



BETTER ASSISTANCE IN CRISES PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Midline Report

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Acronyms

BASIC	Better Assistance in Crises Programme
CAMAELEON	Cash Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, Learning Organizational Network
COP26	UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties 26
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DAI	Development Alternatives Incorporated
EACDS	Expert Advisory Call-Down Service
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office
EQ	Evaluation question
EQALS	Evaluation Quality Assurance and Learning Service
FCAS	Fragile and conflict-affected states
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
G7	Group of Seven
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GSP	Gender-Responsive Social Protection Programme
HSOT	Humanitarian and Stabilisation Operations Team
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization
KELU	Knowledge, Evidence, Learning, and Uptake
KII	Key informant interview
KPI	Key performance indicator
KML	Knowledge management and learning
MAINTAINS	Maintaining Essential Services after a Natural Disaster
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
PFP	Programme Funded Post
REAP	Risk Informed Early Action Partnership
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SP	Social protection
SPACE	The Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 Expert advice helpline
SPIAC-B	Social Protection Interagency Cooperation Board
SPT	Social Protection Team
SRO	Senior responsible owner
SPARC	Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises
STAAR	Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources
TA	Technical assistance
TAF	BASIC's Technical Assistance Facility
TAS	BASIC's Technical Assistance Services Programme
ToC	Theory of change
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VFM	Value for money
WFP	World Food Programme
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

Executive summary

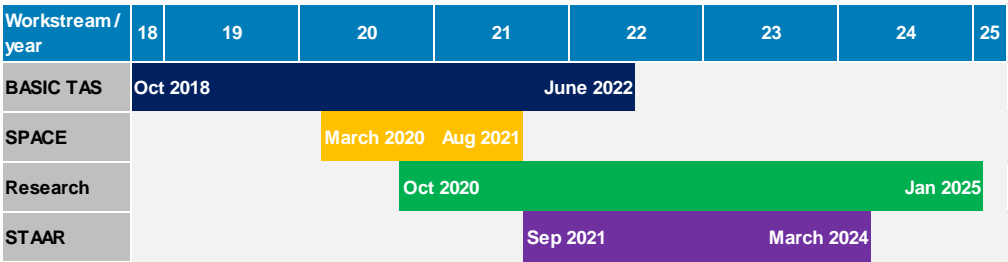
This report presents the results of the midline evaluation of the Better Assistance in Crises Programme. The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) commissioned Integrity Global to undertake an independent performance evaluation of the Better Assistance in Crises Programme (BASIC) in October 2020.

The evaluation purpose is to provide accountability and learning. The purpose of this performance evaluation is to provide (1) timely evidence to improve BASIC delivery, (2) evidence on how technical assistance and research services can support the use of social protection during crisis, and (3) guidance on the design of future centrally managed programmes. This midline report is the second of three evaluation outputs and provides a mid-point evaluation of progress over the first three years of implementation, assesses progress against the baseline phase, and provides a benchmark for upcoming endline. Midline evaluation evidence was collected between May and September 2022.

Better Assistance in Crises Programme

BASIC aims to support the new and/or improved use of social protection approaches during crises. Delivered between 2018 and 2024 by the FCDO Social Protection Team (SPT), BASIC aims to provide (1) technical assistance, (2) research, and (3) knowledge management and learning services to the FCDO and its partners to improve the use of social protection systems and approaches during crises. BASIC workstreams expect to do this by: improving the capacity of donors, multilateral agencies, and national governments; supporting the development of new or strengthened country plans, policies, programmes, and systems; increasing the use of high-quality evidence; and promoting greater coherence and coordination between actors and initiatives. BASIC is delivered by two suppliers:

- BASIC Research:** The Institute for Development Studies (IDS), in partnership with the Universities of Sussex and Wolverhampton, was contracted to deliver BASIC Research – a multi-year research programme with a global and country-level focus across a range of thematic issues relating to (1) politics and political economy, (2) climate and livelihoods resilience, (3) Inclusion and participation, and (4) systems for design and delivery. BASIC Research began inception in October 2022 and transitioned to implementation in February 2022 with a programme of 21 research projects.
- BASIC Technical Assistance:** Development Alternatives Incorporated (DAI) was contracted to deliver BASIC Technical Assistance, which has been delivered across two contracts to date: BASIC Technical Assistance Services (TAS), which included the Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 Expert advice helpline (SPACE) and funding provided to the Humanitarian and Stabilisation Operations Team (delivered by Palladium), and the Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (STAAR) facility (see figure below for dates of operation). By June 2021, BASIC TAS delivered 28 projects across 45 countries. By contrast, only three assignments were completed over the subsequent year. Nevertheless, as of August 2022, five STAAR assignments were live, two in procurement, and a further eight were being scoped.



BASIC budgetary information and uncertainties

The original budget for the programme was £20.5 million for delivery between 2019 and 2024. Just under £10 million each was allocated to BASIC Technical Assistance (DAI and Palladium) and BASIC Research (IDS). During the evaluation period (May–September 2022), the BASIC supplier delivery budgets were subject to uncertainty, as a result of the HM Treasury three-year spending review. In June 2022, the FCDO communicated plans to decrease delivery budgets to suppliers, indicating it could take several months for final figures to be confirmed. Therefore, for a period of three months, suppliers were working to ‘minimum budgets’ before budgets for the remainder of the programme period were confirmed in late September 2022. The confirmed budgets represent a re-instatement of the total budgets for each workstream, but with a different spending profile with significant budget deferred to 2024/25. Budgetary discussions and uncertainty delayed the implementation of both workstreams, and we reflect on these delays in the evaluation.

Evaluation approach

The evaluation covers all BASIC workstreams and considers performance at the global and country level. Examining the impacts of BASIC on end beneficiaries is out of scope of this evaluation contract.

The evaluation uses a blended theory-based and case-based approach, and was underpinned by clear management processes. Our approach was non-experimental and relied on contribution analysis, which assesses the relative contribution of BASIC to outcomes and impacts of interest compared to other possible explanatory factors. Budget uncertainties and implementation delays made it more challenging to engage with BASIC suppliers and caused some delay to data collection activities, although these delays were sufficiently mitigated. Our approach to evaluation ethics aligns with evaluation and learning industry best practices.

We took a mixed-methods approach to assess performance, triangulating evidence to provide robust findings. We collected data by (1) reviewing programme documents and wider policy documents, (2) analysing relevant secondary data sources, (3) interviewing programme and global stakeholders, (4) conducting country case-studies in Jordan, Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen, and a learning case on the links between social protection and climate change, and (5) surveying FCDO advisors working in countries targeted by BASIC. In total, we engaged 153 stakeholders and reviewed 148 documents. We developed findings for each sub-EQ by triangulating data from different methods and discussing these as a team, appraising the strength of evidence underpinning the findings.

Key findings

EQ1 Relevance: To what extent do BASIC interventions, individually or in combination, suit the needs of target groups?

Shifts in UK government priorities have challenged BASIC's original strategic rationale, which aligned strongly with the 2016 WHS and Grand Bargain commitments. The FCDO's prioritisation of improving humanitarian responses now provides the principal entry point for BASIC.

In line with the original design intent, BASIC Technical Assistance remained well adapted to servicing FCDO needs. There have been more recent attempts to reorient BASIC to servicing a wider range of users and developing a more strategic role, but these efforts have been delayed by budget uncertainties.

Early indications suggest that gender and social inclusion will continue to be mainstreamed under STAAR, albeit through different mechanisms than under SPACE – while GESI-targeted work is a priority for Research.

BASIC has remained highly relevant to the changing crises witnessed in the midline period, including the Ukraine crisis. **But reductions in the UK aid budget in the past year have created BASIC funding uncertainties.** The UK aid funding changes may also affect the pathways of change by changing FCDO demand for support to business case development and constraining FCDOs direct ability to utilise BASIC outputs to influence systems change.

EQ2 Coherence: Are BASIC interventions internally coherent and do they work in harmony with the operations of other donors and actors in the same field?

While stakeholders perceived an added value in the two workstreams within BASIC, limited linkages were developed over the midline period and some potential opportunities for synergies were not explored. Mechanisms are being established to strengthen coordination between workstreams during implementation. BASIC's coordination with other centrally managed FCDO programmes prevented overlaps and helped identify synergies, but technical partnerships with external actors to collaborate on the provision of technical assistance and research were still nascent and to be further developed during implementation.

EQ3 Effectiveness: To what extent are BASIC interventions, individually and in combination, attaining their objectives and why?

Long inception phases and budget reductions have hindered generation of outputs over the past year and resulted in unmet demand.

Only three technical assistance assignments have been completed since the BASIC baseline.

Assignments delivered over the past year primarily provided advice to inform FCDO programming and supported relationship building and coordination efforts with donors and multilateral agencies. Progress against knowledge management and learning objectives has also been slower than anticipated.

Multiple BASIC Research outputs have been produced during inception (21 research concept notes, reports on each focus country, 18 working papers based on secondary data, 12 thematic briefs, and research proposals for all four core research themes specified). The fieldwork by BASIC Research was just starting during the midline period.

Midline evidence suggests BASIC has been most effective in supporting the development of new FCDO programmes as well as sharpening their GESI focus, and to a lesser extent improved in-country coordination and FCDO staff technical capacities. Evidence of change in other outcome areas anticipated in the ToC – including institutional capacity and building political commitments – was more limited.

Factors supporting the achievement of outcomes included evidence of the successful delivery of social assistance and COVID-19 responses also enabled outcome change, while residual funding and coordination challenges at country and global levels blocked outcome change.

EQ4 Impact: What are the positive and negative, intended, and unintended consequences of BASIC interventions, individually and in combination?

Midline evidence provides some indications that technical assistance is plausibly contributing to more effective, efficient, and inclusive social assistance. By far the best evidenced impact pathway at midline is technical assistance advice informing the design of new FCDO country programmes whose implementation is contributing to the delivery of 'more effective', 'more efficient', and/or 'more inclusive' social assistance. So far, evidence is very limited on BASIC's ability to bring about diversified and more sustainable funding for social protection approaches in crises

At the global level BASIC seeks to use research and coordination efforts to influence global actors. SPACE outputs continued to influence several multilateral organisations’ global social protection strategies. Research outputs targeting a global audience represent a key pathway for global impact, potentially complemented by a wider targeting of technical assistance beyond the FCDO.

EQ5 Efficiency: Are BASIC interventions, individually and in combination, delivering in a timely and cost-efficient manner?

The efficiency of both workstreams was affected by protracted inception phases slowing the pace of delivery and may necessitate a significant scale up of delivery in the remaining years. Finalisation of deliverables and contract amendments were similarly inefficient. There was insufficient data to report conclusively on cost effectiveness during this midline study.

BASIC suppliers faced challenges in managing value for money (VFM) because of funding uncertainty and limited end date clarity. While management structures for both workstreams are in place, leadership and management arrangements have been affected by FCDO staff turnover. While both workstreams sought to progress delivery to the extent possible during their protracted inception phases, the slow progression into implementation by both, alongside funding uncertainty, impacted negatively on the pace of delivery and timely response to potential users of the service.

EQ6 Sustainability: To what extent are the benefits and activities associated with BASIC interventions, individually and in combination, likely to continue after funding ceases?

Earlier BASIC TAS can plausibly contribute to programme and systems change at the country-level, although delivery delays compromised our ability to assess sustainability. National governments and donors faced challenges in securing long-term social assistance funding commitments. Enablers of sustainable change include use of embedded advisors/nexus advisors and resumption of in-country travel, which supports a deeper and more impactful engagement with partners in-country.

Conclusions, lessons, and recommendations

Our midline conclusions, lessons for the FCDO and partners, and recommendations are presented below.

Conclusions	
1	There is strengthening evidence that BASIC has the potential to contribute to more effective, efficient, and inclusive social assistance, most concretely through supporting the development of FCDO programmes.
2	BASIC can plausibly make a meaningful contribution to change without necessarily acting simultaneously across all the pathways identified within the theory of change.
3	Changes in the policies and priorities of UK Aid and the evolving resource availability highlight the need for BASIC to evolve and strengthen its support to coordination and influencing functions.
4	BASIC has had success in influencing in specific areas – such as the integration of GESI perspectives – and may have a comparative advantage in other niche areas, including the integration of climate change with social protection responses to crisis.
5	Several attempts to develop workstream synergies were made, but synergies were not fully explored during the midline period. Options are increasingly being considered by suppliers as the programme moves forward into implementation, but would benefit from a clearer framework outlining strategic opportunities.
6	The VFM proposition and programme efficiency have been compromised by the extended inception periods and funding uncertainties.
Lessons	

1	There is a need to consider how to improve the efficiency of the inception process. Time taken to approve the inception products compromised programme efficiency. Contributing factors included delivery delays, budget uncertainties, and time taken to design and set-up management processes and technical approaches. New centrally managed programmes should consider measures to reduce the risk of inception delays, so as to deliver programme efficiency at the outset of inception.
2	The objectives of integrating multiple workstreams and suppliers within one programme need to be clarified at the outset. Creating synergies between the Technical Assistance and Research workstreams within BASIC has proved challenging, especially given the different timescales for the inception phases of each workstream. Without adequate FCDO encouragement and guidance there is a risk that the incentives for suppliers may tend towards prioritising isolated implementation, which affect the value proposition of the programme.
Recommendation areas	
1	Increase the contribution of BASIC to influencing other actors to adopt social protection approaches in crises, alongside continued support to FCDO programme and policy development. This prioritisation could include the clarification of influencing objectives at different levels, expanding the role of cross-assignment knowledge management and learning, articulating influencing objectives for coordination assignments in scopes of work, and encouraging the monitoring of influencing activities.
2	Explore opportunities to build synergies between the BASIC workstreams. Synergies could be explored by defining the objectives of synergies, encouraging the use of staff and common approaches across both workstreams, and considering activating the BASIC advisory group and tasking it with promoting desired workstream synergies.
3	Adapt the scope and approach of BASIC to reflect evolving demand and the changing context. This could include ensuring the continuation of high-quality GESI mainstreaming, maintaining flexibility to support climate change activities outside of fragile and conflict-affected states, and continuing to explore how and when sustainable financing can be enabled, including through climate-related work. The programme could also proactively seek out collaboration with FCDO humanitarian teams to maintain the policy priority given to using social protection approaches during crises.
4	Ensure that BASIC continues to deliver good VFM. This could be achieved by ensuring suppliers report on their proposed VFM metrics in quarterly reporting, supporting localisation efforts to improve effectiveness and sustainability of outputs, and completing any amendments required to extend BASIC delivery until the end of March 2025. The FCDO and suppliers should also establish clarity around the contract amendment process and initiate discussions internally and externally about a possible successor programme to avoid a hard stop to BASIC activities.

Next steps for the evaluation

The endline will be more summative in nature but will still focus on process issues and achievement of some outputs and outcomes given implementation delays. This midline is formative and BASIC programme adaptations are anticipated from FCDO SPT and BASIC suppliers. Our endline evaluation, which is currently scheduled to start in October 2023 (although this timing may need to be reconsidered in light of the programme period extension), will increasingly consider the contribution of BASIC to outcomes and impacts of interest and the sustainability of these effects, (i.e., the likelihood of systems change in targeted countries). Given the BASIC implementation delays, the endline will likely still consider process issues, as well as outcomes less well evidenced to date – for example, coordination and influencing.

We expect to adapt our endline evaluation design to respond to programme implementation and evidence gaps. We made several successful adjustments to our baseline methodology to improve participation in the midline. Our midline results present opportunities to adapt our approach to help collect evidence to better test the BASIC theory of change. These include broadening the scope of key informants to include an increasing number of non-FCDO staff and focusing our final learning case on coordination and influencing activities, given the relative evidence gap this study identified. These adaptations will be agreed with the FCDO prior to commencing the endline.

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1 Purpose, scope, and objectives

This section presents an introduction to the BASIC evaluation and this evaluation report. It covers the aims, purpose, objectives, scope, and target audiences of the evaluation.

1.1 Introduction

The Better Assistance in Crises Programme (BASIC) aims to support the new and/or improved use of social protection (SP) approaches during crisis by providing expert advisory, capacity building, learning, coordination, high-level policy influencing, and research services. It is being delivered between 2018 and 2025 (extended from 2024 at the time of data collection) by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Social Protection Team (SPT). In October 2020, the FCDO commissioned Integrity Global to undertake an independent performance evaluation of BASIC at three points over its five-year implementation period. This report presents the results of the midline evaluation – the second evaluation point, which covers the programme implementation period from September 2021 to August 2022.

1.2 Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The overall purpose and objectives of the performance evaluation specified in the Terms of Reference (Appendix A8) are as follows:

1.2.1 Purpose

- Provide timely evidence to improve BASIC processes, ways of working, knowledge exchange, and learning.
- Provide evidence and learning to the FCDO, other UK government departments, country governments, and partners on how technical assistance (TA) and research can contribute to better use of social assistance approaches in crises.
- Inform the design of future centrally managed programmes and deepen global evidence and learning on how programme modalities could change policy, programmes, and systems.

1.2.2 Objectives

- Assess whether, why, and how BASIC is achieving its stated outputs and outcomes and progress towards impact and explore whether intended outputs and outcomes were realistic and appropriate and whether there were any unintended outputs and outcomes.
- Identify what is working (and not) and why in promoting greater use of social assistance approaches in crises, and policy change and enhanced capacities through TA, research, influencing, and capacity strengthening; generate evidence and learning on the effectiveness of the programme (and how it can be improved).
- Provide evaluative evidence that can strengthen the approach to monitoring within and across programme workstreams, with a particular focus on strengthening the programme logframe and providing practical support to strengthen monitoring of BASIC Technical Assistance Services Programme (TAS) and BASIC Research.
- Generate learning on what works from the combination of TA, research, influencing, and capacity strengthening in promoting policy-, programme-, and systems-level change in crises, assessing the effectiveness of delivery modalities used in the programme and their combination.
- Learn from these lessons and make recommendations on what form a future service delivery programme should look like, the next phase of business planning for BASIC 2.0.

1.3 Scope of the assignment

The evaluation covers all three BASIC workstreams: Technical Assistance, Research, and Knowledge Management, and Learning (KML) (Section 2). The evaluation covers all global and country-level assignments delivered by BASIC, including more detailed case study research completed in Jordan,

Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen, as well as a global case study related to the links between climate change and SP agendas. The evaluation does not cover the final impacts of BASIC on end beneficiaries and the performance of this evaluation contract.

1.4 Target audiences and stakeholders

The primary audience for evaluation findings is the FCDO SPT and BASIC suppliers but we also identified a wider set of secondary stakeholders (FCDO country posts and partners, other FCDO departments, or those implementing similar centrally managed facilities) and tertiary stakeholders (external BASIC advisors, governments, donors, agencies, think-tanks, and consultancy firms). We engaged regularly with FCDO SPT and BASIC suppliers throughout the evaluation period and provided a structured process for them to comment on our approach, and the resulting findings, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons. As part of our influence and use plan, and periodic contract management, we will follow up with a sample of these users quarterly to collect feedback on the report’s utility, including examples of its use, and monitor uptake of recommendations.¹

1.5 Purpose of the midline report

This midline report, which we produced between May and October 2022, is the second of three contractual evaluation outputs. The midline evaluation serves three main purposes. First, it evaluates progress over the first three years of the programme’s implementation. Second, it provides a snapshot of the programme’s current status to assess progress against the baseline phase, and act as a benchmark for the upcoming endline phase currently scheduled between October 2023 and March 2024. Third, it elaborates the causal pathways within the theory of change (ToC). The midline report also evaluates outputs, outcomes, and impacts, can be used to refine the BASIC ToC, and updates the BASIC logframe.

1.6 Organisation of this report

The report and associated appendices (presented separately) are structured as follows:

Section	Appendix
<div><div>2.</div><div>BASIC context and delivery to date, including its ToC</div></div> <div><div>3.</div><div>Evaluation approach and methods</div></div> <div><div>4.</div><div>Midline evaluation findings, structured by evaluation question</div></div> <div><div>5.</div><div>Conclusions, learning and recommendations at this stage, and next steps for the evaluation</div></div>	<div><div>A – Background and evaluation methodology</div><div><div>1.</div><div>Programme background</div></div><div><div>2.</div><div>Evaluation methodology and approach</div></div><div><div>3.</div><div>Use and influence plan and uptake of baseline recommendations</div></div><div><div>4.</div><div>Data collection tools</div></div><div><div>5.</div><div>List of evaluation participants and reviewed documents</div></div><div><div>6.</div><div>Mapping findings to conclusions and recommendations</div></div><div><div>7.</div><div>Mapping EQUALS criteria to report content</div></div><div><div>8.</div><div>Terms of reference and deviations from these and inception phase</div></div></div> <div><div>B – Supplementary analyses</div><div><div>1.</div><div>Administrative data analysis</div></div><div><div>2.</div><div>Secondary data analysis</div></div><div><div>3.</div><div>Survey analysis</div></div><div><div>4.</div><div>Country case study – Jordan</div></div><div><div>5.</div><div>Country case study – Nigeria</div></div><div><div>6.</div><div>Country case study – Somalia</div></div><div><div>7.</div><div>Country case study – Yemen</div></div><div><div>8.</div><div>Learning case – climate change and SP</div></div><div><div>9.</div><div>Analytical scorecards – gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) and value for money (VFM)</div></div><div><div>10.</div><div>Logframe review</div></div></div>

2 Description of BASIC and its context

This section presents an overview of the BASIC ToC and delivery to date. A more detailed overview of BASIC’s operating context and delivery is presented in Appendices A and B.

2.1 BASIC programme

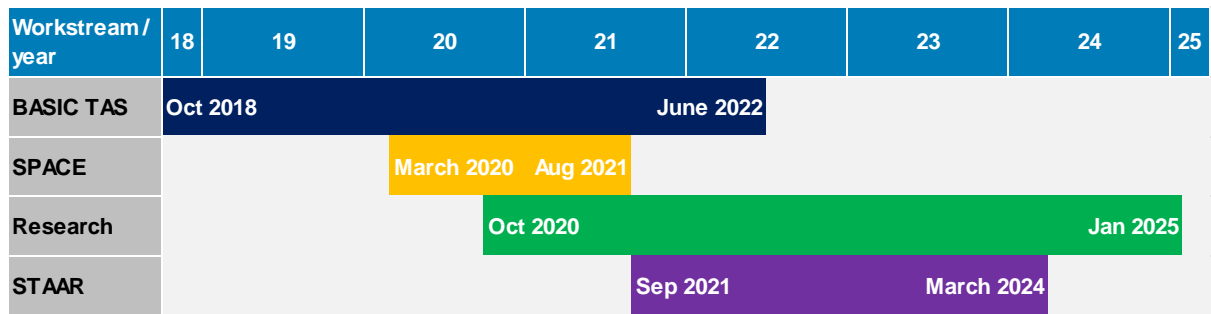
The BASIC programme aims to help poor and vulnerable people cope better with crises.² Delivered between 2019 and 2025, BASIC aims to help people meet their essential needs through more effective social assistance to low-and-middle-income countries in crisis through three main workstreams: Technical Assistance, Research, and KML.³ Box 2.1 summarises the terms we use to refer to BASIC and its different workstreams.

Box 2.1: Overview of BASIC terminology

- BASIC TAS** refers to the Technical Assistance Services programme delivered through the FCDO framework contract ‘Strengthening Resilience and Response to Crises’, Lot B of the Expert Advisory Call-Down Service (EACDS) managed by DAI Global UK Ltd (DAI) between 2018 and 2022, and the Humanitarian and Stabilisation Operations Team (HSOT) under Palladium.
- SPACE** refers to the three BASIC TAS projects that delivered the Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 expert advice helpline.
- STAAR** refers to the Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources Facility that was awarded to DAI in September 2021 and is currently under implementation. STAAR helps deliver TA for BASIC and the Gender-Responsive Social Protection (GSP) programme.
- BASIC Research** refers to the global research programme delivered by a consortium led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), which is currently in its implementation phase at the time of reporting.
- Knowledge management and learning (KML)** refers to this evaluation contract as well as broader work led by BASIC suppliers to store and use insight developed by the programme.
- BASIC Technical Assistance** refers to BASIC TAS, SPACE and STAAR collectively, while **BASIC programme** refers to these three activities, plus BASIC Research and KML.

An overview of delivery plans to date at the time of data collection is presented in [Figure 2.1](#): BASIC delivery over time

Figure 2.1: BASIC delivery over time



Source: FCDO (2022). BASIC programme documents. N.B. BASIC TAS accounts for ECADS assignments only.

2.1.1 BASIC Technical Assistance

BASIC Technical Assistance provides demand-driven country support through capacity building, learning, and coordination across multiple countries and at global level. It also expected to play a policy-influencing role through the programmes it supports. The Technical Assistance workstream was initially delivered (from 2019) through TAS. A programme-funded post (PFP) was seconded to the TAS supplier to support demand generation, delivery, and learning. HSOT, managed

by Palladium, was generally used to provide cash coordination and/or expertise in the SP–humanitarian nexus.

SPACE is a COVID-19-responsive helpline developed to provide short-term TA. Between March 2020 and August 2021, the FCDO, via BASIC and GSP, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade funded the SPACE advice helpline in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Delivered as part of BASIC TAS, SPACE’s goal was to support countries’ use or adaptation of SP approaches – including through closer alignment or coordination with humanitarian assistance – in response to the immediate and medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The STAAR facility was procured to follow on from BASIC TAS and began implementation in June 2022. The STAAR contract was awarded to DAI in September 2021 to provide a facility that manages TA funded by BASIC and GSP programmes. The objective of the BASIC window within STAAR is to expand and improve the effectiveness of investments by the FCDO, governments, and partners in approaches to SP in crises. The facility is delivered by a core team and ad-hoc assignment teams. Assignments falling under the GSP window explicitly focus on gender-responsive approaches to SP. The facility provides flexible TA, analysis, capacity development, influencing and learning support across a portfolio of demand-driven and strategic assignments.

2.1.2 BASIC Research

BASIC Research aims to strengthen both global and country-specific evidence on using social assistance approaches to build resilience and respond to crises, in different contexts, for different vulnerable groups. BASIC Research is currently comprised of three components – Global Research, Focus Country Research, and Research Uptake and Engagement. The contract for BASIC Research was awarded in October 2020 to IDS, the University of Sussex and the Centre for International Development and Training at the University of Wolverhampton.

2.1.3 Knowledge Management and Learning

The programme’s third workstream includes this evaluation contract and a broader programme of KML work led by BASIC suppliers. The new Knowledge, Evidence, Learning, and Uptake (KELU) strategy identifies learning synergies across the two other workstreams. Made available in August 2022, KELU is being coordinated by the BASIC PFP and is underpinned by existing workstream KML strategies.

Box 2.2: BASIC budgetary information

The original BASIC budget was £20.5 million for delivery between 2019 and 2014. Of this, just under £10 million was allocated to BASIC Technical Assistance (DAI), while just under £10 million was allocated to BASIC Research (IDS).⁴ The programme’s business case classified £5 million of the total budget as International Climate Finance, with £3 million drawn from the BASIC Research budget, and £2 million from the Technical Assistance budget.

As a result of HM Treasury’s three-year spending review, FCDO budgets were revised, which has implications for the BASIC programme. In June 2022, the FCDO communicated to suppliers plans to decrease delivery budgets, indicating that it may take several months for final figures to be confirmed. Therefore, for a period of three months suppliers were working to ‘minimum budgets’ before budgets for the remainder of the programme period were confirmed in late September 2022. The confirmed budgets represent a re-instatement of the original budgets for each workstream, but with a different spending profile. The budget for both workstreams has been reduced in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years and increased significantly for 2024/25, as shown in [Table 2.1](#).

Table 2.1: BASIC budget over delivery period

Financial year	BASIC Research		STAAR	
	Forecast estimate (excluding VAT) – £m	Budget confirmed in Sept. 2022 – £m	Forecast estimate – £m	Budget confirmed in Sept. 2022 – £m
2022/23	3.40	2.40	2.16	1.30
2023/24	2.66	2.35	2.14	1.67
2024/25	0.79	2.02	1.80	3.10
Total	6.85	6.77	6.10	6.07

Source: FCDO Social Protection Team (2022). *N.B Forecast columns were estimates of the split of spend across the programme. This, rather than budget reductions, explains why the total forecast figures do not match the confirmed budget totals for BASIC Research and STAAR.*

2.2 Rationale for intervention

The BASIC Business Case suggests that extreme poverty and fragility are closely interlinked but the humanitarian system is ill-suited to respond and, in a context of unprecedented need, severely overstretched. Crises are increasingly protracted or recurrent, with 86 per cent of aid going to crises lasting three years or more, yet financing and delivery models are mainly short term and reactive.⁵ As set out in its business case, BASIC aims to address the increasing need and specific challenges resulting from different types of crises – all of which jeopardise Sustainable Development Goal 1 (ending poverty in all its forms), as well as the key promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ‘leave no one behind’.⁶

- **Recurring climate-related shocks:** Climate-related shocks are set to become more frequent and are a major impediment to development, setting back poverty alleviation and leading to loss of lives and livelihoods. These shocks are expected to put greater pressure on overstretched humanitarian systems. Types of disasters that generate the most humanitarian need, such as cyclones, floods, and droughts, are predictable but international humanitarian aid is often too little, too late.
- **Protracted conflict-related crisis in most fragile and conflict-affected states:** Most humanitarian aid is spent in a small number of conflict-related crises over long periods of time. Contexts of protracted crises routinely feature at the very low end of the Human Development Index. As such, there is a considerable overlap between fragile states and humanitarian caseload.⁷
- **Protracted displacement and refugees:** The number of forcibly displaced people is rising, and they are displaced for extended periods. More than 80 per cent of refugee crises last longer than a decade, and 40 per cent last longer than two. Despite the protracted nature of displacement, responses are often based on short-term planning, with funding mostly allocated on a yearly basis.⁸

Research suggests social assistance has the potential to respond to protracted crises more effectively and efficiently, but the BASIC business case indicates that it is currently underused. This underuse is due to limited evidence, knowledge, and capacity to guide programme design and delivery, and political economy challenges to reform.⁹ Programme documents argue that the delivery of humanitarian cash is often fragmented, weakly coordinated, short-term, and unpredictable, even in protracted crises. Social assistance approaches can help address these weaknesses, and transcend the humanitarian–development divide, by bridging humanitarian cash transfers with longer-term social assistance and providing a medium-term exit strategy from humanitarian assistance to sustainable, national government-owned systems. A series of important

policy commitments¹⁰ reflect a clear international consensus to maximise the use of social assistance systems and approaches in crises to help provide more effective, efficient, and sustainable responses to affected populations.

BASIC operates in a context in which other programmes are contributing towards advancing SP approaches to crises. There are several FCDO and other donor programmes working in humanitarian assistance and/or SP with core research and/or TA workstreams. In light of this, it is important to consider the relevance of these programmes and situate BASIC's efforts within broader complementary efforts of other actors. See Appendix A for an outline of other relevant programmes and key stakeholders.

2.3 BASIC theory of change

The BASIC ToC suggests workstreams will result in more effective, efficient, equitable, and sustainably financed use of SP approaches during crisis. The core rationale underpinning the BASIC ToC is that providing quality support to the development of country policies and systems, building the capacities of the FCDO, governments, and other stakeholders, and generating evidence and learning on what works in different contexts will, taken together, bring about more efficient and effective social assistance in crises, enabled by diversified and more sustainable funding. The expected impact of these outcomes is that vulnerable people are able to cope better with crises and meet their basic needs after – or in anticipation of – protracted conflict, protracted displacements, and/or climate crises. The BASIC programme-level ToC ([Figure 2.2](#)) includes the following outputs:

- high-quality advice on the design and delivery of country plans, policies, programmes, and systems
- targeted capacity-building support (FCDO, agencies, governments, donors, and local actors), including co-creation of research
- greater awareness, knowledge, and learning across countries and agencies on SP approaches in crises
- generation and effective dissemination of high-quality, policy-relevant research on what works in different contexts.
- new or strengthened relationships and strategic partnerships across the humanitarian, climate resilience, and SP sectors.

The overall BASIC programme's intended impact is that vulnerable people are better able to cope with crises and meet their basic needs through:

- more efficient social assistance in crises (earlier, timelier, less fragmented, and lower cost)
- social assistance in crises that is more effective at addressing household needs
- more inclusive design and delivery of social assistance in crises (gender, age, disability, and marginalised groups)
- diversified and more sustainable funding for SP approaches in crises (domestic, development, and private)

A range of other contextual factors may also affect the ability of BASIC to meet its objectives.

A range of bilateral, multilateral, governmental and non-governmental actors continue to allocate resources to deliver and enhance humanitarian and SP systems.¹¹ Within the international community, a range of research and TA programmes have also been developed to provide support in this area.¹² And finally, broader technological innovation in sectors relating to SP are likely to enable further system enhancement or development.

2.4 BASIC delivery to date

A summary of BASIC delivery by workstream is presented in [Table 2.2](#). For more detail on BASIC delivery to date, please see Appendix B1.

Table 2.2: Overview of BASIC delivery – September 2022

Component	Assignment / project type	Quantity	Status
BASIC Research	Projects + concept notes	21	In progress
BASIC Research	Working papers	18	Completed
BASIC Research	Thematic briefs	12	Completed
BASIC Technical Assistance	Projects	28	Completed
SPACE	Assignments (various)	105	Completed
STAAR	Assignments (various)	34	In progress

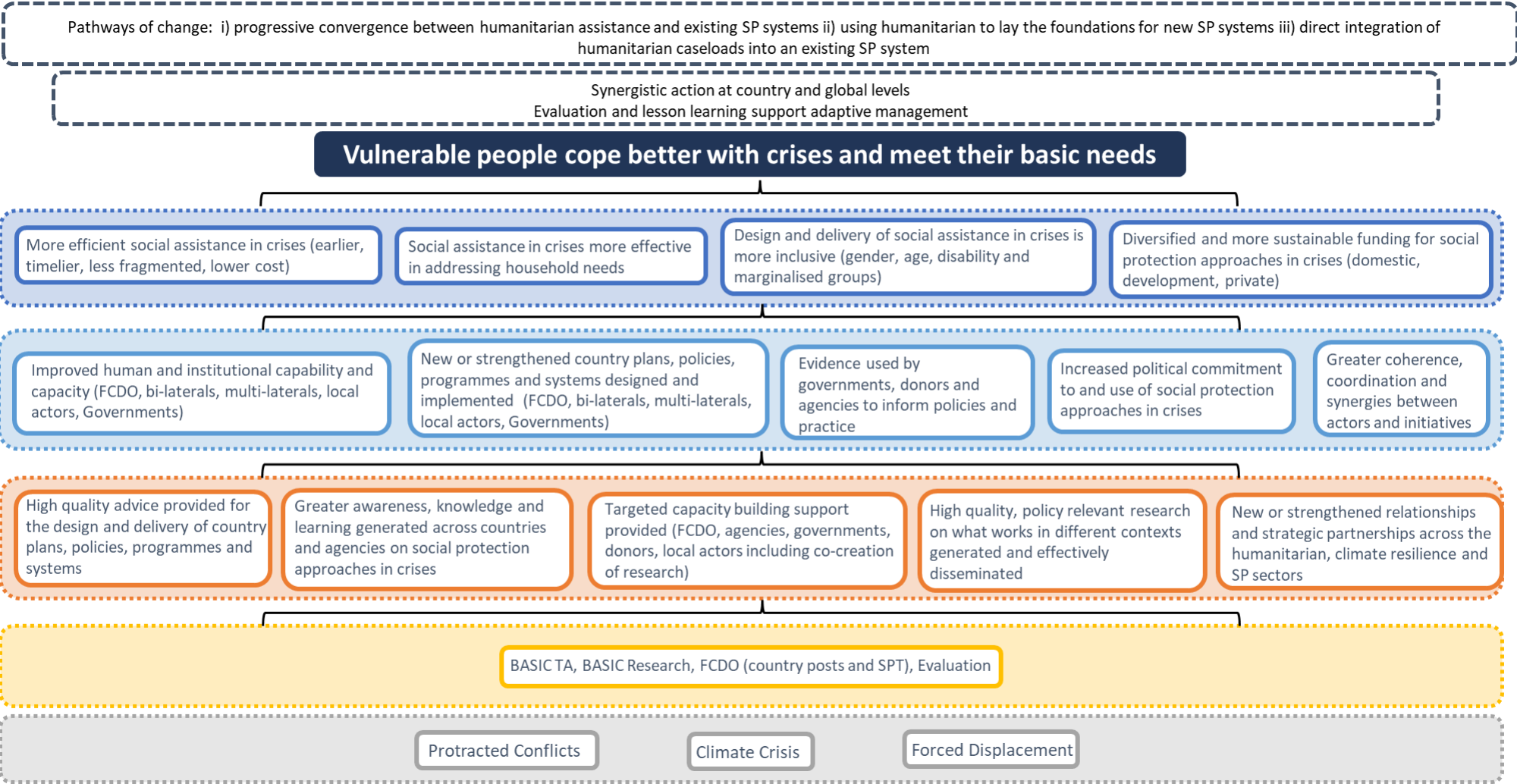
2.4.1 BASIC Research

During its inception and early implementation, BASIC Research produced 18 working papers and 12 thematic briefs. Working papers are the synthesis of findings from multi-country or global studies, all of which included a programme of literature review. Theme briefs are a sub-set of papers, summarising elements of the working papers into shorter briefing papers. The studies will also inform the global- and country-level research that the BASIC programme will carry out during implementation.

BASIC Research proposed a programme of 21 projects related to global- and country-level research. The research focused on four main themes around the use of SP approaches during crises. These themes included inclusion and participation (34%; n=10), systems (31%; n=9), climate and livelihoods (21%; n=6), and politics (14%; n=4); projects often contributed to multiple themes.

The majority of projects detailed a global focus, supported by deeper in-country research in focus countries. The portfolio targets a total of 19 countries across four regions: the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Lebanon, Niger, Nigeria, and Yemen hosted the largest number of research projects, which reflects their deep-country engagement status. In over half of the countries, the projects are contributing to global research, meaning they are considering results both globally and across specified countries. The identified target audiences are governments in or preparing for crises, the FCDO and international donors, other local actors, humanitarian/aid agencies, NGOs, and researchers.

Figure 2.2 BASIC Theory of Change



2.4.2 BASIC Technical Assistance

BASIC TAS delivered 28 projects across 45 countries between March 2019 and March 2022, spending £2.62 million. Just under half of the reported spend related to the delivery of SPACE, which accounted for 105 assignments, delivered across three projects.

STAAR’s inception phase began in September 2021 and was expected to run until December 2021, but this was delayed, and implementation formally began in June 2022. Despite this, some assignments were completed as part of the inception phase, including those related to the Ukraine response.

STAAR have a total of 34 demand-led and STAAR-led assignments, according to records shared with the evaluation team. Five of these assignments relate specifically to the GSP programme and are outside the scope of this evaluation. Half of the assignments are currently being or have been delivered, with the remainder in a process of scoping or procurement. The majority of all identified assignments were demand-led. The assignments cover 12 countries in total, with Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen targeted the most.¹³ A large number of assignments were not country-specific – these typically related to STAAR management activities, or broad thematic areas like digital cash payments, climate and environment, or food security. The FCDO was the lead user specified for the majority of these STAAR assignments (56%; n=19). The FCDO and STAAR were the lead users of all concluded assignments to date.

3 Evaluation approach and methods

This section summarises our evaluation design. It covers our evaluation questions, overall approach, data collection and analysis methods, management approach, and key evaluation limitations and mitigating strategies. Our approach and methods are presented fully in Appendix B.

3.1 Evaluation questions

To address the evaluation purpose and objectives, we set the following high-level evaluation questions (EQs), which align to OECD-DAC criteria:

- 1. Relevance:** To what extent do BASIC interventions, individually or in combination, suit the needs of target groups?
- 2. Coherence:** Are BASIC interventions internally coherent and do they work in harmony with the operations of other donors and actors in the same field?
- 3. Effectiveness:** To what extent are BASIC interventions, individually and in combination, attaining their objectives and why?
- 4. Impact:** What are the positive and negative, intended, and unintended consequences of BASIC interventions, individually and in combination?
- 5. Efficiency:** Are BASIC interventions, individually and in combination, delivering in a timely and cost-efficient manner?
- 6. Sustainability:** To what extent are the benefits and activities associated with BASIC interventions, individually and in combination, likely to continue after funding ceases?

Under our EQs, we considered 22 sub-EQs to structure our findings. We refined these sub-EQs with the FCDO in the baseline period (the result of this process is presented in Appendix A).

3.2 Approach, methods, and limitations

To answer the EQs, we chose a blended theory-based and case-based approach, drawing on mixed methods to fully address the evaluation purpose and account for BASIC’s complex operating environment and expected causal pathways. We collected qualitative and quantitative data using the methods outlined in [Table 3.1](#). The main changes from the baseline include the improvement of our in-house survey and the introduction of a learning case study on SP approaches to climate issues.

Table 3.1: Data collection approaches used by the evaluation

Method	Description
Key informant interviews (KIIs)	We completed 29 KIIs to collect views on the performance and context of BASIC. The KIIs engaged stakeholders representing the FCDO, BASIC suppliers, complementary programmes, donors, and agencies. They were semi-structured and tailored to informants. We followed transparent procedures to collect, store, and analyse data.
Case studies	Country case studies were used to identify any in-country effects, and why and how they arose. To assess BASIC’s performance in different contexts, we delivered four case studies in Jordan, Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen, and one learning case on the links between SP approaches and climate issues. When selecting the four country case studies, we adopted diverse purposive sampling to identify a range of experiences from different BASIC operating contexts. We also considered accessibility (including physical accessibility) and responsiveness in our sampling. Case studies were delivered in part by national consultants, and all cases were informed by a review of secondary data, programme documents, and KIIs (20 per case study on average). Three of the four top countries in terms of number of STAAR assignments are included in the case studies.
In-house survey	FCDO conflict, humanitarian, social development, and climate and environment advisors located in FCDO country posts that were in scope to receive BASIC support were surveyed to collect representative views on context and programme performance. We administered a questionnaire between June and September 2022, structured against the ToC. Initial testing indicated a survey length of 30 minutes, and the survey

Method	Description
	was adjusted so that it would take an estimated 15–20 minutes. The FCDO SPT shared contact details of 147 staff with us. Of these, 101 were deemed relevant to the population of interest. In total, 30 advisors participated in the survey – a response rate of 30 per cent overall, which varied somewhat by region and advisor type. The response rate was considerably higher than the 17 responses (13%) achieved in the baseline. This was likely due to administering the survey as a structured remote interview rather than a self-reported online survey. Appendix B3 provides detailed information on the delivery and results of the survey.
Document review	We reviewed 93 BASIC programme documents to understand the extent, nature, and effects of BASIC support provided to country posts, and 37 policy and grey literature documents to understand key developments in the sector.
Secondary data analysis	We analysed BASIC monitoring data to assess outputs realised across different countries. We analysed indicators from a range of secondary data sources to understand context and the extent and quality of SP systems in BASIC target countries. We adopted clear and transparent processes for collecting and analysing secondary data.

We used a non-experimental contribution analysis approach to assess the validity of the BASIC ToC. Our contribution analysis assesses the relative contribution of BASIC compared to other possible explanatory factors. Our country case studies were informed to a limited extent by two additional analytical frameworks: the Actor-Narrative-Interest model and the Kirkpatrick model of learning effectiveness to assess the effectiveness of capacity building delivered in case countries. These frameworks supported an assessment of the expected effects of BASIC on policy change and organisational learning.

We identified several limitations and mitigants for our approach ([Table 3.2](#)).

Table 3.2: Summary of evaluation design limitations

Limitation	Mitigation
BASIC supplier uncertainties around budget and delivery resulting in lack of clarity around operational context and more limited supplier engagement	Worked closely with the FCDO and BASIC suppliers to get regular programme updates and documents to maintain a good understanding of delivery context and delays.
Reduced wider FCDO stakeholder engagement with the evaluation (not SPT specifically) due to pressures of other business (managing potential budget cuts, responses to COVID-19, changes in policy).	Used new data collection approaches, such as the individually administered survey questionnaires. Improved KII recruitment through personalised emails and adaptation of approach and interview length depending on availability.
Limited implementation of BASIC Research and STAAR during the evaluation period reducing evidence on implementation evaluated at the midline	Devoted attention to understanding reasons for limited implementation as part of our data collection process and analysis.
Limited sample of country case studies given extensive engagement of BASIC across different geographies and contexts. Risk of skewing findings.	Used a considered sampling process and collected data from other contexts and geographies through the survey. Accounted for limitation in analysis and integrated systematic reviews to mitigate against over-reliance of case findings in report sections.
Possible risk of bias in the survey results as advisors who are more knowledgeable and positive about BASIC may be more likely to respond and humanitarian advisors had a lower response rate than other advisors.	Triangulated use of survey results against other sources of evidence. Contextualised use and presentation of the survey findings in the report against these specific risks.

We followed a systematic approach to appraising and triangulating evidence from different sources. Multiple team members were involved in data collection using the different instruments and coding the findings to minimise bias. During the synthesis phase we held periodic analysis sessions as a team to reach consensus. Where there were outliers or conflicting results, we reported our

assessment of the most reasonable answer to EQs with appropriate caveats. We also present the strength of evidence underpinning each sub-EQ using a rubric approach. This approach considers the scale and consistency of triangulation, and the extent of evidence saturation achieved.

3.3 Management and evaluation ethics

The evaluation was delivered by technical and project management units. We specified clear internal and external, and knowledge management processes to deliver the evaluation. We used a risk register to record, monitor, and report project-related risks, and updated it at least quarterly. We used quality assurance processes to deliver this report in line with EQuALS standards. We offered FCDO and BASIC suppliers opportunities to comment on our delivery progress and results prior to final submission. We have procedures to support the safe collection, management, analysis, dissemination, and destruction of data collected, and to safeguard against personal data breaches.

Our approach to evaluation ethics aligns with evaluation and learning industry best practice. In our company-wide Standard Operating Procedures, we set out a clear code of ethics, which aligns with the UK Evaluation Society Guidelines for Good Practice. We are signatories to the Safeguarding Leads Network '*Putting People First*' commitments and work collaboratively with the network to help prevent sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and abuse in the delivery of UK Aid. We acknowledge the high-risk status the FCDO has awarded to duty of care, and Integrity accepts responsibility for staff, contractors, and evaluation participants throughout the lifetime of the contract.

4 Evaluation findings

This section presents our evaluation findings by EQ. Each section summarises midline progress before answering each sub-EQ. Our BASIC logframe review is presented in Appendix B.

4.1 EQ1 Relevance

EQ	Baseline findings	Midline update
1.1 Alignment to FCDO priorities	Designed to act on a range of key FCDO strategic goals and international policy commitments and focus on protracted crises. Limited activities to address commitments to mitigating climate change.	UK government policy priorities are evolving. The policy commitments that underpinned BASIC, including the 2016 WHS and Grand Bargain, are now less prominent. The FCDO commitment to improving humanitarian response now provides the principal entry point for BASIC. BASIC is adapting to demand from the FCDO for linking climate change and SP.
1.2 Responsiveness to user needs	Well adapted to meeting the needs of FCDO country posts. Less responsive, or adapted to, meeting the needs of other stakeholders, including national authorities.	BASIC Technical Assistance remains well adapted to servicing FCDO needs, but there is limited progress at this point towards meeting the needs of a wider set of stakeholders. BASIC Research provides a public good, but in practice may be more closely aligned to the needs of some potential stakeholder groups.
1.3 Balance of demand-driven and strategic approaches	Builds strategically on initial opportunistic entry points. Opportunity to increase value-added through stronger global-country synergies.	While remaining predominantly demand-led, BASIC STAAR has introduced a number of strategic <i>elements, both in reinforced core team capacities and STAAR-led initiatives</i> . Innovations are being piloted to assess their added value.
1.4 GESI considerations	Consideration of gender-responsive and inclusive SP improved strongly under SPACE. Opportunity to broaden the scope of inclusion.	Early indications suggest that GESI will continue to be mainstreamed under STAAR in SPACE. GESI-targeted work has remained a priority for under BASIC Research.
1.5 Adaptation to changes in context	Adapted rapidly and flexibly to COVID-19 and growth in demand. Remains relevant under FCDO budget revisions.	BASIC has remained highly relevant to the new crises witnessed in the midline period, but reductions in the UK aid budget have created funding uncertainties for BASIC and may change FCDO demand for BASIC's services and FCDO influence in the sector.

4.1.1 EQ1.1 Is BASIC aligned with FCDO priorities (relating to social protection, humanitarian, and climate change) and Grand Bargain commitments?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 1: The UK government policy priorities are shifting with implications for the continuing relevance of BASIC. Significant shifts in FCDO international development policies and priorities were reported in the midline period. The International Development Strategy published in May 2022 outlined a development policy more integrated with its foreign, defence, and security efforts, with a particular emphasis on trade and economic development. The strategy's four key focus areas are: supporting economic development, making gender equality a core priority, delivering humanitarian leadership, and tackling climate change and global health. The operational consequences of this policy shift had become increasingly evident in the midline.

The BASIC business case was aligned with commitments to the 2016 WHS and in the Grand Bargain, including localisation and the increasing use of cash. While not retracted, FCDO staff saw these commitments as softening, with a shift to the G7 as the primary platform for coordination. While a variety of factors were cited as influencing these shifts in priorities, the political environment was seen as an important part of it. In one KII, an FCDO interviewee commented, *'The UK is no longer on the Grand Bargain steering group and merely has a watching brief. Likewise, we have scaled back our engagement on cash significantly a lot and we are no longer driving the agenda.'* Another added, *'Various caucuses under Grand Bargain 2.0 still have relevance. But not the over-arching frame of*

reference. There was less explicit mention of localisation (a higher proportion of humanitarian funding provided to local and national actors) as a goal among FCDO respondents.

Finding 2: The FCDO prioritisation of improving humanitarian response now provides the principal entry point for BASIC, rather than building SP systems. Humanitarian assistance and leadership has been retained as a key objective for the UK’s aid programme under the International Development Strategy – although it is perhaps less clear how the FCDO intends to deliver against this goal, given the scaling back of Grand Bargain commitments.

The consequences of relying on a humanitarian entry point for BASIC can be challenging. One key informant observed, *‘A lot of competing demands are being placed on the humanitarian sector regarding mainstreaming, including gender, climate, and inclusion. There is a bandwidth issue (which BASIC has to contend with).’* Most significantly, as seen in both the Somalia and Yemen case studies, at times the immediate goal of addressing humanitarian needs took precedence over longer-term approaches to build SP systems.

In contrast, the government does not directly reference SP, social assistance, or social security in the International Development Strategy. In KIIs, respondents also referred to SP as a lower priority for the FCDO, something that had *‘moved down the agenda’*. Most stakeholders foresaw reduced SP programming and for some, *‘the days of supporting large national flagship social protection programmes were probably over’*. The focus appears to be shifting towards influencing and linking SP to goals like resilience and the humanitarian–development nexus. This raises questions about the implications for the FCDO’s role in influencing shock-sensitive and climate-adapted SP if it becomes increasingly disengaged from fundamental system building. This policy shift is not reflected in BASIC, as STAAR and Research continue to place system building of SP systems centrally in the respective ToCs.

Finding 3: There is strong demand from the FCDO for linking climate change and SP, which BASIC is adapting to. International Climate Finance accounts for a sizeable proportion of BASIC’s budget. In the midline survey, when asked to select from a list of areas in which they would most appreciate support from BASIC, FCDO advisers ranked better linking SP approaches and climate change second highest (with positive responses from 67 per cent of respondents), exceeded only by sustainable financing (at 73 per cent).

However, at this stage, the SPT team’s related priorities are nascent. BASIC Technical Assistance has undertaken little climate-focused work to date relative to the total volume of assignments. BASIC began to explore climate-related issues with the publication of a dedicated SPACE paper on strengthening linkages between SP and climate change response, as well as a paper on shock-responsive SP and disaster risk financing (which included climate). Of the small number of assignments delivered in the midline, three have had an explicit climate focus, suggesting that this shift is already underway.¹⁴ STAAR inception documents position climate as a strategic priority facilitated by the recruitment of a dedicated lead. However, no dedicated scoping work has so far been undertaken to define written strategy outlining areas of focus, what kinds of requests will be supported, and whether and how demand will be generated. It is expected that this work will be undertaken by the Climate Lead.

The BASIC Research team set out their plans for climate-related work clearly during inception – in part due to the nature of the workstream’s more structured thematic approach – but the subsequent scaling back of those plans may mean the deprioritising of certain areas. While there are signals that climate-related work could form a key focus of the portfolio, given the early stage of Research delivery at the time of reporting, it is not yet possible to comment on how far the portfolio would sufficiently cater to FCDO demand in this area.

Until very recently, there has been a clear difference in understanding between the FCDO and the Technical Assistance delivery team about the remit of the facility’s climate-related work. SPT have steered the delivery team to explore the linkages between climate-related crises and SP, particularly (though not exclusively) in the context of fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). This is consistent with the rest of BASIC and seeks to address a dearth of programming and evidence at the intersection of climate, SP, and fragility. In contrast, the STAAR delivery team were interested in exploring the climate linkages more generally across countries within the wider scope of the BASIC business case. Research staff working on climate identified generating empirical data from FCAS contexts, including those experiencing protracted conflict, as a core aim.

4.1.2 EQ1.2 Is BASIC responding to demand and meeting priority needs of immediate users at global and at country levels?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 4: BASIC Technical Assistance remains well adapted to servicing the needs of FCDO country posts, but awareness of the facility is uneven. The baseline finding was that BASIC Technical Assistance responded well to the needs of the FCDO at country level and this responsiveness seems to have been maintained through the midline. New BASIC assignments remained responsive to urgent FCDO priorities, notably addressing the Ukraine crisis. Respondents demand by FCDO country posts for Technical Assistance services under STAAR was perceived to be healthy. A further strong surge in demand was expected once FCDO budgets were set, as this was expected to generate demand to support the development of new business cases.

It was reported that with the STAAR service going live in June 2022, 20 country-based requests for assistance had been received by August, with a majority servicing FCDO posts. Respondents again highlighted the role of the PFP in helping to articulate and develop requests from countries. This role helped to address a bottleneck of limited resources at country level, identified as a barrier to utilisation. The midline survey of FCDO posts confirmed a significant demand for BASIC services that were well aligned with the scope of the programme ([Table 4.1](#)).

Table 4.1: Top 10 areas survey respondents would most like BASIC support

Support area	N	%
Sustainable financing of emergency responses through SP systems	22	73
Clarifying the links between the use of SP approaches and the climate change agenda	20	67
Improving the quality of SP systems in their own right	19	63
Improving the linkages between the humanitarian system and SP approaches	18	60
Improving anticipatory action	17	57
Making existing SP provisions more inclusive	16	53
Improving the capacity of the FCDO in the use of SP approaches during crises	15	50
Improving the capacity of multilateral agencies, donors, and financial institutions in the use of SP approaches during crises	13	43
Improving the quality and reach of humanitarian response	13	43
Making better use of evidence to inform programming and engagement	5	17
Total	30	100









Source: Integrity (2022). Analysis of survey responses, question B5. N.B. a proportion of 50 per cent has a 95 per cent confidence interval of +/- 13 per cent, with all other proportions have smaller intervals. Multi-coding was permitted.

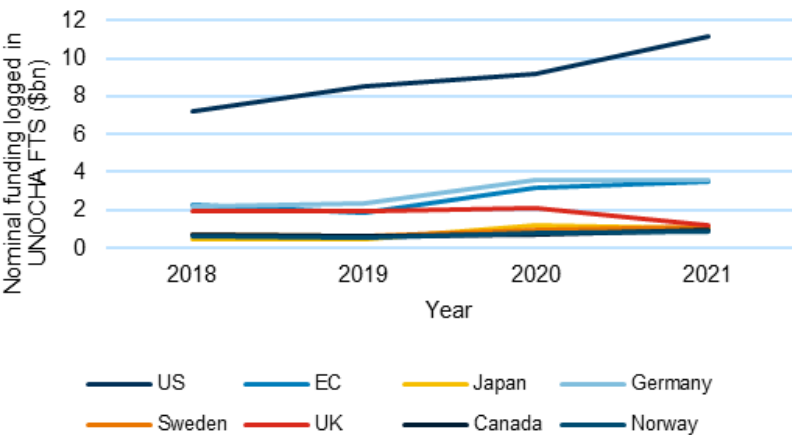
However, there was also evidence that the awareness of BASIC was low among FCDO posts. Only half of those consulted by the midline survey knew of BASIC Technical Assistance, and less than a

third of BASIC Research. Respondents cited this as a major reason for not using the service. An interesting survey finding was that some posts did not make use of BASIC because they were able to access the services from other FCDO and non-FCDO sources. Unfortunately, the survey did not identify these sources.

Finding 5: There is an aspiration to diversify the users serviced by STAAR, but progress in adapting the delivery model during the midline has been limited. KIIs indicated a shared ambition between the FCDO and the supplier to make the TA available to a broader range of stakeholders, including national authorities, UN agencies, and other actors. As the FCDO reported, *‘We’re branding it and trying to set it up as a non-UK facility. The idea is that it should be seen as a bit more independent, and therefore open for national governments to use and so on, and not just fulfilling UK interests.’* This shift towards an influencing role is strategically important given that the UK’s humanitarian aid financial commitments decreased by 38 per cent between 2018 and 2021 (Figure 4.1). In this context, influencing the behaviour of other donors is seen as increasingly important, compared to standard FCDO policies and programming.

Figure 4.1: Overview of key financiers of global humanitarian activity (January–October 2022)

Donor	2022 Funding (\$bn)	2022 Global Share (%)	Nominal % change 2018-2021
 US	12.67	52	55
 EC	2.33	9	53
 Japan	1.66	7	113
 Germany	1.57	6	61
 Sweden	0.91	4	66
 UK	0.87	4	-38
 Canada	0.82	3	36
 Norway	0.69	3	37



Source: UNOCHA (2022). Financial Tracking Service. Date accessed 12/10/2022. Available at: <https://fts.unocha.org/>.

The STAAR inception documents state, *‘Over the initial few months of the implementation phase, we expect requests predominantly to reach STAAR through the Social Protection Team (SPT) in FCDO or directly from FCDO posts (at times supported by the PFP). However, again, we will aim to ensure that our outreach and service building activity helps to expand the user base, in particular at country*

*level. Alongside support requests brought through FCDO and BASIC and GSP components, the demand-led service is open for use by a broad set of potential users.'*¹⁵

In practice, the baseline finding of a principal focus on servicing the FCDO largely remained at the midline point. Among the FCDO respondents to the survey question on who the primary users of BASIC were, 100 per cent saw the FCDO as the primary user, while 40 per cent also cited multi-lateral agencies, 20 per cent other donors, and 10 per cent local or national authorities.¹⁶ However, a number of Technical Assistance assignments – typically those with a coordination function – have been designed to service a broader range of stakeholders. For example, the Ukraine Cash Working Group coordinator position was designed in consultation with a wider group of donors, including the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), the European Commission, and the Swiss government and the service user for this assignment is the Ukraine Cash Working Group and not the FCDO.

The KIs identified a strong interest among a range of other donors and multi-lateral agencies in using the well-regarded BASIC services, including USAID, ECHO, GIZ, the World Bank, the World Food Programme (WFP), and UNICEF. However, these agencies have not seen any information from STAAR on what support might be available or how to access it.¹⁷ The strategic objectives of expanding the STAAR service to other targeted users have not yet been translated into operational guidelines, beyond ensuring that the senior responsible owner (SRO) agrees with all the Terms of Reference, including for any external requests. One challenge is ensuring optimal use of what is an increasing limited resource, and that STAAR resources are not used simply to fill positions that other agencies would otherwise be recruiting for.

STAAR mooted the idea of embedding BASIC advisors with key agencies in the coming year. KIs suggested that advisors embedded in agencies like UNICEF and the World Bank could provide a way of amplifying BASIC messages and increasing influence with national authorities. STAAR reported that they were awaiting finalisation of the inception period before more proactively reaching out to other agencies, with the hesitation due to the uncertainty on the budget available to STAAR.¹⁸

Other donors appreciated the flexibility of BASIC to provide these coordination services and lacked similar facilities of their own to fill this gap. Donors such as the USAID reiterated an interest in considering joint funding. However, there did not appear to be a desire by the SPACE co-funders to extend co-financing arrangements. Respondents noted the pros and cons of a multi-donor facility, including the risk of multiple donors slowing down decision making and policy differences creating complications.

Finding 6: BASIC Research is in principle a public good, but early indications are that the agenda is more clearly aligned with the interests of donors. The BASIC Research inception process, concluded during the midline, settled on four overarching themes for framing the programme from this point: (1) politics and political economy, (2) climate and livelihoods resilience, (3) inclusion and participation, and (4) systems for design and delivery. These themes are addressed through three research sub-components: global research, focus country research, and research uptake and engagement. The research programme sought to balance and synergise the global and country focus research. Respondents framed both within the scope of the overall research themes. Much of the country focus research is designed to contribute to the global research products.

Respondents noted a range of drivers framing the research agenda. The FCDO were consulted, both through the SPT team and in the four focus countries. A number of more bespoke research topics were included that directly addressed in-country priorities, such as the impact of devaluation in Lebanon and increasing inter-operability in Yemen. However, due to FCDO budget uncertainty, much of the country-specific content was initially delayed.

There was also wider external stakeholder consultation at both global and country levels in defining research topics. UN agencies were engaged at both global and national levels through a variety of mechanisms. They generally reported that the research topics – in so far as they were aware of them – addressed important gaps and closely aligned with their interests.¹⁹ Some donors expressed an interest for more operational research: *‘We already have a lot of best practice... the menu of options has been pretty well elaborated by the research. What we need is adaptive management and learning. Let’s test, iterate, adapt, identify the next set of gaps to move us to the next step.’*

At country level, the research team tried to engage with national governments but acknowledged that this was challenging, especially in countries with constrained access like Yemen. Respondents suggested that a deeper engagement would have enabled a more precise definition of national priorities. For example, a couple of commentators identified opportunities to align the research to the specific needs of government, such as public sector budget analysis and micro-simulations, to show that governments can in fact afford SP.

EQ1.3 Does the design of BASIC allow for an appropriate balance between strategic, and demand-driven (responsive and flexible) support?

Strength of Evidence: High

Finding 7: While BASIC Technical Assistance remains predominantly demand-led, there is an increased investment in the strategic leadership provided by STAAR, including the introduction of a number of STAAR-led assignments. In line with the FCDO SPT steer, the STAAR inception plan clearly maintains a strong focus on providing demand-oriented services. *‘The service will aim to respond to all demand led assignments regardless of geographic or thematic priority where there is evidence that it may align with the theory of change. Response to new demand is likely only to be delayed where demand outweighs the resources of the facility, in these circumstances geographic and thematic priorities may take precedence and/or new timelines may be required.’*

At the same time, with encouragement from the FCDO, STAAR is aiming to increase its strategic responsibilities compared to SPACE or BASIC TAS. Consequently, the STAAR inception plan includes increased capacities for STAAR strategic leadership. Under the core budget a number of relevant activities were already in place. For example, a KML team is tasked with supporting learning from existing Technical Assistance assignments and feeding lessons on what is and is not working (and how and why) back into programme delivery.²⁰ A technical senior leadership team was also established to provide follow-up and continuity across themes. However, the strategic importance of these functions is understood to be enhanced under STAAR.

An indicative list of thematic priorities and proposed thematic leads was built into the STAAR inception design. Some of the thematic lead roles sit with the TSLT. STAAR is piloting bringing additional thematic leads in (e.g. climate, disability) for when they do not possess the relevant thematic expertise. Thematic leads were proposed to both generate specific assignments and to spot the opportunities for mainstreaming, as well as support outreach, prioritisation, and for KML purposes.

National coordinators – ideally national consultants – are also proposed to help articulate needs, maintain momentum, mainstream key issues, and strengthen engagement with national actors. However, only the STAAR climate thematic lead and the Nigeria national coordinator role are being recruited at this time as pilots to test the approach.²¹ Concerns were also noted about the costs involved and how this might diminish the resources available for demand-led assignments.

In addition, STAAR includes provision for ‘STAAR-Led Assignments’ alongside ‘Demand-Led Assignments’. Under this – as a STAAR ‘initiative’ – the STAAR team may identify strategic





opportunities where TA could respond to an emerging need, in the absence of a direct request for support.

4.1.3 EQ1.4 To what extent do BASIC’s interventions take GESI into account?

Strength of Evidence: High

Finding 8: Early indications suggest that GESI will continue to be mainstreamed under STAAR, but few targeted GESI assignments will be carried out under the BASIC window. At baseline, the evaluation reported that consideration of gender-responsive and inclusive SP in the initial stages of TAS was relatively weak but became exceptionally strong under SPACE, benefitting from a six-person sub-team of GESI experts funded by the GSP programme who had input in and quality-assured every assignment. The mechanism for mainstreaming GESI in STAAR will differ, with a requirement for GESI expertise to be included in all assignments and plans to draw on a joint BASIC–GSP TSLT to cover gaps when needed. Nevertheless, early indications suggest that GESI mainstreaming will continue to be strong under STAAR. The terms of reference for six of the seven STAAR assignments that were either complete or in implementation by August 2022 suggested GESI-related issues would be mainstreamed. Dimensions of exclusion referenced include gender, age, ability, and displacement, as well as their intersection. In all country cases, Technical Assistance remains GESI-sensitive using a scale adapted from UNICEF Innocenti’s Gender Integration Continuum. At baseline, two of the four cases (Jordan and Somalia) included elements that were GESI-responsive, reflecting a higher level of ambition. At midline, this was the case for two of the four countries, with one assignment delivered in Nigeria over the past year having a focus on inclusion (Appendix B).

Figure 4.2: GESI responsiveness of BASIC Technical Assistance in case study countries at baseline and midline

Country	GESI responsiveness of TA component		
	Baseline	Midline	Direction of travel
 Jordan	GESI-sensitive, with some aspects GESI-responsive	GESI-sensitive, with some aspects GESI-responsive	→
 Nigeria	GESI-sensitive	GESI-sensitive, with some aspects GESI-responsive	↑
 Somalia	GESI-sensitive, with some aspects GESI-responsive	GESI-sensitive	↓
 Yemen	GESI-sensitive	GESI-sensitive	→

Source: Integrity (2022). Country case evidence.

Under STAAR, the GSP window will be responsible for assignments with a primary aim to strengthen the gender-responsiveness of SP. At global level, targeted assignments already commissioned through this GSP window include a resource pack on gender-responsive SP to upskill staff across FCDO cadres and senior personnel, and a gender data charter for the Social Protection Interagency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) sub-group. At country level, these assignments focused on child marriage for UNICEF in India and FCDO Nepal, and a longer-term post to support UN Women in Lebanon. Broadly speaking, this delineation seems appropriate, but as the GSP programme lacks an explicit focus on FCAS contexts, there is a risk that STAAR undertakes relatively little GESI-targeted work in FCAS contexts. STAAR is managing this risk by recruiting country leads in BASIC priority countries with dual responsibility for identifying opportunities for both the BASIC and GSP programmes. This was being piloted in Nigeria, and the idea of recruiting country leads for all focus countries was under discussion, at the time of reporting.

Finding 9: Research’s dedicated inclusion theme remained strong in inception plans throughout uncertainty caused by the budget reductions. Of the twelve theme briefs produced by BASIC Research during inception, three had an explicit GESI focus, five mainstreamed GESI-related issues, and four mentioned GESI-related issues only briefly or not at all. BASIC Research’s dedicated inclusion theme is being taken forwards into implementation and remains the largest of its four main themes. Within the theme, two of three originally planned workstreams (focusing on the marginalised people’s lived experiences and displacement) are moving forwards despite budget reductions, with the third (accountability) paused and to be revisited in the programme’s final year, should additional funding become available.

Overall, Basic Research’s GESI-focused work remains strong, and the team have made considerable efforts to protect it. They have also identified and prioritised the two workstreams with the most potential to deliver interesting findings in areas where the existing evidence base is weak. Particularly interesting is the development a ‘*capacities cube*’ as a three-dimensional framework for conceptualising and researching gendered dimensions of competency, capability, and performance within institutions operating in crisis situations.

However, BASIC Research’s budget uncertainty is negatively affecting mainstreaming. Steps taken during inception to support GESI mainstreaming in BASIC Research included the development of a matrix planning approach to ensure sufficient consideration of inclusion across themes and focus countries. The team intended to review this plan quarterly to inform programme adaptations, but have placed related activities (e.g. a related agenda item in the August quarterly workstream meeting) on hold until budget revisions are finalised. There is a risk that the team might not be able to actively monitor mainstreaming in time to make a meaningful difference to implementation.

4.1.4 EQ1.5 Context and adaptation: Have changes in context affected the relevance of BASIC, and has the programme adapted appropriately to these changes?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 10: BASIC has remained highly relevant to the emerging crises witnessed in the midline period. The baseline evaluation found that BASIC had proved highly adaptable in responding to the major new crisis of COVID-19, adapting rapidly, flexibly, and appropriately by establishing SPACE. This adaptability has been largely maintained in the midline period. While the effects of the COVID-19 have waned, significant new crises have emerged, most notably the Ukraine crisis and the associated global economic effects, including rising food prices. Respondents agreed that these crises had affirmed the relevance of the BASIC approach, provided new SP opportunities, and increased the amount of attention on the issue. Ukraine provides a good case in point, where a large-scale humanitarian response has been mounted using largely independent channels of delivery with little reference to the well-established national SP system.

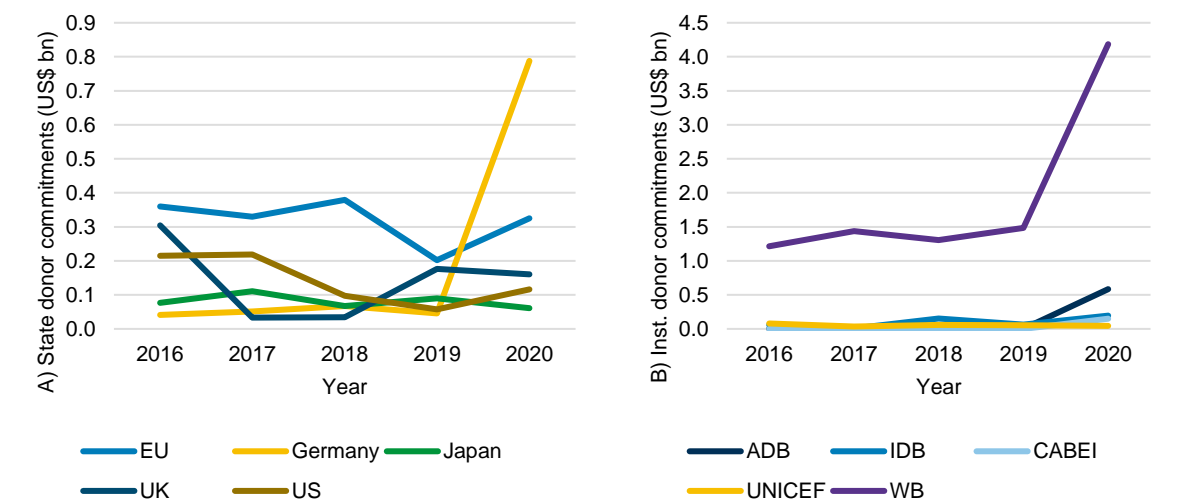
Several activities were initiated ahead of full implementation of STAAR. These allowed important pieces of work to move ahead, such as support for the Ukraine crisis response and emerging needs.²² BASIC researchers also contributed to a University of Wolverhampton briefing note on SP in Ukraine in the immediate aftermath of the February 2022 invasion.²³ The FCDO SPT decided to maintain a reserve within that to respond to unforeseen emergencies, reinforcing BASIC’s adaptability.

The survey of FCDO staff found a perception of a growing number of climate-related crises related to the accelerating effects of climate change. While many crises are complex, with strong interrelationships between climate change effects and increasing conflict, this finding does suggest the need to devote more attention to linking climate change and SP approaches in the context of natural disasters. The programme should be able to accommodate this due to the flexible BASIC criteria for approving demand-led requests. Both the Research and STAAR inception products

highlighted the need to remain adaptive and flexible, and change the workplan as the programme progresses.

Finding 11: A significant contextual change during the midline period has been the FCDO budget revisions. The consequent changes in spending may affect BASIC through three main pathways: uncertainty over the BASIC budget; changes in demand for BASIC services by FCDO posts; and a reduced ability of the FCDO to use BASIC outputs to influence other actors. The impact of the UK aid cuts has crystallised since the baseline evaluation. UK official development assistance was less than £11.5 billion last year, compared with £14.5 billion in 2020, a fall of 21 per cent. UK direct humanitarian aid to foreign countries was £744 million in 2021, compared with £1.53 billion in 2020, a cut of 51 per cent, according to the most recent provisional UK aid figures. UK aid cuts in some BASIC countries were even larger; UK aid to Yemen fell from £221m 2020/21 to £82 million in 2021/22, a cut of 63 per cent. UK Official Development Assistance was nearly £11.5 billion.²⁴ The UK has also become a much less prominent donor in the area of SP programming, dwarfed by the World Bank and other donors like Germany (Figure 4.3). As an illustration of the effects at country level, the World Bank and European Union have built an emerging SP system in Somalia that did not exist three years ago, with marginal support from the FCDO.

Figure 4.3: Social protection commitments²⁵ from largest six state and institutional/agency donors (USD billions), 2016–2020



Source: OECD (2022). Credit Reporting System. *N.B. Note the different donor commitment scales across the two charts and that the data reflects financial commitments and not disbursements. The query used to retrieve OECD data is presented in Appendix B.*

The overall reductions in the UK aid budget have translated into significant provisional budget cuts to both BASIC workstreams in the current financial year, although their exact magnitude and the budget available for future years were yet to be confirmed. The budget uncertainties negatively affected morale, caused reputational damage, and potentially reduced VFM (see EQ5).

The FCDO budget uncertainties appear to have resulted in a slow-down of business case development, and consequently reduced demand for BASIC services by FCDO posts. Conversely, respondents argued that FCDO posts may look to BASIC to fill gaps created by wider FCDO budget cuts – for example, FCDO Yemen were increasingly reliant on BASIC when funding for a planned in-country TA facility was scaled back.

Stakeholders also pointed out that the reduced UK aid budget is reducing FCDO influence and capacity. One noted that the changes were likely to reduce the strength of in-country influencing

networks, adding, *‘We will likely be more focused on delivery of impact through working with international agencies than in-country governments.’*

Most respondents concurred that the conceptual contributions of BASIC need to be backed by programming to incentivise reforms. For example, the Somalia case study found that the WFP have primarily implemented multi-purpose cash assistance for basic needs, using ECHO and FCDO funding to date. The case study identified questions around WFP’s conviction to this should the FCDO (and ECHO) stop funding them.

Furthermore, concerns were raised that the technical capacities in the FCDO at country level were at risk of diminishing. A key assumption in the BASIC ToC is that FCDO country offices capacity to leverage BASIC outputs. However, as one stakeholder said, *‘We are still valued in big forums but losing our expertise gradually. Increasingly we are seeing generalist Foreign Office staff moving into technical positions and this will inevitably affect our programmes.’* Several of the country case studies found that a major bottleneck to the use of BASIC services was FCDO staffing constraints. For example, in Nigeria the country office had limited full-time staff with technical expertise in SP, with posts not being replaced after staff turnover.

4.2 EQ2 Coherence

Evaluation question	Baseline findings	Midline update
2.1 Internal coherence	Effective mechanisms have been established to promote information exchange and cooperation between BASIC workstreams.	Stakeholders perceived an added value in co-housing the two workstreams within BASIC, but the linkages between STAAR and Research were poorly developed during the respective inception phases. Mechanisms are now being established to strengthen coordination between STAAR and Research during implementation.
2.2 External coherence	Few overlaps between BASIC and other FCDO centrally managed programmes with few other comparable centrally managed programmes supported by other actors. Opportunity to strengthen and formalise collaboration with global actors including World Bank.	Coordination with other centrally managed FCDO programmes prevented overlaps and helped identify synergies. Institutional partnerships with external actors, in areas such as the provision of TA, knowledge management, and research, were still nascent.

4.2.1 EQ2.1 What are the design linkages and coordination mechanisms in place between BASIC workstreams?

Strength of Evidence: High

Finding 12: Stakeholders perceived an added value in housing the two workstreams within BASIC, but synergies between STAAR and Research were only partially developed at the time of the midline.

In line with the aspirations of the business case, a number of efforts were made to link the Research and Technical Assistance workstreams. Interviewees referred to a shared approach to KML as a main point of collaboration. However, even in this case, each workstream developed their own KML strategy, albeit in consultation, with the PFP only drawing together a common approach after the respective inception periods were completed.

BASIC Research drew on the learning emerging from Technical Assistance assignments, including SPACE, and the design of the Research workstream had drawn on a systematic review of the preceding BASIC Technical Assistance outputs to shape the research. In Nigeria, the nexus advisor facilitated introductions for the Research team, which helped them to shape proposals. However, research questions were set independently by the research project without direct reference to STAAR and there was a perception of a somewhat *‘extractive process’*.

However, potential linkages were not articulated well during the inception period. Neither workstream was well sighted on each other's inception products and processes, with incomplete aligned inception periods not helping. Nor was there a post-inception joint dialogue on how to respond to the FCDO budget revisions in a coordinated way.

The selection of four priority countries for research that overlapped with the prioritisation of STAAR support could provide an opportunity to 'layer' research with TA, but this was not developed during the inception. The research intervention had become both more diffuse in its focus (with significant case work in Ethiopia, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria now included) and more orientated to delivering global products over directly servicing national decision makers. Equally, there is no guarantee that STAAR assignments will be active in research countries.

The programme²³ did not capitalise on other potential opportunities for developing synergies. STAAR identified several thematic priorities with parallels to Research's thematic priorities. However, while the teams discussed this, they developed no explicit links between the two workstreams. For instance, linkages between BASIC's workstreams on climate-related issues were yet to be explored. This contrasted with the deep thought that had gone into the internal synergies within each workstream – of demand-led and strategic-led work under STAAR and global and country components under Research. There were no plans developed for cross-commenting on outputs. For example, STAAR experts are not expected to provide quality assurance of draft research publications. Suppliers noted that there was a VFM discussion on this point, with concerns raised that this arrangement would mean that the FCDO were paying twice for quality assurance.

Commentators perceived insufficient clarity from FCDO in how they expected the two workstreams to work together. The expected synergies from the two workstreams within BASIC were relatively weakly articulated in the BASIC business case. During the inception, suppliers perceived that they were '*left to work out coordination arrangements*'. Many users perceived the two workstreams to be '*very separate*', with limited understanding of the common identity or purpose. Respondents noted a missed opportunity to join the two workstreams up during inception. For example, one KII respondent stated, '*There was ample time to have greater coherence between components during inception phase.*'

However, users did see potential value in having the two BASIC workstreams play complementary roles, with the more rapid and operational advisory inputs from STAAR contrasted with the longer-term research based on primary data. Users of Technical Assistance are more targeted, contrasting with users of Research, which are less specific. One suggestion was that research '*may be helpful to bring in new disciplines and perspectives – climate scientists, anthropology, political economists – as opposed to another paper on well-rehearsed debates such as targeting approaches*'.

At the same time, respondents noted the practical constraints of realising synergies. The baseline evaluation found that the Technical Assistance and Research workstreams were operating on different timelines, meaning that use of the main Research outputs by governments, donors, and agencies was unlikely to combine with Technical Assistance to generate outcomes within, or immediately beyond, the lifetime of the programme.

Finding 13: Mechanisms are being established to strengthen coordination between STAAR and Research during implementation. Respondents cited some examples in which the two workstreams had worked to complement each other effectively – for example, in Ukraine, where STAAR has conducted a detailed operational analysis and provide coordination based on the research brief of adaptations to the SP system. This was perceived as useful in prompting thinking about how best to link humanitarian cash responses with government SP systems. Generally, BASIC

consultants drew on research papers for their work. One commented, *'There was a great paper produced by Research on conflict and fragility which I will use for a forthcoming Ethiopia assignment.'*

However, respondents cited other examples – such as Ethiopia and Myanmar – in which the two workstreams planned activities independently and could have benefitted from linking up earlier. The FCDO country posts appear to play a role in helping to coordinate between the workstreams. In Yemen, the FCDO office played an intermediary role of effectively shaping both workstreams to contribute in a relatively coordinated way to their new business case, rather than the suppliers coordinating directly. However, in Nigeria, the country team perceived they had less influence in shaping the Research agenda to link to other priorities emanating from the Technical Assistance contributions. The FCDO in Somalia did not take on a significant coordination role either – while not a deep-engagement country, there are significant simultaneous activities by both workstreams in-country.

There are some references in the respective inception products to planned coordination during implementation, but little discussion of what synergies were anticipated or how teams were to coordinate to avoid overlaps. However, there was a shared recognition that with the shift to implementation, the teams needed to re-invigorate coordination between the workstreams through monthly meetings. This was necessary for both building synergies and avoiding duplications.

Quarterly cross-consortium meetings continued during the midline period. While these meetings provided a space for exchanging information, they were not a forum for deep and frequent exchanges. One interviewee noted, *'We need to build relationships across programmes. We need to know who to reach out to.'* The suppliers have agreed to institute a monthly call to explore linkages around specific assignments and activities. STAAR now share regular email updates of new assignments – a similar initiative from BASIC Research was requested. Guidelines were reportedly developed for sharing draft and unpublished documents between the two workstreams.²⁶

The PFP started in her post in January 2022, after a gap from her predecessor, and has responsibility for working closely with both suppliers, which is expected to improve coordination. As noted, this includes a specific responsibility for leading the development of a joint KML strategy, which should also help improve coordination.

4.2.2 EQ2.2 What are the design linkages and coordination mechanisms in place between BASIC and other relevant FCDO and development partner interventions in BASIC's deep engagement countries and globally?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 14: Coordination with other centrally managed FCDO programmes prevented overlaps and helped identify synergies. The baseline had found that there was a good level of coherence between BASIC and other relevant FCDO centrally managed programmes, underpinned by BASIC having a relatively clear and unique role. However, the extent of active coordination was mixed. The midline situation remained similar.

The strongest linkages were established with the FCDO-funded GSP programme, with STAAR jointly delivering a component of this programme alongside BASIC. STAAR was designed to maximise cross-programme linkages, coordination, and synergies on gender-responsive SP. Where GESI is the primary focus of an assignment it would be led by GSP, while for BASIC, GESI would be mainstreamed. To encourage synergies, at least one demand-led project notified to the STAAR team will serve both programme windows.²⁷

There is a shared agenda with the UK-funded Risk Informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) initiative, which aims to encourage *'investment in social protection to ensure those most affected by climate change can strengthen their resilience capacity and avoid the worst impacts of disasters'*.²⁸ STAAR supported the development of a paper by REAP presented at COP26. Despite this, the senior REAP staff interviewed appeared to have limited knowledge of BASIC.

The baseline highlighted strong synergies with MAINTAINS, given its focus on shock-responsive SP outside of crisis settings. The premature closure of this programme potentially opened up additional opportunities for BASIC in working across a broader set of crisis typologies. Ad hoc contacts were reported with other FCDO programmes, such as SPARC. However, the STAAR supplier reported that they lacked bandwidth during the inception period to build relationships more systematically. The case studies (including Nigeria) suggested there was coordination between centrally managed FCDO programmes at country level where there were (potentially) overlapping or synergistic activities. Respondents suggested that in many cases the country was the most appropriate locus for coordination.

Finding 15: Partnerships with other external actors, in areas such as the provision of TA, knowledge management, and research to support SP approaches in crises, were still nascent.

A STAAR inception assumption is that it collaborates effectively with other programmes and organisations to achieve capacity strengthening and influencing outcomes. This includes collaborating with several agencies – including the World Bank, UNICEF, and the International Labour Organization (ILO) – at HQ level. However, KIIs reported that the workstream had largely paused institutional partnership building with other agencies during inception due to the ongoing budget uncertainties. STAAR reported that it was recommencing these conversations in implementation.

One supplier noted, *'The delayed move to implementation, constraints on proactive engagement with potential service users, and delayed launch of activities...have each made it difficult to conduct the amount of outreach that had originally been foreseen for the first weeks of implementation, and the maintaining and building of relationships. This has included a pause in commencing outreach to ILO, WFP, UNICEF, and World Bank that had been originally included in the workplan.'*

There are apparent opportunities and interest in closer collaboration with both STAAR and Research. However, many of the individuals interviewed in the counterpart organisations reported that they remained largely ignorant of BASIC's partnership intentions at this stage.

BASIC intends to build on the GSP programme's established links with the World Bank and UNICEF.²⁹ The World Bank reportedly expressed interest in linking STAAR services with the World Bank's rapid social response fund Gender Window.³⁰

UNICEF's Office of Research is conducting SP research through Innocenti – supported by the GSP programme. Its Social Protection System Readiness Assessment Tool addresses some of the same gaps and challenges that BASIC seeks to address, just within the context of UNICEF programming.³¹ However, the extent of active collaboration with BASIC was unclear, although at country level the Yemen case study found UNICEF perceived a degree of competition with BASIC Research.

The WFP remained keen to cooperate, with their solid operational experience, but they require a clearer understanding of the strategic benefits of this partnership. UNHCR also commented that the three [BASIC Research and SPACE] papers on SP and displacement – including the Shock Responsive Social Protection paper in FCAS – would have benefited from collaboration with them to make them more operationally relevant. It was also suggested that it was important for BASIC Research to engage strongly with ODI's BRACED project on climate and livelihoods resilience.

There appears to be an agreement that the knowledge management function is already well serviced with SPIAC-B and socialprotection.org already hosting a community of practice. Respondents welcomed the decision to use these established channels to disseminate and archive the BASIC produced resources instead of BASIC building up its own platform, despite some concerns about the user friendliness of the existing options.

4.3 EQ3 Effectiveness

EQ	Progress at Baseline	Progress at Midline
3.1 Achievement of outputs	Provided high-quality, diverse, and impartial advice for the design of mainly FCDO programmes. Generated greater awareness and understanding of SP approaches in crises. Strategic partnerships with key humanitarian SP actors not yet developed. Few dedicated capacity-building activities to date.	Only a handful of Technical Assistance assignments delivered since baseline. STAAR has not yet built on SPACE momentum on generating learning or developed a clear strategy for capacity building. Research fieldwork is only now getting underway.
3.2 Contributory factors to outputs	Factors affecting the achievement of TAS and SPACE outputs are: quality and impartiality of advice provided, clarity of user requests, contextual understanding, on-the-ground access and support, and user bandwidth for engagement.	Limited additional data suggests that factors affecting achievement of Technical Assistance outputs are likely to remain constant throughout the programme's lifetime. Long inception phases and budget reductions have hindered generation of outputs over the past year and resulted in unmet demand.
3.3 Achievement of outcomes	TA fed directly into the design of FCDO programmes, and improved coordination between donors and agencies. FCDO offices used outputs to support their influencing objectives. Limited contribution to changes in government policies or programmes, or wider systems change, so far.	FCDO country programmes whose design had been supported by BASIC TAS and SPACE have been implemented and, in at least one case, contributed to changes to wider SP policies and programmes. The FCDO has continued to draw on Technical Assistance to improve coordination and influence other stakeholders, but evidence of knock-on results remains limited.
3.4 GESI outcomes	Lack of clear evidence as to whether TAS and SPACE has contributed to implementation of gender-responsive and inclusive SP. The most promising GESI results relate to influencing of partners in country.	Most of the key changes BASIC TAS and SPACE have contributed to in-country include elements of improved equity in SP delivery. However, there is likely to be a lower level of ambition for GESI-related outcomes looking forwards.
3.5 Contributory factors to outcomes	Three factors enable BASIC's ability to bring about outcome-level change: strategic use of BASIC to support country objectives; positive political economy of social assistance provision; and positive funding environments.	The midline has identified several additional factors that enable or constrain achievement of outcomes. Key enablers include demonstration effects, and the catalytic effect of COVID-19 and key constraints include reduced donor funding, including by the FCDO.
3.6 Synergies between workstreams	Research is operating on a different timeframe from Technical Assistance. Research differs qualitatively from analysis and evidence synthesis undertaken by Technical Assistance and has the potential to add value.	Given the continued lack of substantial linkages and coordination between Technical Assistance and Research, synergies between BASIC workstreams are unlikely to enhance achievement of outcomes.

4.3.1 EQ3.1 Has each workstream, and BASIC overall, achieved their intended outputs?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 16: Only a few Technical Assistance assignments have been delivered since baseline; however, STAAR is now building its pipeline rapidly. Assignments delivered over the past year have focused on providing advice to inform FCDO programming and building relationships among donors and multilaterals through coordination. As of June 2021, TAS had delivered 28

projects to date, engaging with 45 countries – 33 of them more than once – through 128 unique engagements. By contrast, only three assignments have been delivered in full (completed) over the subsequent year. Nevertheless, by August 2022, five assignments were live, two in procurement, and a further eight being scoped.

Of the three Technical Assistance assignments delivered in full since the baseline period, one provided advice to inform new FCDO programming in-country – a political economy analysis to inform FCDO climate resilience and adaptation programming in Pakistan – and two focused on developing relationships – one in-country, through a donor coordinator for WFP cash programming in Lebanon, and the other at global level, by inputting to a paper produced by REAP ahead of COP26 to help build strategic partnerships around climate and SP. Additionally, the Technical Assistance workstream has emphasised responding to the Ukraine crisis over the past year, with the main deliverable a recently published paper on strengthening humanitarian and SP linkages in the regional refugee response. This deliverable is intended to serve a range of FCDO purposes, including informing response plans, supporting coordination, and influencing other stakeholders.³²

Of the 15 STAAR assignments that were live, in procurement, or being scoped in August, all but three responded to country requests: three from Yemen (although all were only at scoping), two from Ukraine, two from Nigeria, and one from each of Lebanon, Somalia, South Sudan, Zambia, and (jointly) Ethiopia/Myanmar. Two were global-level assignments: the first, the development of an internal FCDO guidance note on digital payments; the second, support to the USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security, including potential inputs to SPARC research on food security.

Most users continue to value BASIC Technical Assistance as a source of high-quality and impartial advice. Survey data indicates that, among FCDO respondents who had accessed Technical Assistance at some point across the programme's lifetime, 80 per cent agreed (50 per cent strongly) that the support had met its intended aims. Effective GESI mainstreaming continues to feature prominently among user responses as a mark of quality with, again, 80 per cent agreeing (50 per cent strongly) that gender and inclusion were mainstreamed in advice. However, case study data suggests that exceptions to high levels of user satisfaction exist, with one of the few assignments delivered during the past year and sampled by the midline evaluation not well received by its commissioners (see annexed learning case study for details).

Finding 17: STAAR inception and early implementation has not been resourced to build on SPACE's momentum on generating knowledge and learning, nor has it developed a clear strategy for capacity building. During inception, the focus of Research has remained primarily on planning, with fieldwork to enable generation of research outputs only recently getting underway. At baseline, the evaluation found that SPACE had produced a large volume of learning publications (with 101 of its 207 outputs global public goods), distinguishing itself – and building strong brand visibility – through the high-quality and practical orientation of its learning products, as well as the speed with which these were published compared to other sources. By contrast, the programme had undertaken very few dedicated capacity-building activities.

STAAR inception documents set out an ambitious KML strategy, which focuses on targeted support to uptake of knowledge and learning. They also articulate an aim to take a more strategic approach to capacity building, supported by a dedicated technical lead, but at the time of data collection it was not yet clear how this would be implemented. Neither knowledge management nor capacity building have formed a core part of Technical Assistance deliverables over the past year. The first STAAR publication on Ukraine was made publicly available on socialprotection.org in August 2022, six months after the onset of the crisis. Further, most of the more strategic, 'STAAR-led' activities envisaged in inception documents – including some related to both KML and capacity building – are

now being deprioritised or delayed as a result of reduced budget in 2022/23 and, in particular, the scaling back of core team costs. At the time of data collection, several elements of the data collection strategy were paused, with activity limited to uptake of knowledge from individual assignments.

In the baseline evaluation, we noted a mismatch of expectations for deliverables from the Research inception phase: IDS had focused on preparing for implementation, but FCDO SPT had expected that the inception process would itself yield policy-relevant papers. Ultimately, alongside the inception report itself, Research outputs produced during inception were: a series of 21 concept notes, reports on each of the four focus countries, 18 working papers based on review of secondary data, 12 thematic briefs summarising findings on the state of the evidence from sets of working papers grouped by theme and outline directions for research, and, lastly, research proposals for each of the four core research themes selected. IDS also held an e-discussion series in June to share research plans for the input and validation of external stakeholders.

4.3.2 EQ3.2 What factors have contributed to or hindered achievement of outputs and why?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 18: Additional, though limited, midline data suggests that factors affecting the achievement of outputs remain similar to those identified at baseline. At baseline, we found that different TA modalities responded to different types of need – and were used to build upon each other, helping to provide quality advice. There is some early evidence that STAAR is taking a similar approach. The first short, desk-based Ukraine assignment described under EQ 3.1 has been followed by a six-month deployment to support coordination between cash actors, engage government on linkages between humanitarian cash and SP, and identify opportunities for further TA with either the Cash Working Group or Ministry of Social Policy.

Other factors affecting the achievement of Technical Assistance outputs at baseline were: the quality and impartiality of advice provided, clarity of user requests, contextual understanding, including the political economy of SP, on-the-ground access and support, and user bandwidth for engagement. With implementation limited over the past year, the evaluation team was not able to collect as much data on factors that affected the achievement of Technical Assistance outputs than at baseline. Nevertheless, case study data indicates that all of these issues continue to affect user satisfaction. One assignment, which sought to develop a framework to bring together disasters, climate change, and SP into an integrated approach, proved challenging to implement, in part due to the diversity of expertise required by the assignment, including the intersection between climate and SP.

In the KIIs, users also provided some additional comments on Technical Assistance delivery (across the programme’s lifetime), offering some lessons for STAAR. Foremost among these was the value of drawing on national consultants with in-depth knowledge of context and sharing outputs with external stakeholders at country level wherever possible. Equally, respondents noted the important role of the core senior leadership team in scoping and laying the groundwork for delivery where users are not fully clear of their requirements, have limited capacity to engage, and/or have competing priorities.

For Research, use of socialprotection.org enabled ‘*effective dissemination*’ of some early outputs, although KIIs suggested that the website’s facilitation of learning events could have been more proactive. Most KII respondents were not aware of these outputs.

Finding 19: Across the programme, two major factors have hindered generation of outputs over the past year and resulted in unmet demand: the lengthy inception phases for both STAAR and Research and, from May 2022, uncertainties associated with the BASIC budget. DAI leading the implementation of the new Technical Assistance Facility (now, STAAR) could have enabled continuity of service, with key processes already in place and STAAR retaining a cohesive

core group of SPACE consultants who work well together and deliver quality work. However, while the inception phase was originally intended to last for three months, starting in September 2021, the technical senior leadership team did not mobilise until June 2022, with inception documents finalised in August. It is unclear whether this extended inception period has yielded any additional value, and it was potentially a missed opportunity to develop approaches to some of the strategic priorities identified in the inception documents (e.g. climate, capacity building). Inception arrangements allowed for only limited delivery, with DAI financially resourced for the short inception phase originally envisaged and the FCDO reluctant to approve many assignments before inception was signed off.

For STAAR, the lengthy inception period has resulted in unmet demand and constrained outreach to encourage requests from users beyond the FCDO. One of the two STAAR assignments in procurement as of August 2022 is a review of the global literature on the potential for social assistance to contribute to reduced deforestation and biodiversity loss, and the use of climate-smart agriculture. The commissioner, FCDO Zambia, is seeking to take advantage of a window of political opportunity, with a strong and explicit demand from government for this evidence and FCDO support to progress related programming. However, procurement of the assignment was delayed by several months, due first to the length of the STAAR inception period and then a pivot to prioritising support for Ukraine. At global level, DAI report that their relationship with SPIAC-B, which had previously received BASIC support and continues to be supported by the GSP programme, has become strained due to delays in providing support.

The Research inception phase concluded in February 2022 and was followed a few months later by news of a provisional large reduction to the workstream’s budget, which, by early September, had not yet been finalised. For Research, the budget uncertainty required extensive replanning with much of the research planned for implementation significantly scaled back. Further, prolonged uncertainties strained relationships with in-country partners, particularly those with whom IDS has not previously worked.

4.3.3 EQ3.3 Has each workstream, and BASIC overall, contributed to outcomes?

Strength of Evidence: High

Finding 20: BASIC has contributed to the use of new or improved SP approaches by the FCDO and some other agencies, but has so far had little impact on national governments. There is limited evidence that BASIC TAS and SPACE advice have so far contributed to changes to wider SP policies and programmes. At baseline, BASIC Technical Assistance advice and outputs were found to have fed directly into the design of FCDO programmes. At midline, there is some evidence that early STAAR outputs are likewise informing FCDO programme design. The evidence of BASIC contributing to significant policy and programme related results beyond this is weaker.

The midline survey of FCDO staff found that 70 per cent either agreed or strongly agreed that BASIC support had contributed to new or improved use of SP approaches by the FCDO, and 60 per cent that it had influenced those of other donors and agencies. Only 10 per cent agreed that this was the case when it came to partner governments (

[Figure 4.4](#)). The evaluation identified one notable exception: in Jordan, an emergency SP programme, the design of which had been supported by SPACE, was subsequently implemented, and contributed to changes in government SP programming (Appendix B). Among those survey respondents who had received BASIC support (all FCDO):

- 70 per cent agreed (30 per cent strongly) that it had contributed to new or improved use of SP approaches by the FCDO.

- 60 per cent agreed (20 per cent strongly) that it had contributed to new or improved use of SP approaches by other donors and agencies.
- 10 per cent strongly agreed that it had contributed to new or improved use of SP approaches by partner governments (none simply agreed).

Figure 4.4: Survey responses to statements about changes resulting from Technical Assistance

Changes reported by survey respondents	Strongly disagree -%	Disagree - %	Neither agree nor disagree -%	Agree -%	Strongly agree -%
New/improved use of SP approaches in FCDO	0	10	10	40	30
New/improved SP approach adopted by other donors/agencies	0	10	20	40	20
New/improved SP approaches adopted by partner governments	10	20	40	0	10

Source: Integrity (2022). Survey. N=30. The results are presented in full in Appendix B.

It remains challenging to measure the extent to which, and how, these different stakeholder groups have used evidence generated by the programme to inform policy and practice. Regular monitoring and reporting on uptake of SPACE/TAS evidence products was absent during the STAAR inception period, while the first STAAR quarterly report contains only a brief reference to *‘continue[d]...traction for the framing and associated thematic papers developed under SPACE’*. Nevertheless, in global and country-level KIIs, many FCDO staff and some multilaterals (including multiple WFP staff members) reported having made use of BASIC products – most often those produced by SPACE early on during the COVID-19 pandemic – but were usually unable to cite specific examples of their application.³³

At midline, the evaluation tracked the contributions of TAS and SPACE outputs to additional outcomes already reported in the baseline evaluation and explored any trajectory towards outcome-level change by STAAR assignments carried out during inception. The contribution of BASIC to system-wide changes was reported as modest. Among the FCDO advisors surveyed who were working in countries that have received BASIC support, the most common *‘most significant changes’* reported were the development of new or improved SP programmes, and improved capability and capacity. However, only 8 per cent identified BASIC among the top three actors who had contributed to the changes identified (with almost all other categories of actor ranked more highly).

Identifying respondents who had engaged with the (only recently published) inception phase outputs of BASIC Research was more challenging, though several spoke highly of IDS expertise and expressed an expectation that outputs would be of high quality. This suggests considerable potential for practitioners to trust in the credibility of implementation-phase Research outputs. Practitioners emphasised their limited time, and that outputs needed to be short and action-oriented.

Finding 21: Technical Assistance has continued to contribute to coordination improvements, but it is not yet clear whether improved coordination is improving the coherence of and synergies between humanitarian and SP initiatives. Likewise, country posts have continued to use Technical Assistance outputs for influencing purposes, but it is too early to assess whether these efforts will contribute to increased political commitment. At baseline, BASIC support had begun to improve coordination between donors and agencies on humanitarian and SP policy and programming. Coordination improvements between FCDO humanitarian and social development advisors, among donors and multilaterals, and, to a lesser extent, between donors/multilaterals and government, have continued at midline. Among survey respondents who had received BASIC support, 70 per cent agreed (20 per cent strongly) that support had helped improve collaboration on SP within the FCDO. Evidence from country case studies indicate coordination improvements beyond the FCDO. In Jordan, for example, a key achievement cited in KIIs was

securing agreement among donors of shared objectives and comprehensive ‘common messages’ for engagement with government on SP. As co-lead of the SP donor group, the FCDO has driven identification of these shared priorities. They were supported, in turn, by SPACE, which facilitated internal discussion, helping the FCDO to position themselves as a thought leader in a crowded donor environment.

At global level, instances of improved coordination are more nascent, but early STAAR assignments have offered a promising example (see [Box 4.1](#)). Nevertheless, at midline, evidence remains limited as to whether instances of improved coordination will translate into more coherent and synergistic delivery, either globally or at country level. The exception is Nigeria, where more formalised coordination between the FCDO and World Bank, supported by BASIC, enabled the FCDO to feed into the design of the scaling up of the World Bank’s National Social Safety Net Programme.

Box 4.1: STAAR has helped convene stakeholders around linkages between climate and SP in crises

At global level, STAAR’s support to a paper led by REAP (‘Early action and climate crisis: could social protection be a game-changer?’) has helped convene stakeholders working across SP and early climate action. Developed in autumn 2021, the note explored how SP can support the REAP agenda of ‘making one billion people safer from climate-related disasters’, making a case for increasingly integrated early action and SP approaches to respond to increasingly complex and risky contexts. STAAR funded the time of some contributors to the paper. The position paper has functioned as ‘a catalyst to get policy actors together’ as the main activity undertaken by a newly established taskforce on early climate action and SP in the run up to COP26 (KII with BASIC beneficiary).

Some FCDO offices have continued to use Technical Assistance (including SPACE) outputs to influence internal and external stakeholders. As suggested by the Jordan example just noted, coordination and influencing are closely related. In Nigeria, BASIC’s in-country advisor influenced multilateral and government stakeholders across the humanitarian–development nexus on specific coordination issues, helping to develop shared practical plans that set out steps to improve the response of SP delivery systems to humanitarian shocks. While it is still challenging to assess whether influencing efforts are laying foundations for increased political commitment to use of SP approaches in crises, the potential seems greater at country rather than global level at present – with support for the SPIAC-B working group during the baseline not being continued.

Finding 22: Evidence of improved institutional capacities tends to be limited to FCDO staff, with the potential for capacity improvements in other donors/agencies or partner governments as yet unrealised. Of the five outcomes articulated in the BASIC ToC, improved human and institutional capacity is the least evidenced. At baseline, there was some evidence that BASIC had built individual – but not institutional – capabilities. At midline, capability improvements were reported by some FCDO humanitarian and/or development staff in-country, usually relating to improved understanding of specific elements of the humanitarian–development nexus. KII respondents indicated potential for (as yet unrealised) capacity improvements beyond the FCDO in three countries:

- Lebanon, where the country coordinator is supporting CAMAELEON (the Cash Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, Learning Organizational Network) to maintain capabilities in the context of high staff turnover, including through localisation
- Pakistan, where a SPACE assignment that scoped entry points for strengthening SP has been integrated into the terms of reference for an institutional strengthening component of the FCDO’s climate resilience programming
- Yemen, where BASIC analysis of the targeting practices of national social assistance was seen as a contribution to institutional strengthening.

BASIC’s ability to bring about capacity-building outcomes through STAAR may be diminished by the pausing of development of a dedicated strategy and particular efforts are made to scope and generate demand for relevant assignments.

4.3.4 EQ3.4 To what extent has BASIC contributed to the development of gender-responsive and inclusive social protection policies, systems, and programmes in partner countries and globally?

Strength of Evidence: Low

Finding 23: Most of the key changes BASIC TAS and SPACE have contributed at country level include elements of improved equity in SP delivery. However, there is likely to be a lower level of ambition for GESI-related outcomes in the future. At baseline, there was a lack of clear evidence on whether Technical Assistance had contributed to the demand for, or design and implementation of, gender-responsive and inclusive SP policies and programmes. Country-level results were mixed, both for assignments that mainstreamed GESI-related issues and for more targeted pieces of work. At midline, neither the FCDO nor DAI were able to point to GESI-related results of Technical Assistance support that were additional to those identified at baseline. This may be because most of its assignments delivered since baseline have not had a targeted GESI focus, and the outcomes of GESI mainstreaming are not well captured in regular monitoring. However, most of the key changes observed in the country case studies to which BASIC TAS and SPACE outputs contributed integrate improvements to equity of delivery ([Box 4.2](#)). Additionally, there is strong potential for BASIC to support GESI-related outcomes in Lebanon, where the country coordinator’s work has focused on greater transparency and inclusion of particularly vulnerable groups in targeting, as well as mechanisms for accountability and grievance redressal, in WFP cash programming.

Box 4.2: Key changes at midline to which Technical Assistance contributed include more equitable SP

Improved inclusivity of the National Social Protection Policy in Nigeria: The nexus advisor engaged directly in the validation of the new national SP policy, which builds on the 2017–2020 policy. This included advocating for explicit consideration of displaced persons, who had previously been excluded based on an erroneous assumption that all displaced households were being supported by humanitarian programmes. KIIIs suggested that this contributed to the strength of the final policy’s potential to guide inclusive delivery through universal coverage. Government stakeholders suggest the policy may pass into law by the end of 2022.

Shift towards contributory SP, including expansion to informal workers in Jordan: Donor interests and funding have shifted towards promoting more sustainable financing models for SP, including contributory SP. BASIC helped design the FCDO’s new Strengthening Societal and Economic Resilience in Jordan programme, which will support a social security corporation programme that aims to extend coverage of contributory SP to informal workers by providing wage subsidies and income support. Dutch embassy staff report that they expect the FCDO contribution to help the programme reach more beneficiaries and more sectors.

There is likely to be a lower level of ambition for GESI-related outcomes under BASIC than previously, as well as compared to the GSP programme. While gender will continue to be mainstreamed in Technical Assistance assignments, there will be fewer resources and a reduced level of effort for this compared to SPACE (see EQ 1.6). Across the STAAR facility as a whole, however, a large volume of targeted GESI assignments with a higher level of ambition will be delivered through the GSP window. Building country demand for gender-responsive and inclusive SP is critical to achieving GESI-related outcomes – and will continue to be a focus for the GSP programme but not for BASIC. Evidence from country case studies suggests that GESI recommendations in particular require specific follow-up to ensure implementation, as in Yemen, where GESI-related recommendations were not actioned. Similarly, the stage 1 GSP evaluation report found that while ‘*SPACE GESI-specific outputs result[ed] in new thinking by FCDO advisors on*

how to make emergency social protection programming under COVID-19 more gender-responsive', short-term TA 'cannot address wider structural gaps in capacity'.

4.3.5 EQ3.5 What factors have contributed to or hindered achievement of outcomes and why? Have underpinning assumptions held?

Strength of Evidence: High

Finding 24: The midline evaluation has identified three additional factors that are enabling and/or constraining BASIC’s contribution to outcome-level change. These factors are: how strategically users were able to draw on BASIC in support of their objectives; the political economy of social assistance provision; and funding environments, within the FCDO and across humanitarian/SP actors. The midline has expanded on these factors, as set out in [Table 4.2](#). For political challenges, the most common barriers cited by survey respondents, the midline has sought to disaggregate different elements of the SP political economy. Many of the barriers relate to core elements of the BASIC ToC ([Table 4.3](#)).

Table 4.2: Enablers of outcome-level change

Factor	Case example
Demonstration effects have enabled advocates of SP to point to evidence of its effectiveness and reduced uncertainty around returns from SP investments.	In Somalia, a new national SP programme and its rapid expansion to reach 200,000 households – or 1.2 million individuals – in two years have demonstrated the viability and effectiveness of developing an SP system fit for purpose there. Existing accomplishments and perceived potential have generated momentum around SP in Somalia, supported by smaller programmes that have, in different ways, underscored the benefits of SP in crisis response.
COVID-19 as a catalyst. The dramatic increase and change in needs profile which accompanied COVID-19 demonstrated the value of SP and accelerated reforms.	In Jordan, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated or catalysed key reforms – both the expansion and then consolidation of national social assistance programming and push to expand contributory social insurance to informal workers. Longer-term support for systems development over the preceding few years made the rapid expansion of the government social assistance feasible.
Political economy – active and longstanding international engagement and support	In Yemen, the entry of the World Bank as a significant player in support for SP systems in crisis-affected countries has been critical in moving the agenda forwards. The World Bank is one of the few developmental actors active there, and is making consistent, significant contributions that have proved critical to maintaining national SP institutions.
Political economy – national government appetite to strengthen SP programmes and systems	In Nigeria, demonstration, combined with a technical and practically oriented international community, has resulted in increased government support for SP, particularly at federal level.

Table 4.3: Constraints to achieving outcome-level change

Factor	Case example
Political economy – reduced UK spending, and therefore programming and influence	In Nigeria, uncertainties relating to the international and development priorities of the UK government created challenges for BASIC and FCDO Nigeria, slowing delivery by limiting their ability to commit resources to initiatives and reformulate programming against periodically revised strategies. These challenges are compounded by budgetary uncertainties.
Political economy – reduced international funding more widely	In Jordan, beyond the FCDO, international funding is decreasing due to donor fatigue, the economic impacts of COVID-19 on donor economies, and diverted funding to Ukraine. Emergency COVID-19 funding has ended. Humanitarian agencies expect to have to reduce their caseloads and the value of transfers significantly. Global inflation and price increases are exacerbating the impact of funding cuts on social assistance delivery by reducing beneficiaries’ purchasing power.
Political economy – persistent domestic political barriers	In Jordan, barriers to refugee integration persist. Compared to other sectors, strengthening the humanitarian–development nexus by integrating refugees into national SP systems has been a sticking point. There are some reasons for optimism, with the government having recently published a white paper that proposed a new Jordan Compact with a focus on refugee self-reliance. Critically though, withdrawal of international funding is giving credence to government fears that they could be left financially responsible for a very large caseload.

Factor	Case example
Continued fragmentation of donor and multilateral programming	In Yemen, donors maintain differing policy objectives and operational parameters. For example, USAID is limited largely to humanitarian aid and within that mostly the provision of in-kind assistance. This compromises its ability to engage with aspects of the more ambitious agenda being proposed by the FCDO. Other donors remain bifurcated between humanitarian and development, which makes it challenging to bring them together on supporting the use of SP in crises.
Continued coordination challenges among donors/multilaterals, as well as with and within government	In Somalia, formal, established coordination mechanisms to develop the humanitarian–development nexus around SP do not exist. For example, there is no formal, systematic link between the Cash Working Groups and the other donor/multilateral forums discussing the same issues. Where informal coordination happens, competing donor interests, priorities, and political pressures get in the way of agreeing an agenda. With coordination failing to produce results, partners progressively disengage from it.
Capacity gaps and/or bandwidth limitations on human resources within national institutions	In Jordan, there are insufficient human resources in key government SP institutions. While national social assistance programming has expanded dramatically, a government hiring freeze has prevented the National Aid Fund from hiring the civil servants needed to effectively run its operations (though this has been partially mitigated by UNICEF/WFP financial support to hire and train new employees).

4.3.6 EQ3.6 Do the workstreams of BASIC synergise and together bring about changes in the use of SP approaches in crises?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 25: Given the continued lack of substantial linkages and coordination between Technical Assistance and Research (see EQ 2.1), and Research’s nascent status, synergies between BASIC workstreams are limited. Certain aspects of the Research portfolio that differed qualitatively from – and had strong potential to add value to – analysis and evidence synthesis undertaken by Technical Assistance were potentially affected by budget changes. These include: longer-term engagement, building local capacities, and collecting much-needed primary data in protracted crises contexts. Otherwise (as described under EQ 2.1) interaction between the two workstreams has been limited – suggesting that any remaining potential for synergies is unlikely to be realised or, therefore, to enhance outcomes. A key exception is that several independent consultants reported having applied both Technical Assistance and Research outputs to technical work outside of BASIC (though this link is not fostered by the two workstreams falling under the same programme).

4.4 EQ4 Impact

EQ	Progress at baseline	Progress at midline
4.1 Contribution to impacts	Potential to contribute to more effective, efficient, and inclusive social assistance and, in turn, to enable vulnerable populations to cope better with crises and meet their basic needs.	Plausible contribution to more effective, efficient, and inclusive social assistance. Relatively limited potential to bring about diversified and more sustainable funding.
4.2 Contribution at country level	Most plausible ToC impact pathway is for high-quality advice to combine with greater awareness and strengthened relationships to bring about new or strengthened country policies or programmes, and greater coherence/synergies. Least plausible impact pathway is for capacity building support to bring about improved institutional capability.	By far the best evidenced impact pathway at midline is TAS advice informing the design of new FCDO country programmes whose implementation is contributing to the delivery of 'more effective', 'more efficient', and/or 'more inclusive' SP.
4.3 Contribution at global level	Similar levels of feasibility as above for different impact pathways at global level.	There may be a shift in the plausibility of different impact pathways at global level, with STAAR likely not to produce the same volume of global public goods as SPACE, and Research outputs targeting a global audience. Nevertheless, SPACE has influenced several multilateral organisations’ global SP strategies.

4.4.1 EQ4.1 Has BASIC and its workstreams achieved or likely to contribute to intended

impacts per the ToC and business case?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

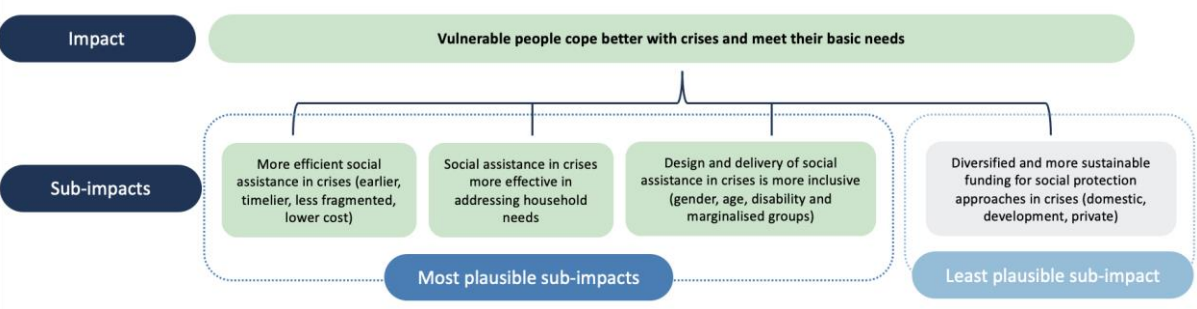
Finding 26: There is some early evidence that the Technical Assistance workstream can plausibly contribute to more effective, efficient, and inclusive social assistance. However, there is little evidence that BASIC is bringing about diversified and more sustainable funding for SP approaches in crises. As indicated under EQ 3.3, two main pathways of change are emerging: the design of new FCDO programmes that are subsequently implemented and coordination improvements among different groups of stakeholders (

Figure 4.5). While the baseline reported that these outcomes had the *potential* to contribute to sub-impacts, at midline there is some, albeit very limited, early evidence of a trajectory towards more effective, efficient, and/or inclusive SP approaches in crises at country – but not global – level. The strongest evidence is for the linkage between the design and implementation of new FCDO programmes and more effective and inclusive SP (see EQ 4.2).

As noted under EQ 3.3, there is not yet any evidence of coordination improvements translating into changes in SP delivery. However, with improved coordination and coherence across actors and initiatives with a larger scale of ambition than new FCDO programmes offers strong potential to bring about impacts. In Nigeria, BASIC support for formalising coordination between the FCDO and the World Bank – which enabled the FCDO to input into the design of the expanded World Bank Social Safety Net programme – was enabled by FCDO expertise in designing SP systems for vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups. In Lebanon, on the other hand, the FCDO’s strategic priorities relating to coordination efforts could be clearer, while large aid funding cuts appear to be undermining the FCDO’s influence with other donors and agencies. The coordinator role could benefit from increased STAAR capacity to provide strategic direction when sufficient support from the FCDO in-country is not available.

However, while case study evidence suggests Technical Assistance is beginning to help make social assistance more effective, efficient, and inclusive, there is still limited evidence that it can and will support diversified and more sustainable funding for SP approaches in crises. There are, however, notable exceptions at country level (see EQ 4.2), such as Jordan, where a new FCDO programme with a TAS-supported design aims to strengthen contributory SP (not yet in implementation).

Figure 4.5: Plausibility of ToC sub-impacts



4.4.2 EQ4.2 What has been the impact of BASIC and its workstreams on policy, programme, and system change in countries with varying levels of engagement? What complementary actions outside of BASIC are necessary to create impact?

Strength of Evidence: High

Finding 27: Key changes identified in country case studies, to which BASIC has contributed, provide evidence of a trajectory towards sub-impact level change as articulated by BASIC’s ToC. Table 4.4 summarises all key changes observed in country case studies assessed to be of ‘high’ or ‘medium’ significance, to which BASIC’s has contributed significantly. All five relate to the following impact pathway, which is therefore the best evidenced at midline: ‘*high quality advice*’ provided by Technical Assistance (output) has informed the design of ‘new [FCDO] country programmes’ (outcome) whose implementation is contributing to the delivery of ‘*more effective*’, ‘*more efficient*’, and/or ‘*more inclusive*’ SP (sub-impacts). However, so far, in only one case study country has BASIC-supported FCDO programming been implemented and translated into more effective and inclusive SP delivery (Jordan, row 1 in Table 4.4). In addition, in Nigeria, the nexus advisor has built ‘*new or strengthened [existing] relationships*’ and drawn on their ‘*knowledge and learning*’ to influence the development of a new National Social Protection Policy and the scaling up of the World Bank’s Social Safety Nets project (however, the case study assesses BASIC’s contribution here to be low).

The impact pathway that is least evidenced at country level is for: ‘*Targeted [BASIC] capacity building support*’ to bring about ‘*Improved... institutional capability and capacity*’ and, in turn, and in combination with other outcomes, more effective, efficient, or inclusive social assistance in crises.

Table 4.4: ToC pathways through which BASIC has contributed to changes at country level

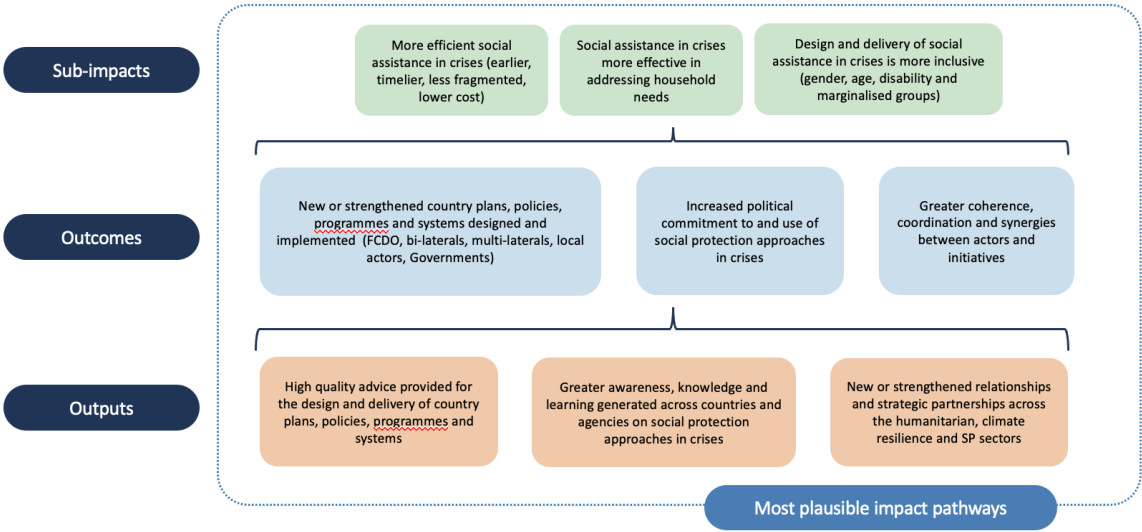
Key change	Significance of the change	BASIC’s contribution
Rapid horizontal and vertical expansion of government social assistance in Jordan	The National Aid Fund increased the value of beneficiary transfers and significantly expanded its caseload in response to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with two additional emergency cash transfer programmes reaching more than 241,000 and 154,000 households respectively.	BASIC Technical Assistance contributed directly to the design of a new FCDO programme, which disbursed funds to the National Aid Fund through: (1) £20 million as grant finance through a World Bank Trust Fund and (2) a £14 million grant under a Joint Funding Arrangement. Use of the two funding modalities recommended by SPACE enabled the FCDO to leverage other donor funding.
Shift towards more sustainable financing for SP, in Jordan	Donor interests and funding have shifted markedly towards more sustainable financing models. This is reflected in support for contributory SP through the Social Security Corporation, which has not previously received donor funding. The FCDO will shortly implement a new programme to support an SSC programme that will extend coverage of social insurance to informal workers.	BASIC Technical Assistance contributed directly to the design of the new programme and therefore to FCDO funding to the SSC programme. FCDO is providing more than half of currently committed donor funding, a contribution which has facilitated donor contracting with the government and will enable the programme to reach a higher number of beneficiaries and cover more sectors.

Key change	Significance of the change	BASIC's contribution
Development of FCDO Nigeria programme business case	FCDO Nigeria has developed a business case for humanitarian assistance to replace a predecessor programme. The advanced conceptualisation of SP and humanitarian cash linkages it presents has provided a basis for more efficient, effective, and inclusive use of SP approaches during crises during implementation.	The nexus advisor contributed directly to the development of the business case, providing extensive advice, drafting support, quality assurance, and oversight, as well as convening external actors around its development. The FCDO reported that, without the nexus advisor, the business case would have been less ambitious, with less attention on nexus issues such as the inclusion of internally displaced persons.
Development of FCDO Somalia programme business case	FCDO Somalia has developed a business case for humanitarian assistance to replace a predecessor programme that ran for five years. ³⁴	BASIC Technical Assistance made a considerable contribution to the business case by developing a cash strategy document. Feedback from FCDO respondents confirmed that the document directly fed into specific areas of the business case on cash programming and leveraging humanitarian experience and expertise towards SP approaches.
Development of FCDO Yemen programme business case	Over the last year, FCDO Yemen has received approval for the Yemen Food Security Safety Net Programme, which will provide cash transfers to up to 1.5 million of Yemen's most food-insecure households. It will spend up to £250 million over five years, replacing three existing programmes. It brings together existing programmes that provide cash to Yemen's most vulnerable, taking a more strategic, longer-term development approach with UN, NGO, and Yemeni partners, and improving coherence and coordination.	BASIC is acknowledged to have played a significant role in both the technical development of the business case itself and the provision of supporting evidence for the ministerial approval process. The various outputs had been heavily drawn on by post to support all stages of the business case development, including pre-concept note decision making. BASIC provided posts with an important challenge function prior to turning outwards to engage with other stakeholders.

Source: All key changes observed in country case studies assessed to be of 'high' or 'medium' significance, to which BASIC's contribution has been 'high' or 'medium'.

Figure 4.6 illustrates the ToC pathway that appears most plausible based on analysis of country-level changes to which BASIC has contributed. Uptake of research generated and disseminated is also excluded, given that Research is only now moving into implementation and that (as presented under EQ3.3) the evaluation found it challenging to identify respondents who had engaged with outputs produced during inception. Some but not all of these outputs can be found on socialprotection.org. It is also possible that Research lacks the opportunities that SPACE, which also provided TA, had to point stakeholders to relevant resources directly.

Figure 4.6: Plausibility of ToC impact pathways



[Table 4.5](#) builds on this analysis by assessing the strength of evaluation evidence to support assumptions associated with specific causal linkages in the ToC. Assumptions that are best evidenced at midline tend to relate to the programme’s technical expertise, while those that are least well evidenced relate to collaboration within and beyond BASIC, and funding environments.

Table 4.5: Strength of assumptions associated with ToC pathways

Level	Strength of evidence
Linking inputs to outputs	<p>FCDO posts are sufficiently engaged to identify windows of opportunity for reform and draw on BASIC Technical Assistance strategically to promote use of SP approaches in crises.</p> <p>BASIC has the flexibility to adapt to major contextual changes, including new shocks and the FCDO budget revision exercise.</p> <p>There is sufficient technical expertise and capacity to deliver high-quality advice and robust research in these contexts.</p>
Linking outputs to outcomes	<p>International consultants and researchers delivering BASIC provide advice that is relevant and appropriate. There is adequate commitment, and financial and human resource at country level (in the FCDO, governments, or agencies) to implement new or strengthened plans, policies, and programmes.</p> <p>International consultants and researchers delivering BASIC generate evidence that is relevant and appropriate. In-country researchers have sufficient networks and capacity to engage key stakeholders and promote uptake of research. Users can access evidence and understand its applicability to their own contexts. Staff turnover among users and policymakers does not prevent uptake of research/evidence.</p> <p>FCDO posts have the absorptive capacity to utilise BASIC outputs and link to their influencing work. Buy-in from senior FCDO personnel is sufficient to support high-level influencing agenda.</p> <p>BASIC workstreams collaborate effectively to maximise cross-programme linkages, coordination, and synergies. BASIC collaborates effectively with other stakeholders to achieve capacity strengthening and influencing outcomes.</p>
Linking outcomes to impact	<p>Conflict and security do not prevent country-level research, TA, or capacity-building support, or subsequent implementation of plans.</p> <p>Humanitarian assistance is an appropriate entry point for building a social assistance system.</p> <p>The benefits of reduced fragmentation in assistance outweigh the benefits of maintaining intentional overlaps and redundancies that may be desirable in FCAS.</p> <p>Stakeholders are willing to contribute potentially increased levels of funding to support the establishment of social assistance systems.</p>

N.B. Strength of the evidence for ToC assumptions. Key: well evidenced; partially evidenced; limited or no evidence.

4.4.3 EQ4.3 What has been the impact of BASIC and its workstreams on policy, programme, and system change globally, including the legacy impact of SPACE?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 28: The plausibility of different impact pathways at global level may shift, with STAAR unlikely to produce the same volume of global public goods as SPACE, and Research outputs targeting a global audience. Nevertheless, SPACE has influenced several multilateral organisations’ global SP strategies. To date, the most plausible ToC impact pathway at global level has been for: ‘high quality advice’ provided by Technical Assistance to combine with ‘greater awareness, knowledge and learning’ and ‘new or strengthened relationships’ (outputs) to bring about ‘greater coherence, coordination, and synergies’ (outcomes) and, in turn, more effective, efficient, and/or inclusive social assistance in crises (impact). However, the midline evaluation has not yielded any specific examples of (trajectory towards) sub-impacts among global policymakers or practitioners. Further, SPACE’s strong focus on global public goods is not planned to flow through to STAAR. The potential for impact could be increased markedly if STAAR delivers on its intention to diversify its users and develop targeted and strategic partnerships, with a potential assignment for USAID a solid first step. Moving forward, uptake of Research (outcome) has strong potential as a global impact pathway, with findings intended to explore what works in different contexts, pitched at a global audience.

At midline, the evaluation team identified global-level humanitarian cash and SP strategy and policy documents published by key international institutions in 2021 and 2022 and carried out citation analysis to determine whether BASIC products have had a direct impact on their development. Of the seven documents identified,³⁵ three included references to SPACE publications. The first, the ECHO cash transfer policy, references four SPACE papers on linking humanitarian assistance and SP, identification and registration systems, and transfer values. The second, ILO’s World Social Protection Report, draws on two GESI-focused SPACE reports, one a general brief on gender and inclusion in SP responses to COVID-19 and the other focusing on inclusive information systems. The ECHO policy also references a fifth paper funded by the FCDO.³⁶ Lastly, and most notably given the relatively large volume of FCDO funding channelled to related World Bank programming, the new World Bank SP and jobs sector strategy (the ‘*SPJ Compass*’), references two SPACE publications, one on the linkages between SP and climate and the other a GESI-focused piece evidencing the inaccuracy of assumptions that child grants result in increased pregnancy rates.³⁷

It is also worth noting that the midline has not identified specific instances where interaction between the global and country level has enabled progression towards impact.

4.5 EQ5 Efficiency

EQ	Progress at baseline	Progress at midline
5.1 What is the VFM	BASIC offers good economy through competitive procurement mechanisms and cost containment. The launch of SPACE and request responses were highly efficient. Evidence on effectiveness is limited at this stage. Delayed procurement of Research impacted on efficiency. New contracting arrangement for STAAR deemed likely to improve procurement for Technical Assistance workstream.	There could be a deterioration in BASIC’s VFM proposition at midline, if any budget cuts compromise the appropriateness of Research’s spend on inception phase deliverables. Efficiency of both workstreams was affected by protracted inception phases slowing the pace of delivery, necessitating a significant scale up of delivery in the remaining years. Approval processes for deliverables and contract amendments were similarly inefficient. There is insufficient data to report on cost effectiveness.
5.2 Management to deliver VFM	BASIC’S management takes VFM considerations into account. VFM is considered in decision making and risk management processes are fit for purpose. However, FCDO management capacity was a challenge due to resource constraints and staff turnover.	Funding uncertainty, as well as lack of clarity on the end dates for BASIC’s workstreams has led to challenges in the management of VFM considerations. While management structures for both workstreams are in place, leadership and management arrangements have been affected by FCDO staff turnover. VFM was considered in decision making, although some changes may negatively affect VFM.
5.3 Timeliness of delivery	COVID-19 impacted the timely delivery of outputs, although TAS and SPACE were viewed as highly responsive. The transition of Research into implementation carried with it the expectation of timely response to user needs. New STAAR contracting mechanism bodes well for timely delivery.	While both workstreams sought to progress delivery to the extent possible during their protracted inception phases, the slow progression into implementation by both, alongside funding uncertainty, impacted negatively on the pace of delivery and timely response to potential users of the service.

At midline, similar to baseline, VFM was assessed in two main ways. First, whether BASIC, its workstreams, and the different types of intervention being implemented through each of those workstreams represent good VFM with reference to FCDO principles. Second, whether the BASIC programme is managing delivery of VFM at each stage in the programme’s cycle – design, procurement, implementation, and close out. A discussion of the equity achieved by BASIC is presented in our answers to EQ3. A more detailed overview of our VFM scorecard assessment that we used to answer EQ5.2 and EQ5.3 is presented in Appendix B.

4.5.1 EQ5.1 Does BASIC, its workstreams, and different types of intervention represent good value for money in terms of the 5 Es (economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and (cost) effectiveness)?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 29: Economy – Overall, the economy of BASIC’s two workstreams differed somewhat. Research’s inception phase costs could compromise VFM, especially if BASIC were to experience budget cuts. STAAR’s delivery model proved more robust to ensuring economy.

Both Research and STAAR had completed their inception phases by midline, although inception phases were longer than envisaged for both workstreams; for Research it was 16 months rather than 12 months and for STAAR it was 9 months rather than 3 months. The cost of Research’s inception phase was considerable (£1.6 million),³⁸ and potentially represents poor VFM, particularly if there are significant budget reductions for this workstream. This could result in a disproportionate allocation of funding to diagnostic scoping and planning activities, although there was some spend on delivery included within inception costs (financing 18 working papers and 12 thematic briefs). Budget cuts for Research, at the time of the midline, were expected to be significant.

The cost of inception phase deliverables was more economical and appropriate in the case of the STAAR (£0.18 million). Fees constitute the key cost driver for both workstreams. For Research, the likely reduction in use of national consultants is set to have negative VFM implications, due to their lower rates compared to international consultants. However, given the early stage of delivery, effects on overall cost-effectiveness are unclear. STAAR was piloting the use of in-country lead positions and, if successful, was hopeful of FCDO approval for the roll-out of this approach in selected countries, with expected positive VFM implications. These roles offer greater scope for deeper engagement with partner governments, and over time harness emerging opportunities to advocate and influence policies and programmes in-country, while also costing less than international experts.

Both workstreams’ management costs were appropriate (at around 20 per cent of their budgets),³⁹ but we identified issues that did increase management inputs during the workstreams’ respective inception phases. These included challenges in meeting FCDO expectations concerning deliverables (in terms of structure, content, and quality of outputs), which required resources to provide orientation support and respond to additional comments. STAAR’s management costs were well managed and accounted for⁴⁰, although its protracted inception phase (See Finding 30) accounted for relatively more management resources than anticipated. FCDO addressed this issue by permitting management costs to be included in assignments delivered during the extended inception phase. There are also economies of scale accruing from STAAR managing BASIC Technical Assistance and the GSP programme through cost sharing (31 per cent of management costs are from GSP’s budget and 69 per cent from BASIC) and minimising duplication of management and governance arrangements.⁴¹

Both workstreams considered cost containment. To counter the impact of potential budget cuts, Research was considering cost-containment measures like reducing the number of open access journal publications, which are expensive, and increasing the number of working papers or policy documents and developing lighter-touch engagement strategies with a greater number of countries. STAAR also learned that sharing the details of the available budget for assignments with end users may not necessarily promote an economical use of funds and could lead to a ‘*spend the budget approach*’ rather than tailoring support to the level of effort required by the assignment.⁴² Respondents cited cost savings from careful planning of STAAR’s TSLT travel to workshops (ensuring it coincides with already planned trips) as well as appropriate allocation of staff to tasks (reducing where possible senior input), as examples of economical use of STAAR’s budget. Both workstreams benefit from access to PFP and HSOT experts, paid for via FCDO funding rather than supplier contracts, representing a cost saving for both Research and STAAR.⁴³

Finding 30: Efficiency – Delays in finalisation and approval of key inception phase deliverables resulted in protracted inception phases for both workstreams, which along with funding uncertainty had a negative impact on the efficient transition to and pace of implementation.

The inception phases of both workstreams faced significant disruption due to delays in the approval of key inception-phase deliverables. Respondents held different perspectives on the reasons for this including; staff turnover in the FCDO and overly-long quality assurance reviews, as well as deliverables not meeting FCDO quality standards and requirements and the late submission of inception deliverables.

The multiple iterations of Research's VFM strategy was cited as an example of inefficient closure, finally warranting the recruitment of a short-term consultant to further develop the strategy. One KII respondent rated the VFM strategy as itself not representing VFM due to the resources it took to finalise it and secure approval. In relation to the extended STAAR inception phase, some KIIs reported that not much had changed since the previous phase, raising questions about its nine-month duration. However, other KII suggested it was necessary due to key changes, such as the merger of Technical Assistance with the GSP programme, the inclusion of more strategic assignments (alongside the demand-led ones), and changes to the management arrangements and budget structure of its predecessor (TAS).

Contract amendment processes for Research were very inefficient. The International Multi-Disciplinary Programme framework necessitated the need for contract amendments when additional delivery partners or experts were needed, and the process of agreeing and approving contract amendments took considerable time. For example, a contract amendment request that was submitted to the FCDO in April 2022 was only approved in July.⁴⁴ Factors that led to time-consuming contract amendment processes included shortcomings in the supplier's understanding of the contract amendment process.

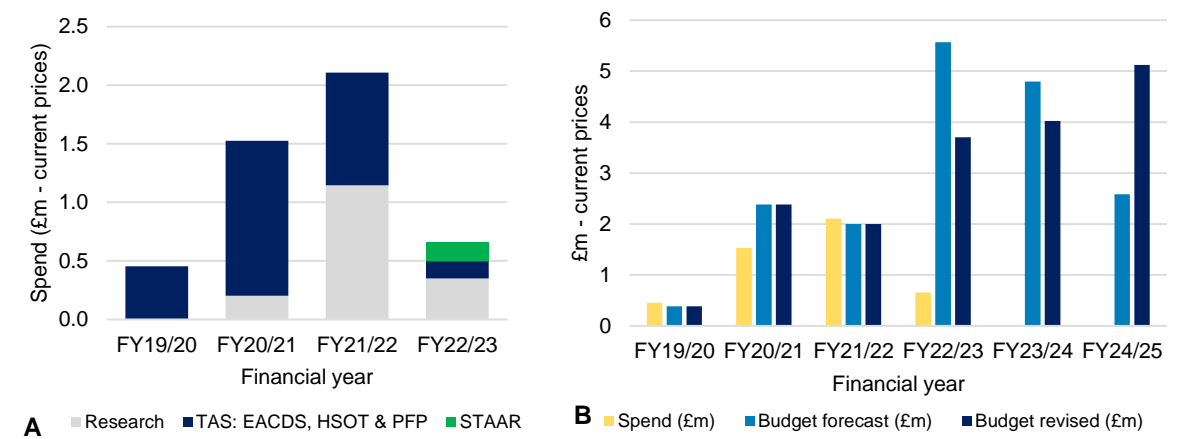
The delayed closure of SPACE, by some four months, was also deemed inefficient in the 2021 Annual Review. STAAR's new contracting model is more efficient than its predecessor, which had separate contracting arrangements (albeit via a framework contract) for each assignment. With one centrally managed contract now in place, STAAR's new, more flexible contracting mechanism means assignments can be expanded as needed (such as the Ukraine briefing assignment),⁴⁵ facilitating more timely progression into delivery.

Both workstreams reported efficiencies in having a centrally managed programme, as a result of putting in place delivery architecture that can service the needs of multiple users, as well as cover a range of countries. This model also serves to reduce FCDO and suppliers' transaction costs, for example by pooling management oversight and quality assurance provision.

Finding 31: Efficiency – Delivery delays in the early years may necessitate scaled delivery in subsequent years and a programme extension. Programme records suggest BASIC's programme financial allocation is £20.5 million, with spend as of July 2022 of £4.75 million— approximately 23 per cent of the total allocation (

[Figure 4.7](#)). As the programme is already 61 per cent through implementation (30 October 2018 to 31 March 2025⁴⁶), its spend profile is skewed to the later years.

Figure 4.7: BASIC spend to date (A) compared to forecasted and revised September 2022 figures (B)⁴⁷



Source: FCDO(2022). FCDO SPT financial records.

Figure 4.7 demonstrates that efficiency in delivering the programme will be essential. Since at the time of the midline, Research and STAAR were expected to conclude in March 2024 and January 2025 respectively, a significant scale up of delivery will be needed for both workstreams in the later years of the implementation cycle. While this spend profile is not entirely ideal, it does offer some advantages to STAAR by giving it the time needed to generate demand for TA to absorb the funding. Key informants identified two key risks related to this spend trajectory. First, a large volume of delivery at the programme’s closure may miss opportunities to respond to additional demand BASIC support creates. The FCDO has already started to consider a joint donor-funded facility as a successor to STAAR to mitigate against this risk. Second, Research may need to refocus on shorter-term activity to produce research within shorter time frames, which may limit any efficiency gains or wider programme benefits arising from longer-term research projects.

Finding 32: Effectiveness – Early evidence demonstrates that BASIC TAS and SPACE can contribute to driving outcome-level change, including improved equity in SP delivery.

Insufficient data prevented an assessment of cost-effectiveness. The assessment of effectiveness is contained in the response to EQ3, which reported that FCDO country programmes whose design has been supported by BASIC TAS and SPACE have contributed to changes in SP policies and programmes. They have also helped improve coordination among stakeholders to encourage more synergies and fewer overlaps in government- and donor-funded programming on the use of SP approaches in crises. Moreover, the assessment of the extent to which BASIC contributed to gender-responsive and inclusive SP reported on examples of key changes to which Technical Assistance has contributed to more equitable SP. Both workstreams include payment by results triggers attached to outputs/KPIs, which bodes well for VFM, incentivising effective delivery.

No data was available at midline to assess BASIC’s cost effectiveness, although STAAR’s approach to VFM⁴⁸ reported plans to measure the contributions of other actors, such as development partners and governments, that would not have been made were it not for STAAR. BASIC’s baseline evaluation similarly suggested that funds leveraged for SP approaches in crises as a result of BASIC should be tracked by both STAAR and Research. This recommendation has not yet been implemented but we iterate this proposal at midline, to help assess future cost effectiveness. Due to its implementation status, no data on Research’s cost effectiveness is available. Attempts to measure Research’s future cost effectiveness may run into the challenge of tracking use of its outputs by a broad range of potential users, since their interaction with the workstream may be indirect.

4.5.2 EQ5.2 Has BASIC managed to ensure delivery of VFM throughout the programme cycle (design, procurement, delivery, and close of interventions)?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 33: Management of VFM has become more challenging in a period of funding uncertainty. Both workstreams have VFM strategies and processes in place, although neither were comprehensively reporting on VFM at the time of reporting due to inception phase delays. Now workstreams are both being implemented, VFM reporting is anticipated to increase in line with supplier VFM plans, although evidence was limited on whether this increase had occurred at the time of reporting. Research’s revised VFM strategy is impressive, although potential funding cuts may impact on the extent it can be implemented as intended.⁴⁹ Both STAAR and Research plan to submit an annual VFM report, with results against VFM indicators, feeding into Annual Review processes.⁵⁰

Box 4.3: BASIC Research VFM Monitoring and Reporting Plan

Research’s VFM Monitoring and Reporting Plan defines a conceptual approach to VFM that positions it as a key element not only in reporting to the FCDO but also embedded in the supplier’s adaptive management approach. Based on the National Audit Office’s 5 Es approach to VFM measurement, the plan sets out VFM metrics for each level of the ToC – outputs, outcomes, and impact – setting out measurement definitions and details on how each metric will be measured. Key risks, such as the risky nature of producing impactful research, as well as the risky environments in which Research operates are taken into consideration in the approaches to measuring and managing VFM.

It was challenging for the FCDO and suppliers to manage VFM considerations due to the prevailing funding uncertainties, which affected timely decision making (with possible implications for reputational damage) and warranted extensive budgetary planning exercises by suppliers. While there is evidence that VFM was considered in decision-making on budget reductions, some decisions – such as the reduction in Research’s in-country partner engagement – may not have been fully guided by VFM principles, as suppliers have an interest in in-house delivery, to ensure the inputs are sufficient to deliver contractually. The lack of confirmation of the end date for both workstreams posed further challenges to decision-making.

Leadership, management, and governance arrangements for both workstreams were compromised by FCDO staff turnover. For example, the BASIC SRO role has been delivered by four FCDO staff since its inception. One of the implications of staff turnover has been some differences in feedback from the FCDO on suppliers’ deliverables. Although management structures for both workstreams are in place, with monthly technical and programme management meetings between suppliers and the FCDO, evidence suggested there has been limited coordination between the two workstreams during the inception phase (see EQ2.1). Both workstreams put in place sufficient risk management processes. Research’s cost effectiveness may be compromised due to the possibility of reduced in-country partner engagement and a move away from larger in-country surveys and longitudinal research, with which potential users associated greatest potential impact. EQ5.3 Is BASIC responding to demand and needs in a timely way and in line with user expectations?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 34: Protracted inception phases and funding uncertainty impacted the timely response of BASIC to user needs amid a slower delivery pace. Nonetheless, both workstreams did succeed in some output delivery during this uncertain period. During the midline evaluation period, protracted inception phases for both workstreams resulted in a delayed start to implementation (see EQ 5.1), meaning they could not respond to user needs in a timely manner. These delayed closures to inception phases, further compounded by funding uncertainty, resulted in the pausing, or scaling back of both workstreams’ delivery. STAAR reported no delays to its response to assignment queries during its first quarter of implementation. However, key informants reported some loss in delivery momentum; for example STAAR had been approached by a new user (WFP) in January 2022 but could not progress this request for support until September 2022 due to paused activity. Stakeholders reported these delays caused reputational damage among users and limited the time available for BASIC to meet its objectives (if a time extension to 2024/25 is not granted).⁵¹ Nonetheless, both Research and STAAR did progress a subset of activities during their inception phases (see EQ3.1).

Uncertainty around funding allocations and the duration of contracts meant the Research spent management time working on new budgets and activity plans rather than research projects.⁵² Research has to make significant changes to 18 of its 21 research projects.^{53, 54} The time taken to approve contract amendments for Research also affected delivery and the timely contracting of new

consortium partners. In quarter two of implementation, BASIC Research⁵⁵ has not been able to share its final agenda much with in-country stakeholders, with possible implications for meeting the needs of users. For example, in the case of Yemen, there was a strong demand for data and evidence to improve the limited understanding of international actors on the ground, but the post inception budget uncertainty particularly impacted the planned research agenda, due to the high data collection costs, as well as access constraints in the field.⁵⁶

Finding 35: Both workstreams have KPIs linked to timely and good quality of delivery. STAAR's contract with the FCDO includes KPIs applied to core management fees and individual assignments. Failing to score sufficiently against each criterion could result in fee reductions amounting to 100 per cent of total quarterly fees. Some examples of KPIs include accuracy and timeliness of reporting, core staff retention rates, and user satisfaction.⁵⁷ These KPIs provide the supplier with an important incentive for timely, good-quality delivery. Similarly, the Research workstream has several indicators linked to payments covering quality and timeliness of output delivery and degree of accuracy of financial forecasts.⁵⁸

4.6 EQ6 Sustainability

EQ	Progress at Baseline	Progress at Midline
6.1 Foundations for system change	There are indications that TAS effects on policy, programme, and systems will be sustainable. At a global level, SPACE is likely to have acted as a catalyst to shaping the COVID-19 responses of a wide pool of users and different donors. Although there is limited evidence yet that BASIC has influenced institutional capabilities, the combination of business case development and leveraging funding from other donors should support likely sustainability.	The assessment of sustainability was compromised by the implementation delays to both Research and STAAR. Nonetheless there was evidence of BASIC catalysing policy, programme and system change at the country level, as a result of earlier assignments supported by TAS. While SPACE helped shape pandemic responses of a wide pool of users and donors, the sustainability of its products is somewhat questionable, due to perceptions of their COVID-19 specificity.
6.2 Factors influencing sustainable change	A range of internal and external factors may affect the sustainability of BASIC's support going forward. At baseline, the assessment of sustainability is limited, due to the early stage of programme delivery. Delivery modalities, FCDO country office engagement, and active involvement of partner governments are some of the factors likely to drive the sustainability of BASIC Technical Assistance	Limited financial resources and the current global economic downturn makes it increasingly difficult for partner governments to invest in SP, constraining appetite for reform and reducing BASIC's ability to advocate/influence governments and partners. Declining donor support (including the FCDO), the nascent state of SP systems in some partner countries, and the timespan needed to deliver sustainable change were identified as other factors hindering sustainability. Some aspects of BASIC's model are enablers of sustainable change – namely embedded advisors/nexus advisors, engagement with other donors, and resumption of in-country travel, which supports a deeper more impactful engagement with partners in-country.

At midline, we considered sustainability by examining how far BASIC activity has already realised systems change or has the capacity to do so in the future. OECD DAC criteria define sustainability as the extent to which the net benefits of an intervention may continue after an intervention has concluded. This includes an examination of the financial, economic, social, environmental, and institutional capacities of systems needed to sustain benefits over time. Well-functioning programmes, data and information systems, finance, and institutional arrangements and partnerships represent the four main areas that underpin effective SP systems.⁵⁹ As BASIC's ToC seeks to effect sustainable change across these areas, largely through the strategic sequencing of small investments, our evaluation will consider the programme to be sustainable if it manages to contribute meaningfully to systems change in countries it services.⁶⁰

4.6.1 EQ 6.1 What is the likelihood that foundations for catalytic change or policy, programme, and system changes at global or at country levels have been laid as a

result of BASIC support?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 36: Midline evidence suggests earlier BASIC TAS has catalysed programme and systems change at country level, although delivery delays compromised our midline assessment of sustainability. The baseline evaluation indicated that a detailed assessment of sustainability of BASIC was not feasible given the early stage of implementation. Similarly, at midline, our assessment of sustainability was compromised by implementation delays. That said, we identified mixed evidence on the sustainability of BASIC at this stage. Regarding SPACE, some stakeholders highlighted its value in shaping the COVID-19 responses of a wide pool of users, although others suggested SPACE insights were less relevant now, given the unique circumstances of COVID-19.⁶¹ However, midline country case study evidence provides several instances where BASIC support can be linked to current or possible future systemic changes ([Table 4.6](#)).

4.6.2 EQ 6.2 What are the factors likely to hinder/support sustainable outcomes in terms of influencing global policy and influencing governments and partners?

Strength of Evidence: Medium

Finding 37: Securing long-term SP funding commitments is the main challenge faced by national governments and donors in achieving systemic change. The baseline evaluation found that partner governments faced funding, institutional, and administrative SP system constraints that were likely to affect sustainability. At midline, it was apparent that these challenges had remained, with the current global economic downturn making funding challenges more pronounced globally and at country level – despite baseline evidence that COVID-19 had increased the appetite of partner governments for investing in SP. This limited opportunities for reform and reduced BASIC’s ability to influence partner governments and partners.⁶²

At midline, country-case evidence continued to highlight partner government reliance on donor funding to support SP programming. Due to economic pressures and funding requirements to support new crisis responses (such as Ukraine), reductions in FCDO funding for SP programming, and donor funding more broadly, were suggested to further hinder BASIC’s ability to support and influence governments and partners.⁶³ These funding challenges are made more acute by the need for long-term funding to fully develop SP systems in BASIC targeted countries. The Research workstream’s politics and political economy theme plans to examine the contextual politics and financing of social assistance at multiple levels and highlight considerations for international (aid) actors to effectively engage with national and sub-national authorities towards supporting sustained financing and effective coordination of social assistance.⁶⁴

Finding 38: Other opportunities and challenges potentially affecting BASIC’s sustainability related to its design and delivery. We identified several other considerations that may affect BASIC’s sustainability:

Context

- **In-country FCDO capacity constraints:** Stakeholders noted that FCDO country offices are critical to *‘pushing for change’*, although this drive is compromised by FCDO staff turnover and a lack of clarity on FCDO SP institutional priorities, which, alongside funding reductions, affect the degree of follow-through on Technical Assistance assignments.⁶⁵

Design

- **Over-reliance on embedded advisors without sufficient handover planning:** We found that BASIC's (STAAR) nexus advisors and embedded consultants can provide greater continuity, deeper in-country engagement, and effectively influence in-country actors.⁶⁶ However, when in-country relationships are 'owned' by these advisors, stakeholders from the FCDO and other donors suggested that the ability of FCDO country offices to effectively influence in this area may be limited when these advisor roles are concluded.
- **Long timescales to global impact:** Stakeholders noted that BASIC's ability to sustainably influence the global policy agenda was challenged given the programme's short lifespan in relation to the time typically taken to realise systemic change.⁶⁷

Operational

- **Continuation of in-country travel:** The resumption of in-country travel by BASIC's consultants and researchers, post-pandemic, increases the potential for STAAR assignments and Research to build relationships in-country and drive advocacy and influencing efforts.⁶⁸
- **Nascent work on measuring the influencing effects of BASIC activity:** The FCDO's reduced engagement in the Grand Bargain further reduces the potential for BASIC to exert policy influence in this arena.⁶⁹ Research has plans to capture the influence of its global and in-country research. STAAR is presently engaging with the FCDO on how it can strengthen capacity and exert influence at global and national system levels, although key informants recognised that engagement on this work should have been done earlier, to practically inform influencing activity.⁷⁰

Table 4.6: Case Study Examples of Likely Sustainable impacts from BASIC support

Country	Change	Likelihood of sustainability	Assessment of sustainability
Nigeria	Scale up of World Bank National Social Safety Nets Project	High	The World Bank has approved credit for this initiative, which involved the scale up of the existing National Social Safety Nets Project, largely funded by the Nigerian government.
	Development of FCDO Nigeria programme business case	Medium	The business case, if approved for implementation, is expected to increase the likelihood of more effective, inclusive use of SP approaches in crises, and may contribute to strengthened country plans, policies, programmes, and systems designed and implemented.
Jordan	Consolidation of National Aid Fund Takaful programmes into a single unified cash transfer programme	High	Given the maturity of National Aid Fund systems, reforms are expected to be sustainable.
	The shift to more sustainable financing for SP	Medium	There is a budget line for National Aid Fund support in the government budget for the first time, albeit financed by a World Bank loan, which National Aid Fund and donors nonetheless see as an important first step for a potential government contribution.
Somalia	Establishment of SP system in Somalia	Medium	The recent introduction of national SP programmes in Somalia was rated as a significant development, although it remains highly dependent on donor funding, with poor prospects for a transition to national funding in the next five to ten years.
	Development of FCDO Somalia programme business case	Medium	The new FCDO business case for the Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Building in Somalia programme, enveloping cash programming and leveraging humanitarian experience to transition to SP in Somalia, was rated as an important development, in view of it being owned by FCDO Somalia although compromised by the latter's historically humanitarian-led approach to crisis response.
Yemen	Development of new FCDO Yemen business case (Yemen Food Security Safety Net Programme)	Medium	Humanitarian support to Yemen remains a priority and FCDO funding has been committed for the next five years, although remains uncertain beyond this timeframe. However, institutional changes in partner agencies, triggered by the programme, should endure over a longer period.
	Increased efficiency and effectiveness of national SP institutions	Medium	The SFD has remained a highly resilient institution through the Yemen crisis, albeit reliant on external financing.

Source: Integrity (2022). Country case study comparative analysis.

5 Closing remarks

Based on the preceding findings, we draw six conclusions and make four main recommendations. Appendix A provides a mapping of the links demonstrating how the recommendations build on the findings and conclusions.

5.1 Conclusions at this stage

Conclusion 1: There is strengthening evidence that BASIC has the potential to contribute to more effective, efficient, and inclusive social assistance, most concretely through supporting the development of FCDO programmes. The country case studies provided strong examples of how BASIC advice influenced the design of new FCDO programmes, reinforcing the baseline evidence. What starts to emerge in the midline is how the subsequent programme implementation was in turn showing indications of contributing to the desired sub-impacts.

A second emerging pathway of change is through coordination improvements among different groups of stakeholders. The midline evaluation reaffirmed the baseline conclusion that BASIC is contributing to improved coordination and coherence across actors and initiatives. The use of long-term assignments has proved effective in shaping and sustaining coordination. However, with a very small number of BASIC coordination assignments ongoing, the evidence base remains thin. While there is some evidence of improved coordination due to BASIC, there are few examples so far of how coordination improvements translated into changes in SP delivery.

Evidence has also started to emerge around the role of BASIC in supporting FCDO influencing work. BASIC Technical Assistance expertise has been particularly influential in encouraging the mainstreaming of specific issues, notably the inclusion of vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups. Moving forward, future Research outputs are expected to further contribute to, and expand, the influencing role of BASIC.

However, as noted in the baseline, the impacts anticipated within the ToC will require considerable time to achieve, given the highly challenging context in which BASIC works. Institutional change takes significant time among all stakeholders, including donors, governments, and multi-laterals organisations, and may only be partially evident even by the endline evaluation.

Conclusion 2: BASIC can plausibly make a meaningful contribution to change without necessarily acting simultaneously across all the pathways identified within the ToC.

Importantly, the midline evaluation has shown that it is not necessary for BASIC to act simultaneously across all the ToC pathways to plausibly contribute to change at sub-impact level. The midline findings have confirmed the baseline findings that BASIC has been able to use some of the ToC pathways effectively in isolation. The pathways in Conclusion 1 have proved particularly strong.

In contrast, there is weak evidence of BASIC plausibly contributing to strengthening human and institutional capacities. Relatively few capacity-building assignments have been commissioned, particularly ones targeted at external actors. As in the baseline evaluation, the main capacity-strengthening results have been in the individual skills of FCDO staff. Capacity-strengthening results so far were typically an indirect benefit of technical assignments or coordination efforts, rather than a primary objective.

Neither supplier, as recommended by the baseline, has yet developed a full capacity-strengthening strategy and uncertainty over budget availability has not helped BASIC to define its role in this area. Other actors – such as the World Bank and UNICEF – have been at the forefront of delivering institutional capacity building, especially with key partners in national governments.

The ToC underpinning BASIC is both comprehensive and ambitious. This is not always commensurate with the limited resources available, now compounded by likely budget reductions. This raises questions of where BASIC should focus its limited resources to the greatest effect, and where other partners are best placed to provide complementary inputs.

Conclusion 3: Changes in the policies and priorities of UK Aid and the evolving resource availability highlight the need for BASIC to evolve and strengthen its support to coordination and influencing functions. UK Aid is going through a significant period of adjustment with shifting strategic goals, new institutional responsibilities for delivery, and a diminished budget. The practical consequences of this budget revision exercise have become increasingly evident at midline and are expected to continue and deepen during the remainder of the BASIC implementation period.

While the FCDO remains a significant and influential donor, its positioning is being recalibrated. A reduction in budget is anticipated to lead to fewer programmes being developed, while smaller budgets in remaining programmes may translate into reduced influence in the sector. Consequently, the demand for BASIC services in developing programmes and the effectiveness of working through this pathway may change. As noted in the baseline evaluation, the ability of the FCDO to use strategic advice and insights developed by BASIC was heavily reinforced by its programme funding— the credibility with other donors and influence that the FCDO was able to apply on programme partners was much stronger where it had a significant financial leverage.

While working through, and in support of, FCDO programmes is expected to remain an important pathway of change, this needs to be rebalanced by an increasing emphasis on collaborating with a more diverse group of actors. Logically, the FCDO must become increasingly adept at using effective coordination and influencing to bring about change and working through this pathway will be increasingly important in creating system-level change. This in turn suggests that BASIC needs to complement its function of servicing the FCDO by becoming more proficient at working through other actors to influence change. This may lead to a degree of tension between BASIC’s current demand-led approach and any attempts to focus on areas of specialised expertise where it may exert the greatest influence.

Conclusion 4: BASIC has had success in influencing in specific areas – such as the integration of GESI perspectives – and may have a comparative advantage in other niche areas, including the integration of climate change with SP responses to crisis. BASIC has had success in influencing actors to integrate GESI perspectives into SP responses to crises, with key country-level changes including elements of improved equity in the design or delivery of SP. This success should be maintained and built on. The design of Research includes – and has protected – a strong focus on GESI, with the dedicated inclusion theme the largest of the four themes, focusing on the lived experiences of marginalised people and displacement.

The midline evaluation also confirmed the demand for BASIC to work on the nexus between climate change and SP. Globally, the incidence of climate-related crises, in proportion to those where conflict is the immediate trigger, is growing. At the same time, climate-linked resources account for a sizeable, and increasing, proportion of BASIC’s budget. There is strong demand from in-country FCDO personnel for advisory support bridging the climate–SP nexus, and on sustainable financing.

There are early indications that STAAR and Research are placing a greater emphasis on climate-focused work. However, there is a question on whether BASIC’s approach to country prioritisation should apply as strongly to climate-focused work. There is less explicit demand from FCDO advisers for support across the triple nexus of SP, climate, and conflict, and, with the closure of MAINTAINS, there has also been a reduction in centrally managed FCDO programming to support shock-responsive SP in the context of natural disasters.

Conclusion 5: Several attempts to develop workstream synergies were made, but synergies were not fully explored during the midline period. Options are increasingly being considered by suppliers as the programme moves forward into implementation, but would benefit from a clearer framework outlining strategic opportunities. There have been some attempts to date to develop synergies between the STAAR and Research workstreams. Products have been shared and some coordination meetings held, including efforts to develop a joint KML strategy. However, the two workstreams currently maintain a high degree of independence.

As the programme transitions into implementation, there are active efforts being put in place to improve coordination – for example, instituting monthly joint supplier meetings and the appointment of the PFP, with some responsibility for improving coordination. However, a clear vision for the objectives of collaboration has yet to be agreed as a basis for coordinated action. Clearer guidance from the client on where linkages could be most appropriately developed will be critical in promoting and shaping improved cooperation between the two workstreams.

There are some evident limitations to developing strong synergies. Mismatched timelines mean that many of the Research outputs may only become available towards the end of the programme period, leaving limited time for STAAR to capitalise on these outputs. However, some Research outputs will come earlier and could be linked to future STAAR activities. Equally, other opportunities exist and are yet to be explored. For example, Research capacities and knowledge – rather than products – could contribute to STAAR assignments. The Research team could draw on their experience and knowledge to direct STAAR consultants to relevant literature. Furthermore, both Research and STAAR are developing thematic areas of focus. In many cases, these overlap – for example, both workstreams plan to appoint thematic leads looking at the climate change–SP nexus – and joint approaches could add value.

Conclusion 6: The VFM proposition and programme efficiency have been compromised by the extended inception periods and funding uncertainties. An already heavy investment in Research’s inception phase has been accentuated by preliminary budget reductions. Ultimately, the final VFM will be heavily influenced by whether there is a deferred budget extension and BASIC effectiveness in sector-wide influencing. The extent to which both workstreams draw on local consultants, and are able to reduce the reliance on international consultants, is a further important consideration. As much as any potential cost savings associated with a shift away from international consultants, domesticating the debate on the use of SP through greater involvement of local expertise is important for programme effectiveness. Both suppliers are now in implementation phases but have not started to report on their VFM metrics as per their VFM strategies and plans.

The efficiency of both Technical Assistance and Research has been compromised by the time taken to approve inception deliverables and agree contract amendments, as well as FCDO staff turnover. The slow spend to date (20 per cent of spend over 60 per cent of the implementation period) risks a ‘cliff edge’ end with implications for VFM.

5.2 Lessons arising from the midline evaluation

A number of preliminary lessons emerged from the midline. These lessons are distinct from our recommendations. Instead, they are intended to contribute to wider organisational learning for the FCDO and its partners. They build on our findings and conclusions, are judged as potentially valid, and have not been generalised from single point findings. Once validated and expanded, more developed lessons will be shared with key stakeholders (across and beyond the FCDO) as part of the endline evaluation.

Lesson 1: There is a need to consider how to improve the efficiency of the inception process.

A lesson emerging from the midline evaluation was that the time taken to approve the inception products compromised programme efficiency. While the duration of the inception periods was affected by the uncertainties associated with the BASIC budget, other factors were at play. A range of factors appear to have contributed to this, including delays in delivery by suppliers and the time needed to set up the new programme management arrangements with the FCDO. The key general lesson is that the FCDO budget uncertainties have had major consequences for the efficiency and effectiveness of programmes, and the importance of minimising further uncertainty during implementation.

A further contributory factor is understood to have been the time taken for the technical approval of the inception documents. Proper scrutiny of all supplier products is obviously required to ensure that contract requirements and adequate quality standards are met. However, the midline evaluation suggested that the process of achieving these quality standards proved intensive and somewhat inefficient.

A lesson drawn was on how to improve the procurement and inception processes. This could include setting out clearer expectations at the start of inception and ensuring there is joint understanding on deliverables and approach across the FCDO and suppliers. More communication and sharing of outlines and drafts would have been beneficial throughout the inception phase.

Lesson 2: The objectives of integrating multiple workstreams and suppliers within one programme need to be clarified at the outset.

Creating synergies between the Technical Assistance and Research workstreams within BASIC has proved challenging and may provide more general lessons for centrally managed FCDO programmes. Especially given the different inception phase timescales for each workstream. Without adequate encouragement and guidance, there is a risk that the incentives for suppliers may mean they prioritise implementation of their own workstreams rather than joint delivery. Collaboration cannot be relied upon to develop organically. This is important as the level of synergies achieved will have a bearing on the overall VFM achieved by the programme.

Several opportunities for encouraging inter-workstream coordination and collaboration emerge from the midline evaluation. Business cases need to be very clear on the rationale for a multi-workstream approach and what synergies are expected. Cooperation and coordination should be ensured during the inception periods so that opportunities are factored in from the outset. Contractors could be incentivised to find creative ways of synergising in response to emerging opportunities. For example, consideration could be given to the role of supplier contracts and the selection of KPIs in enforcing proactive design links between suppliers.

5.3 Recommendations arising from the midline evaluation

Considering these conclusions and lessons, we developed four recommendations, as presented in [Table 5.1](#). Each one is assigned a responsible owner, priority rating, and timeframe for completion. It is anticipated that the FCDO will prepare a management response to these recommendations.

5.4 Next steps for the evaluation

This evaluation is formative in nature and BASIC programme adaptations are anticipated in response. The evaluation was delivered during implementation concurrently with major strategic and budgetary changes to BASIC. We expect that the results of this study will be considered by the FCDO SPT and BASIC suppliers during implementation. The midline recommendations build on the recommendations provided at baseline. A summary of the evaluators’ understanding of actions taken against these earlier recommendations is summarised in Appendix A. As there was no management

response to the baseline recommendations, there was no formal accountability for action or reporting of follow-up actions. We therefore aim to confirm arrangements for monitoring the uptake of the midline recommendations with both suppliers and the FCDO.

Despite this, several of the observed changes at midline appear to be in line with the baseline recommendations. However, given the midline coincided with an extended inception period, it is hard to judge action on the previous recommendations relating to actions during implementation. Consequently, some recommendations remain relevant. Equally important changes in context – such as the reduced BASIC budget – led to a slightly modified position in midline. The links to the midline recommendations are also presented in Appendix A.

The endline evaluation will still increasingly consider the contribution of BASIC to outcomes and impacts of interest. This midline evaluation sought to assess BASIC implementation and performance, and any progress made since the baseline. The endline, which is currently scheduled to begin in October 2023 (although this timing may need to be reconsidered in light of the programme period extension) still represents our main assessment of the contribution of BASIC to key outcomes and impacts of interest, and its expected sustainability once the programme is concluded. The EQs used in the previous studies are expected to remain valid.

Given implementation delays, the endline will also need to consider process issues, as well as outcome areas less well evidenced to date. Delivery of both workstreams has been delayed. As such, there is a need for the endline to revisit process issues relating to implementation and coordination of both workstreams evaluated in the midline, the delivery and outputs of BASIC Research, and areas of the ToC where evidence was limited, such as the impact pathway relating to coordination and influencing at country and global level.

Our adaptations to the baseline methodology met their objectives and evidence collected at midline highlighted new areas where adjustment may be needed. We made several successful adjustments to our baseline methodology to improve participation in the study and its results (Appendix A). Again, our midline findings present opportunities to adapt our approach to help collect evidence to test the BASIC ToC. These include broadening the scope of key informants to include an increasing number of non-FCDO staff, reconsidering longitudinal case countries of focus if limited related BASIC activity is commissioned, and focusing our final learning case on coordination and influencing activities, given the relative evidence gap this study identified. These adaptations will be agreed with the FCDO prior to commencing the endline.

Table 5.1: Midline recommendations arising from the evaluation phase

Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority	Suggested timeline
1. Increase the contribution of BASIC to influencing other actors to adopt SP approaches in crises, alongside continued support to FCDO programme and policy development.	FCDO SPT in conjunction with the STAAR and Research suppliers	High	By mid-2023
<p>This strategic prioritisation should include the following elements:</p> <p>1.1 Building on the KELU strategy, FCDO and BASIC suppliers should clarify priority goals for areas of collective influence in the sector, particularly at global level. This should help inform the selection of relevant partners and assignments.</p> <p>1.2 STAAR should reinforce the planned KML activities to consolidate and disseminate key lessons drawn from across the various assignments.</p> <p>1.3 STAAR should also ensure that coordination assignments have clear linkages to influencing goals.</p> <p>1.4 STAAR and BASIC Research should prioritise the collection, recording, and reporting on the results of influencing work (including TA, coordination, and KML activities) to maximise an understanding of what works and further adapt the approach used during implementation.</p>			
2. Explore opportunities to build synergies between the BASIC workstreams.	STAAR and Research suppliers in conjunction with the FCDO SPT	High	By mid-2023
<p>Synergies should be explored through the following actions:</p> <p>2.1 FCDO, STAAR, and Research should define and explore potential synergies and their objectives and agree which ones make sense, bearing in mind a realistic level of ambition and transaction costs.</p> <p>2.2 Where appropriate, the use of staff across both workstreams should be encouraged. One example that could be considered is the provision of resources STAAR to request ad hoc Research analysis to support new STAAR assignments.</p> <p>2.3 Common approaches by Research and STAAR should be developed for shared thematic priorities. This should be piloted with climate (including coordination with the SPT climate lead), but also GESI and concurrent/interrelated plans to develop local capacity.</p>			
3. Adapt the scope and approach of BASIC to reflect evolving demand and the changing context.	FCDO SPT, in conjunction with the BASIC suppliers.	Medium	By end-2023

Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority	Suggested timeline
<p>This should include the following elements:</p> <p>3.1 FCDO SPT and STAAR should review in six months' time whether STAAR's approach to mainstreaming GESI is maintaining the high standard of support and advice established by SPACE.</p> <p>3.2 BASIC should remain flexible to support climate change activities outside FCAS settings, while managing the potential resource implications.</p> <p>3.3 FCDO SPT should revisit how sustainable financing options can be explored, including through climate-related work, as a sub-impact articulated in the ToC that has received limited dedicated attention to date.</p> <p>3.4 FCDO SPT should coordinate closely with humanitarian counterparts in the FCDO to ensure that the use of SP approaches in crises continue to be prioritised as a policy objective.</p>			
4. Ensure that BASIC continues to deliver good VFM.	FCDO SPT, BASIC suppliers.	Medium	By end-2023
<p>4.1 Both suppliers should report on their VFM metrics (per their VFM strategies and plans) in future quarterly reports.</p> <p>4.2 Suppliers should diversify delivery teams and support localisation by increasing use of local consultants, with the primary objective of increased effectiveness and sustainability.</p> <p>4.3 Any required amendments to enable BASIC delivery to continue until the end of March 2025 should be completed. In the case of Research, a no-cost extension is expected to account for sunk costs arising from its inception phase and represent good VFM. FCDO should also take careful account of the VFM implications in any decisions regarding further budget allocations and timeframes.</p> <p>4.4 FCDO SPT and the BASIC Research supplier should work together with FCDO Programme Commercial Delivery to ensure there is clarity over when contract amendments are required, the process, requirements, and feedback, to minimise risk of delays in approval.</p> <p>4.5 During the next year, the FCDO SPT should initiate discussions, including with other donors, on a successor programme to avoid a hard stop to BASIC activities.</p>			

6 Endnotes

¹ See Appendix A for a review of the follow-up to the recommendations made in the baseline evaluation report.

² Of the total BASIC budget commitments, £5 million of BASIC's budget is provided by the International Climate Fund as part of the FCDO's contribution to the Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership.

³ BASIC Business Case; DAI (2021). BASIC Coordination update meeting, Feb. 2021.

⁴ Just under £0.7 million has been allocated to resource the deliver the BASIC evaluation contract.

⁵ FCDO (2018). BASIC Business Case.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ FCDO (2018). BASIC Business Case.

¹⁰ These include the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain launched at the summit, the 2016 Wilton Principles, the 2017 UK Humanitarian Reform Policy, and the forthcoming UK aid strategy.

¹¹ Additional analysis of key trends in funding commitments can be found in Appendix B.

¹² An illustrative overview of these programmes is provided in Appendix A.

¹³ The count of assignments may not reflect the financial distribution of STAAR spend. This means the count of projects may not accurately reflect the allocation of STAAR spend. Updated records of financial allocations were requested by the evaluation team in September 2022.

¹⁴ They are, at country level, a political economy analysis (PEA) for the British High Commission (BHC) in Pakistan and, at global level, support to a note produced by the UK-funded REAP and a course produced for the FAO e-learning academy. The country-level assignment in the pipeline is a review of the evidence on SP and outcomes related to climate resilience and biodiversity commissioned by FCDO Zambia.

¹⁵ STAAR_003 Implementation Strategy Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (STAAR).

¹⁶ N=10; multiple coding was permitted. As such, percentages do not add up to 100 per cent.

¹⁷ GIZ had requested support in scoping options for a potential SP project in Kismayo, Somalia, to ensure SP-humanitarian linkages and gender responsiveness.

¹⁸ See the findings on EQ5 (VFM) for more details on the BASIC budget uncertainties and impact on programming.

¹⁹ Although it should be noted that at times they struggled to differentiate between SPACE and BASIC research.

²⁰ STAAR_001 - Knowledge Management and Learning Strategy.

²¹ STAAR_011 STAAR QPR Apr-June 2022 v2 clean.

²² STAAR_011 STAAR QPR Apr-June 2022 v2 clean.

²³ Research_065 FINAL QR1_Implementation_resubmission.

²⁴ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-international-development-provisional-uk-aid-spend-2021/statistics-on-international-development-provisional-uk-aid-spend-2021.

²⁵ Data based on commitments rather than actual disbursements.

²⁶ BASIC Research Quarter 2 Narrative Report (QR2).

²⁷ Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (STAAR): Period 1 Costed Workplan - Narrative.

²⁸ UK AID REAP Early action and the climate crisis – could social protection be a game changer?

²⁹ STAAR001 Knowledge Management and Learning Strategy.

³⁰ The Rapid Social Response is a multi-donor program established in 2009 to help the world's poorest countries by building effective SP systems, in partnership with the World Bank.

³¹ UNICEF system readiness tool 2022.

³² The Pakistan and Lebanon assignments were contracted through EACDS as a bridging mechanism following the conclusion of the previous TAS and SPACE contracts; however, there was some provision during the STAAR inception period for staffing assignments, with those for REAP and Ukraine badged as STAAR.

³³ EQ 4.3 analyses the uptake of SPACE/Technical Assistance publications at global level.

³⁴ As the programme is currently in procurement, it was not possible for the evaluation team to access the business case.

³⁵ Strategy documents identified were published by ECHO, ILO, UNHCR, UN Women, WFP, and the World Bank.

³⁶ An assessment of the adaptability and scalability of SP systems produced by the World Bank in collaboration with the UK-funded Centre for Disaster Protection and Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program.

³⁷ World Bank Group. Charting a course towards universal social protection: Resilience, equity, and opportunity for all. 2022. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/38031>.

³⁸ Although less than the budgeted allocation of £1.8 million due to reduced travel costs. The 2021/22 FCDO spending review process also reduced the BASIC Research 21/22 budget by £274,000.

³⁹ KII FCDO, Supplier. Management costs (fixed and flexible) are contained within core costs for STAAR and amount to 20.4 per cent of total contract value.

⁴⁰ KIIs Supplier.

⁴¹ KII Supplier.

⁴² STAAR, QR: April-June 2022, DAI.

⁴³ KIIs Suppliers.

⁴⁴ BASIC Research, Quarter 2 Implementation, 1 May to 31 July 2022, IDS.

⁴⁵ B022 assignment number.

⁴⁶ While Dev Tracker indicates that the programme's end date is March 2025, all supplier contracts presently end by 31 March 2024. Both suppliers do expect to receive a no-cost extension.

⁴⁷ Data provided combines updated spend data provided by FCDO SPT that was accurate as of July 2022, and Dev Tracker projections.

⁴⁸ Set out in STAAR's Monitoring Strategy, DAI, 1 August 2022.

⁴⁹ KIIs Suppliers.

⁵⁰ KIIs Suppliers, VFM monitoring and reporting plans.

⁵¹ KIIs Suppliers.

⁵² BASIC Research, Quarter 2 Implementation, 1 May to 31 July 2022, IDS.

⁵³ Research QR May-July 2022

⁵⁴ These three projects were a substantial way towards completion and have relatively small budgets.

⁵⁵ BASIC Research, Quarter 2 Implementation, 1 May to 31 July 2022, IDS.

⁵⁶ Country Case Study Yemen.

⁵⁷ STAAR, QR: April-June 2022, DAI,

⁵⁸ BASIC Research, Quarter 2 Implementation, 1 May to 31 July 2022, IDS.

⁵⁹ World Bank, Adaptive social protection building resilience to shocks. 2020. <https://bit.ly/3N46riJ>.

⁶⁰ KIIs Supplier.
⁶¹ Country Case Study (Nigeria)
⁶² KIIs Learning Case Study, KIIs FCDO.
⁶³ KIIs FCDO, Suppliers.
⁶⁴ IDS, Research Component, Inception Report.
⁶⁵ KIIs Suppliers, FCDO.
⁶⁶ KIIs Suppliers.
⁶⁷ KIIs Suppliers, FCDO.
⁶⁸ KIIs Suppliers.
⁶⁹ KIIs Suppliers.
⁷⁰ KIIs Supplier.