

Call for Support – Non-state Armed Groups and Covid-19

Introduction

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is an independent, humanitarian, non-profit, non-governmental organisation which provides assistance, protection and durable solutions to displacement affected populations.

NRC is seeking a short-term consultancy to work between August and November 2020, to support the Access Community of Practice and related Country Offices in developing an understanding of Non-state Armed Groups (NSAG) behaviour amid the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. This research will help to develop an understanding of the impact NSAGs have on humanitarian access as well as informing NRCs engagement strategies.

Rationale / Background

In June 2020 NRC launched a 'Future of Access' strategy review process which identified several priorities for focus over the coming strategy period including the ongoing ambition of strengthening its capacity to work in Hard to Reach Areas (H2R). Building on this, the Access Community of Practice has led discussions on how to better understand and strengthen coordination with armed actors on the process of aid delivery, and how to work with communities to reduce vulnerability and exposure to violence; necessary areas of work in order to be able to stay and deliver.

NRC's investment in building access negotiation capacity within the humanitarian community is fundamental to improving the ability to operate in areas controlled by NSAG. NRC prioritized understanding of armed groups to inform and define its engagement and negotiations strategies. The strategy discussions have highlighted that more can be done to ensure NRC's effective engagement of Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG) in order to facilitate the delivery of assistance in areas under their control.

Covid-19 presents a unique opportunity to identify practices and behaviours of NSAGs, and hence provide operational recommendations for humanitarian agencies to engage with these groups. NRC will build on its presence and localized understanding of hard to reach areas, its expertise in humanitarian access and negotiations and global analytical capacity to develop clear trends analysis and recommendations based on research of NSAG behaviour during the pandemic.

There is growing evidence that NSAGs are playing an increasing role during the pandemic by imposing different directives, responses and combat actions in their areas of influence (H2R) where state presence is highly limited. Restrictions imposed by NSAGs in the areas where they operate are likely to remain in place after the pandemic.

This situation adds additional layers of complexity to the humanitarian access landscape and may increase the protection risks to individuals and communities in the field and increase the security risks for humanitarians at the operational level. In some cases, it can also hinder the chances of the people in need to access basic services and can make it more difficult for humanitarian actors to access and provide services.

Apart from stopping the spread of the virus, the motivations behind such restrictions and impositions, are not clear yet. Whether they are for reinforcing their illicit activities to attain military ambitions, to establish increasing control over the population, to gaining power and influence (i.e. role of armed groups as support structures, enhance the perception of legitimacy), remains to be fully understood.

Scope of Work

Initially, this research will focus on the Country Offices of Colombia and Afghanistan. It`s aim is to learn from NSAG behaviour and motivations for such behaviour during covid-19 pandemic and trough this, inform best practices in terms of engagement with NSAG in future.

Having a clear idea of the motivations behind the restrictions will allow NRC to strengthen its analytical capacity and develop clear trends analysis and policy recommendations for humanitarian access in volatiles and dynamic conflict-affected contexts. Consequently, this document aims to answer the following co-related inquiries (1) What are the positions and motivations behind NSAGs behaviours? (2) What is the impact that these new measures have and will have on humanitarian access? (3) What are the key recommendations for the development of evidence based, robust engagement strategies (based on the answers to the previous questions)?

Restrictions imposed by NSAGs in the areas where they operate are likely to remain after the pandemic, impacting the humanitarian access dynamics in H2R areas for the foreseeable future. Therefore, answering the aforementioned questions will allow NRC to predict new dynamics of humanitarian access in order to provide relevant and contextualized advice for humanitarians and for building/strengthening access capacity and strategies.

Achieving the purpose of this consultancy will require the following activities:

1. **Conduct a desk review** of the available data and information relating to restrictions imposed by NSAGs in the context of Covid-19. This will be conducted with the support of the Country Office (CO) focal point(s) and in constant communication with Regional Access Advisor.
2. Building on the findings from the desk review, **plan and coordinate efforts** with the CO focal point(s) and Regional Access Advisor who will have the understanding of how the process can be most effectively launched and if there are specific or contextual issues that should be considered. CO focal point(s) will be mostly involved in the provision of context specific information and facilitation.
3. **Create a methodology for the collection of in country data and information.** How will the methodology be rolled out? What groups will be asked? How will the data be collected? What format will the methodology take? Will different methods be used to ensure all voices are heard effectively?
4. **Conduct data/information collection and analysis.** The analysis of data, led by the consultant and supported by the CO focal point(s) and Regional Access Advisor, should include appropriate visualizations and summary of findings.
5. **Draft a final report.** to be drafted by the consultant with the support of the CO focal point(s) and Regional Access Advisor. The report must include a description and justification of the methodology, a breakdown and description of the findings and identify any gaps in information that may impact the reliability of the data. It will also include the consultant's recommendations for future NRC direction based on the findings of the study and their professional advice. This step should involve coordination with the ongoing development of NRC's global NSAG engagement policy, as well as CO-level recommendations. Recommendations should include proposed short to medium term actions for NRC COs to enhance NSAG contextual understanding and engagement.
6. **Lead a workshop for RO, CO and Access CoP that highlights the main findings** of the research and provides recommendations for the future of NRCs NSAG research and engagement strategies. This should include specific steps to be taken with assigned roles and responsibilities from the CO, developed in coordination with the CO focal point and Regional Access Advisor, in order to enhance

the way, the organisation manages access in relation to NSAGs. Given the current circumstances, this will most likely be conducted remotely.

Expertise Required

To achieve the deliverables expected, the following capacity is required:

- Ability to understand the complexities of specific contexts and develop a knowledge of the interplay in dynamics and communities to inform the methodology.
- Experience in development of research methodologies and relevant materials.
- Ability to draft a final report and country office recommendations based on information and data analysis.
- Ability to develop workshop materials and present findings remotely in an engaging and interactive manner.
- Comfortable operating in the initial phases of a project, where objectives and deliverables are iterative.
- Experience working remotely with minimal supervision, but with strong personal drive and communication skills needed for coordinating multiple moving pieces of work.
- Not necessary to have a strong NRC background, but strong understanding of the humanitarian INGO context.

Expression of Interest

Expressions of interest are requested with the following information:

- Suggested methodology for achieving deliverables
- Timeline for activities
- Background of individual proposed for project
- Proposed budget with number of working days

Expressions of interest should be emailed to co.tender@nrc.no by August 20, with the subject **REF. BOG2456: Non-state Armed Groups and Covid-19**