



Scope of Work for Consultancy Firm to provide a Comprehensive Multi-Sector Needs Assessment in North East Syria

Key Sectors: Food Security, Livelihoods, Social Cohesion, WASH, Protection and Capacity Building, Humanitarian Response.

Multi Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) Locations:

- **Al-Hasakeh:** Shadadah, Areeshah, Markada, Al-Hasakeh sub-districts.
- **Ar-Raqqa:** Ar-Raqqa, Karama, Ath-Thawra;
- **Deir ez-Zor:** Kisreh, Sur sub-districts.

Timeframe / Schedule: Data Collection January/February 2023, with final deliverables expected 31st March, 2023.

Population Groups of Interest: IDPs in host communities; returnees, refugees in host communities; non-displaced communities; returnees in host communities; rural and urban populations; youth; women and girls; people living with a disability.

1. Northeast Syria (NES) situational overview

Now in its 12th year, the Syrian conflict has created one of the world's largest, most complex, and most consequential humanitarian crises. The war has devastated the country's economy, the Syrian pound has lost much of its value, international trade is drastically reduced and the recent drought also worsen the humanitarian needs. UNHCR estimates that 14.6 Syrians are in need, a 9% increase from the previous year, and that 6.9 million Syrians are IDPs, with nearly 2.6 million settled in NES.

The Syrian civil war's socio-political upheaval and the displacement of half the population has destroyed the country's social fabric, altered gender dynamics, and continuously created new lines of conflict. As well as socio-economic conflicts involving individuals, communities, and clans in both urban and rural areas. As stated in the Syrian Centre for Policy Research (SCPR) June 2017 Report, Syria's overall Social Capital Index (SCI) score reduced by 30% when compared to the pre-crisis period. The loss of social networks within Syria is greatest in governorates highly impacted by armed conflict and displacement: Ar-Raqqa, Idlib, Al Hasakeh, and Deir-ez-Zor.

Environmental issues are increasingly severe. For example, in 2021, NES faced unprecedented water scarcity, as a result of historically low rainfall levels. This has created wider issues - for example, most herders in NES have downsized their livestock - by up to 90% in certain cases, with the lack of adequate fodder being a primary reason for such reductions. This poses a grave threat not only to families who depend on livestock but to meat and dairy supply in the local area.

2. Objectives of the Assessment

This assessment aims to deliver updated information on the needs and priorities of crisis-affected populations (IDP, returnee and non-displaced groups) for Mercy Corps and the work of the organization to support vulnerable communities in Northeast Syria (NES). This information will contribute to a more targeted and evidence-based response including on continuing humanitarian needs as well as looking forward to early recovery and development programming.

The assessment should aim to address gaps in the geographic coverage of up-to-date information on the humanitarian and early-recovery situation across NES and provide programmatic recommendations for delivery, adaptation and learning.

Specifically, Mercy Corps Syria wishes to identify differences in urgent and needs in the following areas: WASH, water shortage and sustainability, food, livelihoods and markets, protection and social cohesion. The organisation wishes to understand the differences in needs between and within population groups, and the availability of services to fill these needs across vulnerability profiles in NES. The focus will be on profiling identified sub-districts and informing future Mercy Corps programming particularly with respect to supporting the alignment and integration of programming in geographical areas, allowing for prioritization of needs, access and other considerations. Mercy Corps is also interested in the specific contextualized gender and disability needs of each assessed location.

As well as using the results of this assessment for future program design, quality improvement and coordination of current programming, Mercy Corps aims to share the information with sector Working Groups, and to more closely work with communities in designing their own solutions for building resilience to the current crisis.

3. Research Questions

The overarching research questions are as follows:

1. How do IDPs, returnees and non-displaced communities experience and exhibit needs, access, priorities and vulnerabilities within and between the following sectors?
 - Food Security;
 - Livelihoods;
 - Cash and Markets;
 - NFI;
 - Water security and WASH;
 - Social Cohesion and conflict; and
 - Gender, inclusion and protection
2. What are the patterns and differences of needs with respect to these identified sectors and how do cultural, religious, ethnic, geographical, residence status, age, gender and disability variables explain and determine needs?
 - a. How can we better understand vulnerabilities in order to improve our targeting and response?
 - b. How are needs changing and why?
 - c. How are individuals and communities coping and adapting?
 - d. How are cultural and social norms being experienced and changing e.g. with respect to male/female responsibilities and autonomy?
 - e. To what extent do households (HHs) have multisectoral and overlapping needs?

3. To what extent are actors in our identified geographies currently responding to the needs in the identified sectors and what gaps remain or are emerging?
 - a. What is the current state of service provision, availability and use – e.g. water and electricity (mapping) and what is access like for key population groups?
 - b. What are the levels of satisfaction with NGO providers and what can be improved? How is information shared and used with respect to NGO services?
 - c. How are participants and communities engaging with duty bearers and decision makers?
 - d. How do communities and participants access information on issues such as, but not limited to, available services or presence of aid agencies?

2.2. Assessment Criteria

The following guiding principles and values must be applied:

Independence: Mercy Corps will contract an independent external vendor to conduct a high-quality assessment and we will expect the successful vendor to apply independence and objectiveness in their work.

Project management: Mercy Corps expects vendors to demonstrate how they will manage this assessment project with respect to time, staff and quality.

Methodology: Prospective vendors must demonstrate a comprehensive methodology which includes, but is not limited to, a strong rationale for the selection of quantitative and qualitative methods, approaches to sampling, an understanding of bias and limitations. Please note the requirement for inclusive representation and suggested approach.

Usefulness: One of the objectives is to document sufficiently detailed information on the immediate and medium-term needs of our targeted populations, which can be used to inform planning and decisions in the ongoing programming. Mercy Corps will, as a result, require the contracted vendor to present findings in an easily digestible format that enhances the usefulness of findings as well as conduct a workshop with relevant teams to collectively discuss conclusions, identify recommendations. This will underpin the development of an action plan based on the findings.

Inclusive Representation: The proposed methodology should aim to support representational and active participation of communities (women and girls, men and boys PwD, and marginalized groups) as much as possible within the whole cycle of their work (sampling strategies, data collection tool design, during primary data collection, analysis and reporting).

All work should be undertaken with due consideration for:

- Protection, gender and inclusion, especially when exploring potentially sensitive topics such as social cohesion or tension, gender dynamics, accessibility, child needs, and/or conflict in communities.
- Safeguarding and Do No Harm: any vendor should demonstrate their commitments to both safeguarding and the Do No Harm approach.
- Informed Consent: All respondents should have the opportunity to receive appropriate information about areas including, but not confined to: the purpose of the assessment, the intended use of the data collected, withdrawal of consent, and, where possible, the key findings. Data Protection is taken very seriously and Mercy Corps expects to see all vendors' Data Protection policies.

Quality: Mercy Corps expects all its contractors to deliver to a high standard and the bid should contain information about how the quality of key outputs, such as reporting, is maintained by a contractor. The selected contractor will be expected to share examples of previous reports. Mercy Corps has included with this tender the assessment tool currently used to evaluate quality reporting.

Note:

- Mercy Corps will not pay for work that does not meet agreed quality and ethical standards.

- Mercy Corps may share key findings with community representatives in locations where primary data collection occurred for their input prior to report completion.

2.3. Potential risks and challenges

As there is an ongoing conflict in Syria, there are potential risks and challenges should be considered in implementing this assessment. All assessment locations will be assessed and cleared by Mercy Corps' Security team, and risk mitigation measures will be shared. Risks discussed should include:

1. Limited or no access to certain locations targeted in this program due to the risk profile and access constraints.
2. Challenges in data collection from beneficiaries in certain areas due to conflict dynamics, security risks (for the beneficiaries and data collectors), gender norms and data security issues.

4. Methodology

Specific information about approach and methods for the identified research questions along with limitations must be provided in the tender document submitted by interested parties. The proposal should propose, as appropriate, qualitative/quantitative/mixed methods that are in line with best practices, while also feasible within the timeframe. The choice of data collection, analysis methods and tools should be guided by the research questions and fully justified. The findings must be statistically valid and based on a representative sample.

Where proposed, sampling strategies should be inclusive and representative as much as possible. Respondents should include females and males, various ethnic groups, various age groups and locations, and account for accessibility issues of people with special needs. In order to have more reliable data, all surveys are planned to be conducted in-person through face-to-face interviews. Findings should be built upon a wide range of evidence sources and data should be triangulated within the context to produce a credible assessment of needs in NES.

Participatory Assessments: Mercy Corps is particularly interested in involving the community in understanding their own needs and proposing solutions that will be the most effective. To that end, a two-stage data collection process is suggested: firstly, primary household data or community level information is collected to build an understanding of needs for certain population groups; and a second stage presentation of findings back to communities is combined with a discussion of possible solutions that might be relevant for each community.

The selected vendor is encouraged to use the following data sources in the proposed methodology. Percentages are indicative only to guide the level of emphasis that should be placed on the use of each source when answering research questions. However, Mercy Corps is open to the use of other key information sources as proposed by the vendor.

Secondary Data (10%) – Primarily for tool design

- a. OCHA 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview – OCHA Humanitarian Response Data;
- b. IMMAP Population Monitoring Initiative;
- c. REACH documentation e.g. REACH Rapid Needs Assessment in Northern Hasakeh;
- d. Mercy Corps Humanitarian Access Team (HAT) documents;
- e. Cluster sector standardized tools for needs assessment and the cross-agency strategy concept note;

- f. Internal Mercy Corps data and reports; and
- g. Other documentation as appropriate.

Note:

The intention is **not** to collect the same data as discussed in the above and other sources, but to expand with more detail at the sub-district level for Mercy Corps targeted locations/sectors and to identify the extent to which these needs are currently being met by available services. Enough time should be allocated for the secondary data analysis as these findings will help to identify gaps in knowledge and help craft the tools for the primary data collection. Spending enough time here will reduce the time and resources that will be spent during the primary data collection

Primary Data

- a. Household Surveys (30%) and Community Mixed Methods Assessment (KIIs and FGDs; 45%):
 - i. Stage 1 – Needs Assessment;
 - ii. Stage 2 – Sensitization of Results & Participatory Solution Building.
- b. Cluster Actors / Humanitarian Actors / MC Staff (KII; 15%); and
- c. Others (10%).

5. Research team:

The successful vendor should have a team of experts with the following essential profiles and qualifications:

Essential: The successful team should have:

1. Design and methodological expertise:
 - a. Solid knowledge and understanding of comparative research methods and social research ethics;
 - b. Good knowledge of assessment and evaluation methods and techniques, including a thorough understanding of data collection, methodologies and design, and strong qualitative and quantitative research skills. The successful vendor should demonstrate how their approach is adapted to different and diverse contexts.
2. Contextual and sector knowledge:
 - a. Solid and diversified track record of experience in emergency, protection and livelihoods programming in remote management context;
 - b. Recent contextual knowledge about Syria, particularly Northeast Syria; and
 - c. Expertise in gender and social inclusion dynamics in the context of Syria and demonstrated knowledge of and practical experience with gender integration and conflict sensitivity analysis.
3. Linguistic and functional competencies:
 - a. Fluency in Arabic and English, and team members collecting data should speak both Kurdish and Arabic; and
 - b. Excellent report writing, data management, analysis and interpretation abilities, and expertise in data visualization.

The composition of the assessment team should be gender balanced and sufficiently ethnically diverse to enable complete coverage of the different aspects of this task as set out in these terms of reference. The vendor may subcontract local Syrian consultants for primary data collection, however, such hires must be proficient in both quantitative and qualitative data techniques including analysis.

All team members should also have received training on protection/PSEA/safeguarding and/or gender sensitivity, and ethics. The successful vendor will be expected to provide assurances regarding safeguarding and information on protection referrals for interviewees.

Tenders for this consultancy should also include CVs for all members of the proposed evaluation team and **THREE** examples of quality work.

6. Tender Proposal and Deliverables

The Tender Proposal must include at minimum:

1. Methodology: detailed proposal of methodology (data collection methods, sampling techniques, inclusion of key populations such as PwD)
2. Organizational Profile, Map of Area Access and CVs for all members of proposed evaluation team (explaining language skills and over all experience)
3. Proposed budget (including costs for travel and accommodation of evaluation team and any sub-contracts) - Please note that logistical support from Mercy Corps will **not** be provided for travel and in-country appointments.
4. At least THREE Sample reports of similar work conducted in the past three years.
5. Work plan breakdown and demonstrate the limitations and coping strategies that will guarantee the delivery of stated services within a given timeline (12 weeks max).
6. Data protection, safeguarding and Do No Harm policies.

Contract Deliverables:

Inception Report along with finalized tools: An inception report should be produced outlining the consultants understanding of the assessment and the proposed methodology. The inception report should be approved by Mercy Corps before any field work commences.

Materials/Data: Electronic copies of all assessment documents, materials, and data collected / analyzed, including translations of qualitative data.

Findings Summary: A 5-page summary of lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations (Word Document / PowerPoint Presentation)

Final Report (maximum 30 pages, excluding annexes): Assessment findings must be articulated clearly and in a way that maximizes the potential for these findings to inform decision-making. Mercy Corps is interested in separate sub-district profiles with consideration for each thematic area, in addition to a summary report. The final report should also include a separate gender assessment. There should be clear recommendations for integration of programming per sub-district.

The final report should be visually engaging and in line with Mercy Corps brand guidelines. The evaluation report must also include limitations of the evaluation findings and guidance on how to interpret these findings, preferably as an annex.

Mercy Corps will have primary ownership of all deliverables.

Mercy Corps will:

1. Make available all appropriate documentation and resources as requested;
2. Support the coordination of key informant interviews; and
3. Coordinate timely feedback.

PowerPoint presentation: covering the key findings and programmatic recommendations as well as challenges, limitations and learning.

7. Scoring Evaluation

Trade-Off Method

Mercy Corps Tender Committee will conduct a technical evaluation which will grade technical criteria on a weighted basis (each criterion is given a percentage, all together equaling 100% (30% financial and 70% technical). Vendors' proposals should consist of all required technical submittals so a Mercy Corps committee can thoroughly evaluate the technical criteria listed herein and assign points based on the strength of a technical submission.

Mercy Corps' award criteria shall be based on the proposal's overall "value for money" (quality, cost, delivery time, etc.) while taking into consideration donor and internal requirements and regulations. Each individual criterion has been assigned a weighting prior to the release of this tender based on its importance to Mercy Corps in this process.

Eligible candidates may be invited for a panel interview with Mercy Corps team members prior to final decision on selection.

Vendors with the best score will be accepted as the winning offeror(s), assuming the price is deemed fair and reasonable.

Mercy Corps Contact Point: Zahid Khan (Performance and quality manager NES)

Proposal Submissions should be titled: ORGANIZATION-Proposal MSNA-NES-DATE