



# Terms of Reference

## Research Project on the LEARN Consortium

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**Country of program:** Syria

**Location:** Home-based, with travel to Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)

**Duration:** 2 – 4 weeks for literature review (part one of the research project); duration for the second part of the research project to be determined following the literature review

## 1. Description of the LEARN

The LEARN Consortium is a partnership between four (4) International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), and two (2) national partners. A three-year program with possible extension, it leverages the respective expertise of the I/NGO partners to deliver health, shelter, multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA), protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services to the most vulnerable communities in North East Syria (NES). The main activities being implemented are related to the rehabilitation and running of Primary Healthcare Centers (PHCs), health posts (HP), hospitals and mobile medical units (MMUs), provision of WASH services, private shelter repairs, distribution of essential kits (new arrivals, hygiene, shelter, winterization; in-kind or through cash-for-kits), provision of MPCA, and protection services. A livelihoods component is being added to the ongoing programming from October 2021. The program incorporates a Rapid Response Mechanism and supports Humanitarian Coordination groups for the NES response while also mainstreaming protection across the different sectors. LEARN's goal is achieved through an integrated, multi-sectoral approach which addresses the emergency needs of 550,000 of the most vulnerable conflict-affected men, women and children across NES.

The implementing partners are based in, and implement throughout, NES. The Consortium Management Unit (CMU) is the oversight structure for the program that aims to facilitate smooth coordination, oversee program delivery, lead donor communications, ensure compliance and manage risk. The CMU is led by the Chief of Party (Jordan) and Deputy Chief of Party (Erbil/NES), together with a team of Specialists.

During this three-year period, the Consortium has been learning lessons about set-up of a consortium, efficiency and effectiveness, innovative ways of working, governance and how a consortium can be leveraged to achieve more for communities than through individual partners working alone. This has been documented in internal reports to the donor, lessons learnt processes, and other initiatives; however, due in part to the strict no-visibility environment in NES, there has not been opportunity for consolidated, analyzed and disseminated learning for the benefit of the broader humanitarian community. The purpose of this research project is to look at what would be of value to share more widely, within the donor and I/NGO visibility restrictions.

## 2. Background and Context

LEARN's operational context in NES is dynamic and has been evolving since its inception in September 2018. In early 2019, NES witnessed a steady decline in conflict activity since the group known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was expelled from the region. This decline in conflict activity led residents who had previously been displaced to return to their communities of origin. At the same time, the governorates of Ar-Raqqa, eastern Aleppo, Deir-ez-Zor and Al-Hasakeh continued to host a large number of internally displaced populations. The displaced population mainly live in camps, informal settlements, collective centers or private shelters. Residents of NES faced a new humanitarian crisis after the escalation of conflict in October 2019; this resulted in significant displacement from the region, both internally and towards the Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI). More than 190,000 women, children and men had been displaced, mostly from Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa. Critical infrastructure, including health and water treatment facilities, was damaged or closed. Since mid-December 2019 conflict has continued at a reduced level in comparison to October/early November. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in public health measures being taken in NES to control the spread of infection causing disruption in program implementation towards the end of LEARN's Phase I (Oct 2018 – Sept 2020) award.

To date, in the LEARN Phase II implementation period between October 2020 and July 2021, whilst the security context has remained relatively calm there have been two defining contextual factors: COVID-19 and the worsening economic situation. As of 25 May 2021, 17599 cases and 717 deaths due to COVID-19 have been registered according to the Self-Administration (SA). However, concerns remain about the validity of this data with under-reporting still a major issue. Recent weeks have seen an increase in cases as the 'second wave' takes hold and intermittent lockdowns are being enforced. Such restrictions are disrupting not only the access to basic services but also the economy which had already been negatively impacted by external factors including sanctions, the Lebanese economic and banking crisis, SYP devaluation and the protracted nature of the humanitarian and political crisis in Syria. The relative calm of the period combined with the deterioration of

the socio-economic situation have contributed to the small to medium scale population movements across NES, especially as people search for jobs in the area. Since end of May 2021, the water levels in the main water sources are also depleting which may pose a health and hygiene risk to the population as well as lead to further degradation of food security and the livelihoods status of the population, in an economic landscape dominated by food production.

### 3. Purpose

The aim of the research project and written output is communication with external stakeholders about the LEARN consortium, and its lessons learnt, for the benefit of the broader humanitarian community. To a certain extent, this will also be used for internal purposes when reflecting on potential development of LEARN programming (scope, nature, levels of integration).

The purpose of this research project may also take into consideration any LEARN final evaluation recommendations when completed in October. Consideration of the LEARN consortium may also take into account the LEARN's strategy of:

- comprehensive service delivery to communities (i.e. integrated programming) with health being at centre-stage;
- ability to rapidly deploy lifesaving services in an emergency;
- existence as a humanitarian frontline partnership, with demonstrated flexibility to fill urgent gaps;
- value added in the most "hard to reach" areas, areas that have often seen recent conflict and where the most vulnerable population reside (e.g. IDPs);
- "field-up" consortium that values coordination, collaboration and partnership;
- investment in NES-wide coordination mechanisms;
- programming based on lessons learnt; and,
- a multi-sectoral, needs-based, people-centered approach.

The research project findings will be disseminated for use by the LEARN partner organizations, the donor and other relevant stakeholders such as working groups and other INGOs.

### 4. Scope and methodology

The research project will be split into two discrete parts:

**1. Part one:** External literature review of existing literature around consortia in the humanitarian space e.g. impact, lessons learnt from different stakeholders' perspectives, effective ways of working, etc. (exact scope of review to be discussed in advance between the researcher and LEARN). This will aim to identify gaps and trends in the literature.

The methodological approach and timeline for the literature review (part one) will be broadly outlined by the researcher in the proposal and refined in detail working with the Chief of Party. The literature review design should take into account that it will later be the basis for the following guiding questions:

- a. What gaps have been identified in the existing literature that could be interesting to meet through an analysis of and learning from the LEARN?
- b. What key trends or assumptions have been identified and does the LEARN support (or not) such trends?

It is intended, following the completion of the literature review by the researcher, that the research questions(s) for part two will be defined by LEARN using the outcome of the literature review and the guiding questions.

**2. Part two: Once possible focused research question(s) have been developed by LEARN following the literature review, part two of this TOR for the research project will be updated with more specific requirements and published.** It will be open for the researcher from part one to discuss continuing with part two, but it is not expected from the part one researcher that they will remain for part two.

For part two, ideas brought by the part two researcher on the research question(s) are encouraged and the researcher shall refine and seek approval for the final part two methodological approach, likely through a written proposal followed by a meeting with LEARN. Keeping in mind a realistic scope of work, the part two research will be LEARN-centered and is not expected to be comparative in nature (with other similar consortia in size and scope or other consortia led by SI/implemented in NES). While proposing the approach, the researcher needs to consider the COVID-19 related situation. The methodological approach could include:

#### **Document Review**

- Relevant secondary literature, such as working groups or other agency reports
- Project documents – such as proposal, monthly and semi-annual reports, beneficiaries' feedback (FCRM reports, satisfaction survey reports etc), etc.

#### **Primary Data Collection**

- Key informant interviews with LEARN staff
- Key informant interviews with representatives of different stakeholders e.g. NES Forum, donor, SI HQ, and coordination actors.

The researcher should also investigate appropriate forums for sharing the research for the benefit of the wider humanitarian community, and make some suggestions to the Consortium.

For both part one and part two, the researcher(s) shall adhere to the data protection guidelines of SI. The researcher(s) should ensure familiarity with the unique visibility requirements linked to NES for each LEARN partner organization and the donor. These are mandatory to comply with, and the output must also be in compliance with such requirements. Further, the donor has specific requirements about intellectual works published with which outputs must comply.

### **5. Deliverables and timeline**

Deliverables:

- **Part one: Literature review; brief findings presentation** to be delivered to internal stakeholders (governance bodies of LEARN (Steering Committee and Technical Advisory Group); SI HQ)

The proposed timeframe is **2 – 4 weeks' work**.

- **Part two:** To be determined once specific research project questions are identified following the literature review. Deliverables may include a **research paper; article(s)** (topics of interest will be discussed taking into account ideas brought by, and the forums investigated by, the researcher); **brief findings presentation** as above under part one; and, **materials and data** (including interview transcripts/summaries/recordings, photo documentation, site observation records, etc. to be provided to the Chief of Party).

The proposed timeframe will be estimated when this TOR is updated for part 2 following identification of the research questions.

For both part one and part two, the timeline can be proposed by the researcher and is to be pre-agreed, along with details of travel and resource needs (HR, documentation, logistics) proposed by the researcher, with the Chief of Party. It will be beneficial if the part one researcher is available for travel some time during August or September 2021.

These deliverables are to be:

- prepared in English
- submitted to LEARN electronically via e-mail: [cop@learnconsortium.org](mailto:cop@learnconsortium.org) and [dcop@learnconsortium.org](mailto:dcop@learnconsortium.org).

### **6. Logistics**

The research project (part one and part two) is unpaid but with the costs of any flights, insurance, accommodation, local transport through a LEARN driver and a living per diem while abroad paid for while in KRI by the Consortium. LEARN will also provide a stipend for printing and other directly relevant expenses

while in the researcher's home country as proposed by the researcher(s) and pre-approved in advance by the LEARN.

The LEARN will support logistics arrangements, such as flight bookings. The LEARN partners will facilitate access as needed and agreed with the researcher(s). LEARN will share necessary security and access information. The researcher(s) will be embedded with the LEARN Consortium Management Unit in Erbil/KRI. As such all security and administrative regulations (provided in a briefing upon arrival by the Deputy Chief of Party) will be followed by the researcher(s).

## 7. Management & Reporting Line

- Position under the hierarchical supervision of: Chief of Party and Deputy Chief of Party while Chief of Party is on leave

## 8. Researcher profile

The researcher is expected to demonstrate the following experience and qualifications:

### Essential:

- At least an undergraduate degree in a related field; a masters degree is preferable
- Evidence of developing and applying relevant research methodologies, with a background in qualitative research
- Evidence of similar research in the recent past (desirable for part one; essential for part two)
- Understanding of the humanitarian principles and humanitarian standards
- Strong experience in document review, interviewing, and identifying, analysing and interpreting research source materials
- Ability to work under pressure and a high degree of flexibility, courtesy and professionalism
- Highest standard of accuracy and attention to detail
- The ability to self-supervise, organize and prioritise in order to meet deadlines
- Excellent spoken and written communication skills in English. Translation if needed will be covered by the LEARN

### Desirable:

- Experience working in connection with conflict or post-conflict environments
- Experience in conducting research in remote settings
- Knowledge of the context and the conflict in NES

## 9. Application process

Researchers are requested to send a CV, cover letter and two recent relevant samples to [cop@learnconsortium.org](mailto:cop@learnconsortium.org) and [dcop@learnconsortium.org](mailto:dcop@learnconsortium.org). CVs will be reviewed on a rolling basis.