise from instability overseas. The National Security Council (NSC) will set priorities for the Fund, drawing on the most effective combination of defence, diplomacy, development assistance, security and intelligence.

Stabilisation Unit Publications

The Stabilisation Unit produces a number of publications in order to inform key stakeholders about a range of topics relating to conflict, stability, security and justice. The publications can be found at our new Publications web page.

A brief introduction to the different series and existing titles is below.

Stabilisation Series

Core guidance on the UK perspective on stabilisation; how it should be delivered.

The UK Approach to Stabilisation (2014)
The UK Principles for Stabilisation Operations and Programmes
Security Sector Stabilisation

Issues Note Series

Short papers aimed at policy makers, programme managers and deputy heads of mission to inform them about key issues in thematic areas.

Analysis, Planning and Monitoring and Evaluation

What Works Series

These are long paper intended for programme managers, project officers and deployees. They include detailed tools and frameworks that can be applied to thematic or programmatic areas.

Policing the Context
Analysis
Planning
M&E

Deployee Guide Series

Practical guidance intended for first time or seasoned deployees.

United Nations Missions
EU CSDP
Military Headquarters
OSCE

Feedback can be sent to the SU Lessons Team: SULessons@stabilisationunit.gov.uk.

Introduction

The Principles for Stabilisation Operations and Programmes have been developed as a result of consultations with SU-deployed operational staff working in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. They also reflect recent policy and academic work. By themselves, the Principles may seem like common sense but they have not always been applied consistently in practice.

A key tenet underpinning these Principles is that "how" you deliver stabilisation activity is as important as "what" you do. The Principles are intended to encourage all those engaged in stabilisation activity to focus on a relatively small number of simple, but difficult issues that affect the outcome of any intervention. Experience suggests that the complicated systems and organisational incentives in difficult and complex environments mean that people naturally want to focus on what they can "do", rather than what needs to be done, and even less attention is given to how they can do it.

This is a living practice document, aimed at facilitating continual learning. It is designed to form the basis of conversations with SU deployees and HMG civil servants before they work in stabilisation contexts, and at the point of de-brief, when they will be asked to reflect on how their experience related to the Principles. They will be updated annually to reflect the feedback from these discussions.

This document is intended to be read alongside the [UK Approach to Stabilisation (2014)](#), which states that:

> "Stabilisation is one of the approaches used in situations of violent conflict which is designed to protect and promote legitimate political authority. It uses a combination of integrated civilian and military actions to reduce violence, re-establish security and prepare for longer-term recovery, thus building an enabling environment for structural stability."

The UK Approach to Stabilisation makes it clear that stabilisation is a process, not an end in itself. It is inherently political, and has political aims and objectives. Activities included in a stabilisation approach will be based around the following areas:

- Protect political actors, the political system and the population;
- Promote, consolidate and strengthen political processes;
- Prepare for longer-term recovery.

The Principles are designed to complement the UK Approach by giving further guidance on "how" to deliver stabilisation activities.[2] As the UK Approach makes clear, stabilisation is an art, not a science. Underlying this is the understanding that success is determined by how far any intervention helps to increase the prospects for longer term stability, rather than by what

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[2] Further detail on "what" activities could be undertaken is discussed in the 3P paper, which will be available on the [SU Publications](#) page in early 2015.

quantifiable outcomes are achieved. The Principles are therefore not a blueprint for success, but a reflection on some common factors that contribute to making an intervention more likely to have the desired impact. Overall, the Principles relate and overlap with each other and should be viewed as a whole.

There are 9 Principles, grouped into:

- **Cluster 1** - The Central Element: The Primacy of Politics (Principles 1 and 2)
- **Cluster 2** - Success Factor: Minimise Internal Obstacles (Principles 3 and 4)
- **Cluster 3** - Success Factor: Flexible and Responsive Engagement (Principles 5, 6 and 7)
- **Cluster 4** - Success Factor: Relationship Management (Principles 8 and 9)

The diagram below illustrates the overlapping nature of the Principles and the requirement for actions to be undertaken within the political context. The first cluster, "The Primacy of Politics", is deliberately identified as being the most important because it supports the central point underlying the UK Approach. The Principles do not seek to set a hierarchy between the other three clusters.
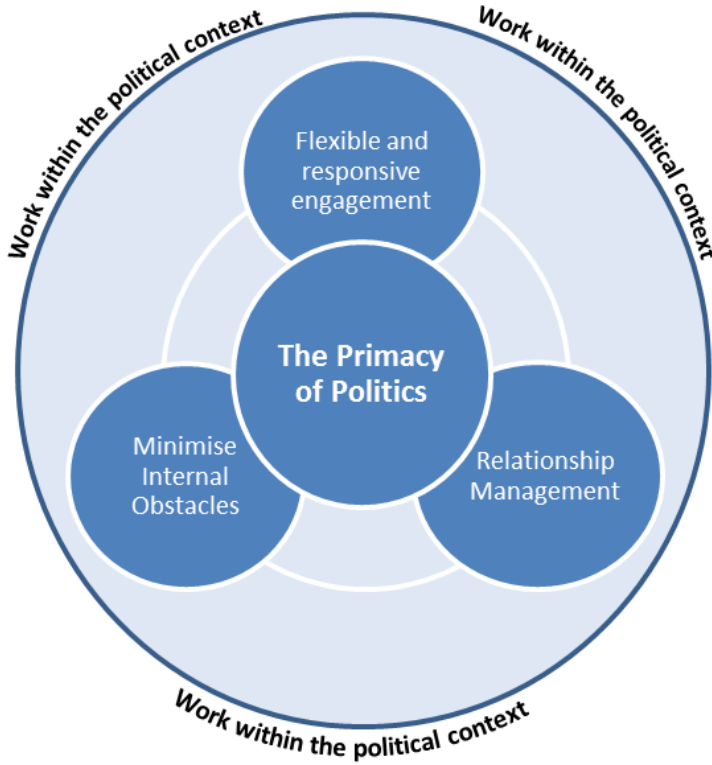

Figure 1: Illustration of the Principles for Stabilisation Operations and Programmes

Summary of Principles for Stabilisation Operations and Programmes

Cluster 1: The Central Element: The Primacy of Politics

| Principles 1 and 2 | 1. **Work within the political context** |
| | 2. **Ensure local political sustainability** |

In line with the UK Approach to Stabilisation, the Principles start with the "Primacy of Politics". Without a full understanding and consideration of the local and national political context and its dynamics, stabilisation interventions will have very little chance of success. This cluster makes clear that HMG is a political actor, working in complex political contexts, to achieve a political end, and always needs to consider its own role within these dynamics. It reiterates the need to ensure that any longer term solution needs to be grounded in local political sustainability.

Cluster 2: Success Factors – Minimise Internal Obstacles

| Principles 3 and 4 | 3. **Enable strong leadership and management** |
| | 4. **Integrate and co-ordinate appropriately** |

As a political actor, HMG is primarily concerned with maximising its impact on a situation. The complexity of stabilisation environments means that there are invariably significant external challenges to contend with, over which we often have limited influence. Working together effectively as "One HMG", however, is within our control, and likely to lead to a greater overall UK impact. This does not mean endless navel-gazing, but means: engaging across HMG to identify common interests; effective leadership in setting objectives, and continually testing them in the light of changing circumstances; coherent and integrated delivery mechanisms; and efficient management of resources to deliver defined priorities. Beyond HMG, establishing ways of working more closely with other international actors is also important.

Cluster 3: Success Factors - Flexible and Responsive Engagement

Principles 5, 6 and 7	5. **Plan iteratively**
	6. **Analyse continually**
	7. **Deliver contextually**

Stabilisation contexts are often rapidly shifting, which means that what is appropriate or feasible changes and needs to be constantly reviewed. For stabilisation activities to make an effective contribution to the overall goal there needs to be an ongoing process of analysis, planning and evaluation. This gives HMG the scope to adapt and respond to the changes in the environment.

Cluster 4: Success Factors – Relationship Management

| Principles 8 and 9 | 8. **Engage broadly** |
| | 9. **Communicate coherently** |

Stabilisation interventions are necessary when the political structures for managing competing relationships and interests have broken down and violent conflict has broken out. Interventions therefore require us to operate outside normal channels and think through how to engage with those outside established state structures. This cluster reflects the need to engage with non-state actors, including armed groups, and promote the participation of marginalised groups in order to create the foundations for stability. Stabilisation environments are often plagued with misinformation and rumour which can inhibit both stabilisation activities and undermine impact. Stabilisation practitioners should therefore be aware of how the wider population perceives developments and ensure that these stakeholders are aware of activities being undertaken and the rationale behind them. Effective two-way communication is part of the political dialogue that will determine the impact of stabilisation.

Cluster 1: The Central Element: The primacy of politics

1. **Work within the political context**
2. **Ensure local political sustainability**

In line with the UK Approach, the "Primacy of Politics" is the start-point. Without due consideration of politics stabilisation interventions are unlikely to have any chance of success. HMG is a political actor, working in complex political contexts, to achieve a political end, and that it always needs to consider its own role within those political dynamics. It reiterates the need to ensure that any longer term solution needs to be grounded in local political sustainability.

1. Work within the political context

Stabilisation is inherently a political intervention by a political actor within a political context. Ultimately, stability is only achieved and maintained through the attainment of durable and legitimate non-violent political processes and settlements. Setting a goal, and devising an approach to support these processes is only possible with a thorough grasp of the political context, including local, national or regional dynamics. HMG has to recognise that we are part of those dynamics and understand how our own politics affects the way we engage, and how others see us. This affects what role we play.

All military, social, economic and other efforts undertaken to promote stability are ultimately aimed at achieving a durable political settlement. However, determining what a feasible political settlement may be, and how best to work towards it, will be affected by:

- **The domestic and geo-political interests** of all those engaged in the intervention;
- **Regional interests** of other states and non-state actors who may have influence;
- **National (host country) political economy**, where stakeholders may be more interested in manoeuvring for power and influence than a sustainable peace;
- **Local politics between individuals/groups** competing for power or resources or contests between belligerents/insurgents and the state.

Experience from the field suggests that:

- Stabilisation activities that are driven solely by the **domestic and/or geo-political** interests of external actors and which do not address the local drivers of instability will not be successful. All work should be preceded and guided by an appropriate conflict analysis (see Principle 6);

- Stabilisation interventions will have an impact on **local political dynamics,** and inevitably there will be losers to whom stability presents a threat. Understanding that impact (both intended and unintended) is key, as is managing both its political benefits and the opposition it may engender. Our efforts should seek to

stimulate constructive, non-violent linkages between the state, elites and the population.

We need to understand the interests and agendas of **national political actors** who have local influence and who can positively or negatively influence local level stabilisation. Their potential role as facilitators or spoilers needs to be understood, and their energies harnessed or interference mitigated. We also need to understand the role of (and work with) legitimate public authorities which may not include the state (See Principle 8). At all levels (regional, national and local).

Regardless of the stated motive **HMG will be seen by others as a political actor**. Different parts of HMG may be perceived separately or not, depending on the context. Understanding our contribution to the political dynamic – and where HMG's intervention may be actively unhelpful or not feasible – is critical to determining a workable approach. Without political will and support for a sustainable political resolution, and a clear understanding of the dynamics affecting that resolution, the likelihood of success is extremely limited.

2. Ensure local political sustainability

Before determining how and when to intervene, the UK needs to consider what local political sustainability could look like in that particular context and what that means for HMG's role. This relies on the political understanding outlined in Principle 1.

The UK Approach aims to build stability by supporting legitimate public authorities to promote non-violent resolution of differences. However, it is acknowledged that in unstable environments, international support may be necessary to protect the population and sufficient stability to provide the space for determining a longer term political solution. These interventions must support, and not prevent, appropriate local solutions although what is deemed appropriate may be open to interpretation. The political environment in these contexts is invariably messy and a flexible approach is key.

There are complex reasons why some states, or regions of them, are unstable – often including regional, national, economic and social factors – but **any drivers of instability will play out in local dynamics and relationships**. These relationships are often between the elites and the population, and their interaction with the state. Stabilisation interventions need to find ways of supporting more constructive relationships between these actors to build the foundations for a longer-term state-building approach and in doing so engender stability.[3]

Stabilisation missions need to recognise the various forms of power structures – official and unofficial - that govern people's lives at the local level, and shape the environment we seek to influence. The concept of "ungoverned" space assumes that areas or peoples

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[3] See Principle 5, the UK Approach to Stabilisation (2014), and DFID's Practice Note on Building Peaceful States and Societies (2010).

beyond the reach of state authorities exist in a socio-political vacuum. This is not the case; both formal and informal power structures shape people's lives and influence their behaviours even if this is not superficially apparent. Analysis plays an important role here as it attempts to understand the strengths and weaknesses of local structures, as well as their interests, intentions and capabilities (see Principle 6).

The most sustainable outcome in many circumstances will be to empower local level non-state institutions. Interventions that exclusively focus on central government and formal structures reduce their ability to achieve impact. The pre-occupation of officials with party politics and the disbursement of state resources through patronage risks nascent central governments becoming distracted from stabilisation and state-building tasks. Stabilisation efforts will need both to encompass local level and informal institutions and mitigate against a potential level of indifference at higher levels.

In the event that there is no internationally legitimate political authority, HMG and others will need to make a judgement about the sort of relationships and actors that are likely to contribute to longer term stability. Politically, supporting some actions or engagement with local actors may not be feasible. Other actors may be spoilers and we need to consider carefully whether or how they could be included in political processes (see Principle 8). Engaging with them is not intended to bolster them but to influence, harness and/or reform them, and this should be part of a considered strategic approach. Experience has demonstrated that ignoring spoilers does not work.

HMG then needs to consider its own role in the process, explicitly acknowledging its own limits of influence, and considering our engagement with formal or informal actors at national or sub-national level. How far we support different actors can radically alter their own perceived capabilities. We have to recognise that in some instances this may inhibit their potential, as they are negatively affected by association with HMG. Equally, our external support may prop-up or prolong unsustainable political arrangements.

Cluster 2: Success Factors – Minimise Internal Obstacles

    3. Enable strong leadership and management
    4. Integrate and co-ordinate appropriately

The complexity of stabilisation environments means that there are invariably external issues, over which we often have limited influence. Working together as "One HMG", however, is within our control and likely to lead to a greater overall impact. This does not mean prioritising internal over external engagement, but means: continuous engagement across HMG to identify the common interests; effective leadership in setting objectives and defining priorities; continually testing them in the light of changing circumstances; and the development of integrated delivery mechanisms, and efficient management of resources. Beyond HMG, establishing ways of working more closely and coherently with other international actors with similar interests is also important.

3. Enable strong leadership and management

In fragile contexts the need for strong leadership and management is paramount. Whilst working in insecure environments poses unique problems, many of the difficulties faced by individuals working there are generic. Strong organisational structures with defined roles and reporting lines, a clear vision of progress and a shared purpose between the departments - with all working towards an overarching HMG (rather than any subordinate, departmental) objective - can all improve the chances of achieving impact.

Most hostile and insecure environments are plagued by inter-related problems, which make it hard to get things done. There is threat of physical violence, but there are also other challenges that increase stress such as weak infrastructure and office systems not being integrated. These problems frustrate the best organisations, and exacerbate the inadequacies of poorer ones. To operate successfully in such places, it is vital that the internal organisation is as robust as it can be.

The SU has provided guidance elsewhere on technical issues in a stabilisation setting but some lessons are best incorporated at a senior level, recognising that few practitioners will be able to shape the whole structure of a mission. Nevertheless, it is useful for all those working in such a context to know how a system can be improved, and to put the lessons into effect at a working level and within organisations as they emerge.

Have a clear structure, ideally with unity of command. Staff in an organisation need to know to whom they report; ideally this should be just one person. Where there are split lines of accountability, it is best to agree in advance as to how any differences of direction will be resolved. Careful consideration should be given to the relative ranks of senior civilian, military and international actors who oversee integrated stabilisation plans and the clear delineation of responsibilities within the chain of command (see Principle 4).

In stabilisation interventions it is vital that staff understand the overall objective they are trying to achieve, what the structure is and what their particular role is within it. It is harder to manage employees in stabilisation settings.

Investing time to identify the more important issues and then deciding the best approach is time well spent. Hostile and insecure environments are rife with many pressing concerns and it is tempting to try to tackle them all at once. However, experience from the field indicates that many of these seemingly urgent problems are symptoms of a deeper fundamental problem, which is often political.

An effective organisation needs to understand and be responsive to a range of actors. Stakeholders include both the institutions back "at home" which initiated a deployment, and the local people and structures with whom you interact.

Finally, effective communication is vital in every organisation, and it is especially important in hostile and insecure environments, where much information is unreliable, skewed or outdated. Politically high-profile stabilisation operations demand a constant flow of information from the field to inform Ministers and drive media management. It is important that the demand for such information does not prevent the forward team from focusing on delivering its stabilisation objectives.

4. Integrate and co-ordinate appropriately

Integration across HMG and co-ordination within and between international and national actors is likely to enable a more focused and effective use of resources and improve the impact of activities.

The **Integrated Approach**, as defined in a forthcoming Issues Note, is fundamental to HMG's stabilisation approach. If we have learnt anything over the past two decades it is that HMG is most effective when we are working together. It is a way of working which needs to be applied at all levels and requires clear national objectives, strong leadership and collaboration across departments.

The Integrated Approach typically represents the coming together of diplomatic, development, defence and increasingly domestic pillars of government, to implement agreed policy through shared strategies and plans designed to achieve collective outcomes. The Integrated Approach has a specific meaning when applied to cross-HMG operations, reflecting the fact that all actors within HMG should both be delivering to the same overarching strategic vision, but also proactively supporting each other's objectives, rather than operating under that strategic vision in institutional siloes.

Co-ordination and collaboration with other stabilisation actors is essential. HMG interventions will be more effective if part of a broader international approach. The challenge is often how to translate broader international aspirations into activities which are sufficiently tailored to the environment to be effective. When HMG adopts an integrated approach, we can serve as a model of best practice for others.

Where international co-ordination is effective, local partners and communities can engage more easily.[4] In many stabilisation environments outside of capital cities, there are often only a handful of actors and agencies operating which makes any working at cross purposes all the more apparent to the local communities. Local engagement and cooperation increase the prospects that our efforts will endure.

However, bearing in mind the goal of local political sustainability, an HMG integrated approach and effective international co-ordination alone is not sufficient. **Working closely with national actors is critical for transition to sustainable local political institutions.** As far as possible, any actors who share an objective should be willing to analyse, plan, implement and review activities in an integrated manner. However, collaborating and co-ordinating will not change the reality that national actors have different interests and incentives and will affect the political dynamics differently.

Bringing together actors with common agendas means that we can develop a better sense of what we are trying to achieve, how our aims conflict with or complement the objectives and interests of the host government and local stakeholders, and how we can anticipate and mitigate risks.

In practical terms, integration and co-ordination is a virtue to which we all aspire but is quite difficult to achieve. Working with other HMG departments and civilian and military actors, international partners and national entities is challenging and time consuming. This is partly because these stakeholders will have different perspectives, mandates, goals and timelines. Committed leadership from all parties and suitable mechanisms can ease the process. In practice this means;

- When prioritising, senior personnel should ensure they explicitly take into account the needs and wishes of others, rather than just developing their own programmes;
- Understanding the perspectives of other stakeholders is essential in order to avoid working at cross purposes;
  There needs to be joint analysis and planning and a commitment to coordinate activities - within HMG and, where appropriate, internationally.
- Establishing clear and regular means of communication both within HMG, internationally and with national and local partners, using shared terminology.

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[4] This may include United Nations agencies and political missions, EU diplomatic or Common Security and Defence Policy missions, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), African Union or other international or regional bodies.

Cluster 3: Success Factors - Flexible and Responsive Engagement

   5. **Plan iteratively**
   6. **Analyse continually**
   7. **Deliver contextually**

Stabilisation contexts are often rapidly shifting, which means that what is appropriate, or feasible, needs to be kept under constant review. For stabilisation activities to make an effective contribution to an overall goal there needs to be an ongoing process of analysis, planning and evaluation which gives the scope to adapt and respond to the environment.[5]

5. Plan iteratively

Planning is critical.   Without careful consideration, delivering activities can have significant negative consequences.   Planning for stabilisation requires joint analysis, agreed goals, agreement on how HMG objectives contribute, and clear benchmarks of progress. **It also means building flexibility into plans and using monitoring** to continually assess progress and where feasible to influence implementation and support evaluation. From their inception, interventions must explicitly consider how ownership will be later transferred to other stakeholders.

The first step of any stabilisation mission should be analysis (see Principle 6), including articulation of the primary challenges, and a clear understanding of our interests and those of other actors. In stabilisation planning, we tend to think of what to "do" before articulating how we understand the problem, what we want to achieve, and what is possible in any given context. HMG then needs to establish what we can feasibly do to have a positive impact, and articulate a set of objectives. Our **goals should relate to building local political sustainability. Our objectives should relate to the role that HMG can feasibly play, based on our understanding of the key factors affecting change.** Relevant stakeholders need to consent to the development of a strategic plan to achieve these objectives.

Objectives should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound), while recognising the messiness of the environment – and be informed by a clear understanding of the intended, and potentially unintended, consequences of our actions. The latter consideration is particularly important; fluid situations in contested environments require that our plans be sufficiently flexible.

We need to understand the assumptions behind activities which will determine whether they will support desired impacts and outcomes. There is a need to review regularly the contribution that different stabilisation activities are making to the outcomes and overall

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[5] For more detailed guidance across the Principles in this cluster see Issues Note: Analysis, Planning, and Monitoring & Evaluation; What Works: Analysis; What Works: Planning; What Works: Monitoring and Evaluation. All are available on the SU Publications page.

impact of the intervention, whether the assumptions hold, and include negative and unintended consequences.

It is essential to have flexibility in planning, which must build on joint analysis and plans should be written by those who will implement them. Making use of different departmental planning methodologies may be appropriate in some situations. Stabilisation environments are highly fluid and any plans must be designed to respond to opportunities as well as threats.

An on-going monitoring and evaluation process is essential. This is a strategic tool to allow plans to be reviewed and adapted and mitigate any second and third order unintended consequences. This should be based on baselines with clear milestones from the outset of an activity. Identifying impact can take time, but identifying how interventions support an environment's stability is worth the effort. Alongside flexibility, there needs to be clear baselines and milestones for tracking progress, particularly where objectives comprise several priorities from different departments.

Exiting is a process, rather than a one-off event, and planning for a successful transition is key. Transition planning helps to reach clarity about an intervention's designed goals, including to whom responsibilities will be handed, and the steps needed to reach these goals. An exit strategy driven by fixed timetables (i.e. plans for withdrawal) can mean that exit is achieved, but not the overall goals. Exit strategies *per se* should be linked to the attainment of a stabilisation mission's strategic objectives, and should involve a transition to locally sustainable political arrangements – or international assistance that will then lead to this – but, be aware that domestic politics (UK or key international partners) can lead to the imposition of an alternative timetable.

6. Analyse continually

Sound analysis is the cornerstone of a stabilisation approach and all stakeholders should be engaged from the outset. Joint analysis[6] should be an on-going part of a stabilisation approach, informing and shaping strategic direction and activities on the ground. Initial analysis should focus on the critical drivers and dynamics present in any given situation. Regular checks on how those drivers/factors are progressing can then help to recalibrate what objectives and approaches are needed.

Without a common understanding of the stabilisation threat and context, integrated and meaningful action will be difficult to implement. The analysis should provide a shared understanding of conflict dynamics and inform a prioritised approach that can adapt to changing circumstances. Thorough contextual understanding illuminates subtle differences, including different types and levels of conflicts and how influences at local, regional, national and international levels shape the context. Good analysis identifies what we think we know and gaps in our analysis. It is the understanding of subtle

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[6] Joint analysis can often be carried out through a Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS). For further information, please contact Simon Arthy or SU Lessons.

contextual issues that will determine whether we make a positive impact, or exacerbate the problem.

Analysis needs to inform the approach to monitoring. Ongoing analysis can reveal the critical success factors likely to affect the success of an intervention or strategy, and the key relationships and sources of information that will reveal how they are playing out - whether perceptions of local groups, programme beneficiaries, or views of key individuals (see Principle 7).

A detailed, and shared, analysis supports efforts to establish an integrated approach. Shared analysis ensures that the interests of those involved do not inadvertently steer the conclusions to their own area of interest. For example, that those with a security sector purview aren't pushing the conclusion that it is weaknesses in the security sector that are driving the conflict. Shared analysis enables a more objective approach, rather than through our own preferred lens. It should also involve a process of bringing together the different actors to work through any differences, which leads to greater understanding and gives greater weight to the analytical conclusions.

Systematic analysis ensures that analytical corners are not cut. It avoids incomplete conclusions and unchallenged assumptions. Analysis grounded in conflict theory involves "unpacking" the context to identify the key parties and actors, their motives, means and incentives, the institutional strengths and weaknesses, societal and cultural patterns, histories of violent conflict, past triggering events and windows of opportunity or risk, and how the conflict systems at local, national and international levels are interconnected and the UK role.

Challenges to sound analysis include time constraints and lack of access to the stakeholders for the gathering of primary data. Innovative solutions are required but it is acknowledged that there is often a reliance on "light-touch" assessments that are often held to be "good enough" despite the fact that they may be based on outdated or incomplete information and overly-influenced by previous experiences in other contexts. It is essential to be clear about the limitations of analysis and to analyse evolving situations continually and be prepared to radically change strategy, implementation and/or programming if there is strong evidence that interventions are not having the desired impact.

7. Deliver contextually

Implementation of activities needs to be moulded to each unique context. There may be multiple contexts within one country requiring different stabilisation activities. Implementation which is appropriate to the context is the result of effectively applying: Work within the Political Context (Principle 1), Plan Iteratively (Principle 5), Analyse Continually (Principle 6) and Engage Broadly (Principle 8). However these on their own will not champion the requirement for innovation and new modes of implementation in stabilisation.

Delivering contextually means not designing activities solely based on models from elsewhere or our inherent assumptions. Delivery mechanisms and modalities should be developed in a manner appropriate to the context in which they are being implemented, and not imported straight from other stabilisation environments or operations.

How we deliver is as important as what we deliver. Assuming that the analysis is correct and the appropriate funding, management and oversight of the stabilisation activity have been put in place, it is still possible for activities to have little impact. This is often because we need to adapt our model of delivery. This should reflect the risk and threat profile, skills in the local and international labour markets, and the degree of political engagement and direction required. Delivering activities in-house or out-sourcing them both present challenges. More often, stabilisation activities use hybrid models to allow them to adapt and respond but, in each case, these systems and models have been tailored to the context.

Prioritisation and sequencing in stabilisation must be ruthless, given finite resources, political and time pressures, the environment will likely be high threat constraining travel and engagement. Not all potential activities have the same value or effect. Past experiences have demonstrated that linear approaches, such as an early focus on security, then politics, and then development are unhelpful. Further, because of the changeable nature of the context, the value of what we deliver may change rapidly and unexpectedly which is why it is important to keep track of the most important developments (Principle 6).

Who owns and who manages a stabilisation activity must be clearly defined. Owning an activity means being responsible for it, in HMG this is ultimately the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO). However, this individual may not be deployed in the area where activities are delivered. Ensuring owners are adequately aware of the nature of stabilisation activities, and its challenges, is critical in order for the SRO to be able to make appropriate decisions. The selection of the owner will ultimately result from an assessment of which Departments, units or HMG assets are best placed to manage and oversee an activity. It is likely that Departments will take ownership of activities which require expertise from other Departments.

Management of an activity involves identifying which department or unit will operationalise the activity (though they may not be actually delivering it, see below). This means ensuring that they have flexible and appropriate financial and reporting mechanisms to cope with the challenges of stabilisation activities. In addition, the owners and managers may not be in the same department (and may be distinct from the implementers). Both of these issues highlight the importance of appropriate integration (see Principle 4).

Further technical guidance on platforms for delivering programmes and activities can be requested from the SU Lessons Team.

Cluster 4: Success Factors – Relationship Management

8. **Engage broadly**
9. **Communicate coherently**

Stabilisation interventions are necessary when political structures for managing competing relationships break down. Interventions therefore require operating outside normal channels and thinking about how to engage with those outside more formal structures. This cluster reflects the need to think critically about power and how it is distributed and manifested. Engaging with influential individuals or non-state groups[7] and promoting the participation of marginalised groups is likely to be needed to create the foundations on which stability can be built. Stabilisation environments are often plagued by misinformation and rumour, which also can inhibit stabilisation activities and undermine their intended impact. Stabilisation practitioners should therefore be explicitly cognisant about how the wider population – outside elite groupings - perceive developments and ensure those stakeholders are aware of activities being undertaken and the rationale behind them. **Effective communication is therefore part of the political dialogue that will determine the impact of stabilisation activities.**

8. Engage broadly

In supporting the political processes and agreements that underpin the foundations for local stability, broad engagement is vital. Agreements aimed creating stability may deliberately or inadvertently exclude potential spoilers or marginalised groups. Stabilisation processes should therefore identify how and when marginalised groups can be constructively involved in maintaining stability through political dialogue. This is important for the long-term sustainability of interventions.

As set out in Principle 2, the aim of stabilisation is to promote a viable political settlement across a thematic or geographic area within a national political framework. These settlements need to be underpinned by agreements that help create legitimacy. These processes provide the basis upon which stability can grow.

The number of stakeholders involved in negotiating a political agreement may be relatively few, within, for example, a sub-district or on a sectorial issue such as justice provision within a state. Despite being few in number, the stakeholders may be diverse in origin, and may include government officials, security service personnel, non-state armed groups, community elders, business leaders, youth groups, women's organisations, trade unions or other non-governmental bodies.[8] Some of these groups may have been traditionally marginalised and may need support to be involved in any process. The following aspects of engagement need to be considered.

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[7] These groups may be loose networks or coalitions rather than more rigid structures.

[8] There is ongoing work by the Stabilisation Unit investigating the specific roles of women in stabilisation.

Engaging with spoilers and non-state armed groups

Broad engagement means that potential spoilers and non-state armed groups should be brought into the process. It is critical that the stabilisation intervention is aware of the range of perspectives and has consulted broadly and deeply within the context to ensure that those engaged understand when their actions may be perceived to be exclusionary. Supporting political settlements which are largely exclusionary can present very significant medium and long-term risks.

Where power brokers have a morally challenging or illegal basis, such as an illegal trading operation, engagement with them may still be necessary because the contexts in which HMG applies stabilisation are messy. We may face restrictions on our engagement; for example, if some actors had been indicted by the UN or International Criminal Court.

Broadening political engagement

If it is effective, the political process will have an impact on the broader population with whom the political elites may have both at positive and negative relationships. Whilst the primary driver of stabilisation is to support a sustainable political process, HMG needs to understand the relationships that exist between those elites and the wider population to identify potential risks to the process and develop mitigation. Simply engaging with the political elite is insufficient.

Marginalised groups need to be recognised as legitimate stakeholders. Deliberate efforts need to be made to include women and youth in stabilisation processes, both in terms of forming political processes and in broadening political engagement. It is important that national authorities are made aware of the risks of ignoring marginalised groups, who may be organised in ethnic, tribal or caste groups or social groups (including women, young people and the elderly). This approach may highlight tensions with the host government or local political actors, through and around which HMG must operate.

The degree to which **informal actors** provide public authority is critical and needs to be considered before and during implementation (see Principle 6). Many environments have non-state governance, security, justice and dispute resolution systems that are more effective and meaningful to most of the population than formal state structures. Efforts to stabilise a conflict-affected environment should exploit their strengths, accountability and responsiveness and seek to build linkages between legitimate public authority and the state. However, informal governance structures are not homogenous. Some may be malign and oppressive, whilst others may enjoy a high degree of credibility and legitimacy; diverse stakeholders may view these entities differently. Understanding these different perceptions before engaging with the entities will be key, as will weighing up the pros and cons of such engagement, and any mitigation that's required.

When the host nation state is a signatory to an international human rights obligation, it may be useful to ensure that local actors are aware of relevant International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights standards. The host nation may need support in

developing the relevant skills and systems, which may promote broader engagement when sensitively applied.

9. Communicate coherently

Stabilisation contexts are characterised by a breakdown of the relationships between the elite, different groups in the population, and their respective interactions with the state. "Normal" channels of HMG communication and engagement, which are primarily with the state, will therefore not capture all stakeholders. The population has a critical role to play – success will largely be determined by their perception of whether the situation has improved. Effective communication is therefore part of the political dialogue that will determine the impact of stabilisation activities.

Communication is a central pillar of effective stabilisation intervention, not least because stability is achieved when perceptions of key actors change. If parties to conflict - whether political or popular, military or civilian - do not perceive changes in the conditions that created the political upheaval, they will not feel compelled to change.

Effective communication in stabilisation requires:

- **Understanding whose perceptions need to change and how (see Principle 6)**. Planning should assess the contribution of communications to achieving stabilisation objectives and, particularly, how they might change perceptions of different actors. Communication must be accessible in terms of language and medium, and must understand how interventions resonate locally. This applies to both civilian and military activities, although it is particularly important for armed actors, given the ways in which they can be perceived by the host nation and the population.
- **Highlight success carefully.** A "success story" that is used for a UK domestic audience may look very different to the elites, regime and local population within the host nation. A *locally relevant* "success story" on the other hand can build local confidence and, if framed and disseminated effectively, can improve local perceptions about international and host nation activities.
- **Guard against window-dressing.** Perceptions will only change if the communication is based on reality. For example, the purpose of military activity needs to be clear and not dressed up as something different. Equally, if actual change has not taken place as a result of activities, then communication activities by themselves will not change perceptions.
- **Use communication to expand popular involvement in the political debate**. Activities may include direct communications by HMG or supporting local actors to engage the population in political issues.
- **Target appropriate channels.** The range of audiences is significant and the forms of communication that people use may be very different from those with which we may be familiar or comfortable. Engaging with both formal and informal media

(including word-of-mouth), in the right languages, and with the right audiences, is essential. For example, in some contexts women are often the main source of information and influencers of opinion. In other contexts, or on specific issues, teachers may be important actors through their relationship with their pupils and their status in the community. Knowing the audience, as with any type of campaign or business strategy, is fundamental to effective communications.

- **Manage the risks.** Engaging in local languages and dialects, with local media sources and actors involved in the political process must be done with a full recognition of the risk to HMG objectives in the event if we are seen as trying to influence local processes.