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The Asia Foundation Afghanistan
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS,
RFP: TAF-CONFLICT & FRAGILITY – AUG 2020 - 0025

Program Office: Strategic Programs & Regional Cooperation

Funding Opportunity Title: Study of COVID-19 Impacts on Vulnerable Groups in Afghanistan’s Border Areas

Announcement Type: Request for Proposal

Funding Opportunity Number: TAF- Conflict & Fragility – AUG -2020-025

Deadline for Applications: August 15, 2020 – 04:00 pm Kabul time via email in PDF format.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For all queries contact Procurement Department (country.afghanistan.procurement@asiafoundation.org). No personal visits or telephone calls shall be entertained.

THE PROCUREMENT UNIT

The Asia Foundation
House # 861, Street # 1
Shirpour, District-10, (Sub Street of Shirpour Project)
Kabul, Afghanistan.

The Foundation will not be responsible for proposals left at the main gate, reception, guard offices, or handed over to any TAF employee other than the procurement unit staff. **Owing to the COVID -19 situation we would encourage you to submit your proposal in soft version (PDF form) duly signed and stamped (Technical Proposal & Financial Proposal) at the following email - country.afghanistan.procurement@asiafoundation.org**

CHECKLIST OF DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN PROPOSAL

Documents / Content to be included in the RFP	Yes	No	Please explain if “No” has been checked.
Technical proposal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
CVs of key staff and core personnel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Summary table of similar projects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Letters of recommendation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implementation plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Risk assessment plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Budget and budget narrative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
M&E strategy/manual distinct from M&E Plan in body of technical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Gender equity policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Copies of last two years of annual audit reports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Bidder’s declaration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	



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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

The Asia Foundation (the Foundation) is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Informed by six decades of experience and deep local expertise, our work across the region addresses five overarching goals – strengthen governance and rule of law, empower women, expand economic opportunity, increase environmental resilience, and promote regional cooperation.

Headquartered in San Francisco, the Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries, including Afghanistan and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.

I . Project Background

COVID-19 in Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s fragile health system, developing economy and four decades of continuous conflict make it particularly unprepared to manage a major disease outbreak. As of 12 July, 34,451 Afghans across all 34 provinces were confirmed to have COVID-19, and 1,010 had died (Afghan Ministry of Public Health). It is widely acknowledged that these official figures vastly underreport the prevalence of the disease. National lockdown measures were extended on June 6 for three more months. UNOCHA expects cases to increase as community transmission escalates, with “grave implications for Afghanistan’s economy and people’s well-being”.

Economic impact. The economic consequences of the pandemic might be even greater than the public health crisis. Shortages have been driving up the price of basic foodstuffs in a country where 14 million people already suffered from food insecurity before the outbreak.¹ Humanitarian agencies are concerned about the effect of extended urban lockdowns on the most vulnerable households, who rely on casual daily labor and lack access to alternative income sources. The global economic slowdown caused by COVID-19 will have durable impacts in Afghanistan, a country heavily dependent on imports. Customs revenues dropped dramatically in March; a 90 percent reduction compared to the same month last year. This slump in trade affects local industries in the manufacturing, construction and services sectors, with predictably dire consequences on unemployment, consumption and therefore the demand for agricultural products. This contributes to a vicious circle that might durably affect every sector of the Afghan economy and deprive the government of the fiscal resources needed to respond.

COVID-19 and the war. The effects of the pandemic on the conflict, and reversely, are complex and difficult to predict. On one hand, the sense of urgency created by COVID-19 has helped generating momentum for the inter-Afghan peace talks. Vying with the Afghan government for legitimacy and access to international resources, the Taliban were quick to launch a public relations campaign promoting their actions to prevent COVID-19 in rural areas under their control. However, the Taliban ignored calls for a

¹ The average price of wheat flour increased by 18 percent between March and June while the cost of cooking oil and rice increased by 37 and 22 percent respectively (WFP).



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national ceasefire: except for a brief pause around Eid, the fighting has continued unabated, preventing humanitarian access to contested regions.

COVID-19 in Afghanistan's border regions. Afghan border cities have been major nodes in the spread of the pandemic. Population returns from Iran and Pakistan appear to have largely contributed to the initial outbreak,² and UNOCHA regards border crossings as key concern areas. Besides Kabul, the most affected provinces are Herat (the main gateway to Iran), Balkh (the main gateway to Central Asia), and Kandahar and Nangarhar near Pakistan. The border with Iran remains open and border crossings into Pakistan have opened sporadically, letting tens of thousands rush in unchecked.³ The economic impact of the pandemic will be felt particularly acutely in these regions, where a large share of the population directly or indirectly depends on the border trade for employment and income.

II. Objective

The Asia Foundation is commissioning a study of the *health and socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in Afghanistan's border areas*. The study will consist of a set of four case studies documenting the *direct and indirect effects of the crisis on the health and livelihoods of particularly vulnerable population groups*. The research will also address the ripple effects of the crisis on the ongoing conflict in selected areas, and risks related to communal and social tensions. From the vantage point of the case studies, it will tease out implications for border dynamics (trade, labor migration, population movements etc.). Findings will be used by The Asia Foundation to design programmatic responses, and to inform its work assisting policymakers to respond to the pandemic and mitigate its socio-economic effects.

III. Scope

The study will focus on the provinces of Herat, Kandahar and Nangarhar, as well as Kabul. The inclusion of Kabul offers a point of comparison as well as an opportunity to illustrate how social and economic dynamics in border areas and in the capital are interconnected.

Each case study will focus on a population group identified as particularly vulnerable to the pandemic and its knock-on social and economic effects, including risks of discrimination and social tensions (more detail below on the selection process). Selected groups could be socio-professional groups (e.g. small traders, migrant workers), geographic groups (population of a specific district) or groups defined by other variables (e.g. women, returnees, ethnic minority). One group will be selected in each province, for a total of four case studies including Kabul. Cases may include groups living in border districts (districts within Herat, Kandahar or Nangarhar that are adjacent to the border) and groups who do not live near the frontier but whose lives depend on border trade, labor migration etc. It should include a mix of rural and urban groups, and if feasible at least one group living in an area under predominantly Taliban control.

² Approximately 300,000 migrant workers returned from both countries between January and May (IOM).

³ The humanitarian community advised against border closures for fear that they will lead to large concentrations of migrant workers in makeshift camps (ICG).



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IV. Research questions

The research will be guided by the following set of questions (this set is indicative and will be further developed by The Asia Foundation and the implementing partner):

- **Health impacts:** What have been the health impacts of the crisis within selected communities, either via exposure to COVID-19 or because of challenged access to healthcare (overwhelmed healthcare facilities, discrimination etc.)? How have groups that were primarily dependent on neighboring countries for health services adjusting to the current situation? What is their degree of awareness and compliance with official guidance on COVID-19? What have they changed in the way they go about their daily routine (hygiene, social interactions etc.)?
- **Economic impacts:** How have selected groups been affected by the pandemic and resulting lockdowns and other mitigating measures? What has been the impact on their livelihoods, and what longer-term economic consequences can be anticipated? What coping strategies have they deployed to mitigate these effects? How do they negotiate the tension between compliance with official guidance (social distancing etc.) and economic pressures? How does this vary across selected groups, and how do their situations and attitudes compare to those of the broader population of selected provinces or the national population?
- **Conflict and social tensions:** In addition to economic impacts, are these groups exposed to risks of social marginalization or violence due to the COVID-19 crisis? What can be inferred from the case studies regarding broader risks of social or communal tensions in selected areas, or the pandemic's effects on the war and the peace process?
- **Border dynamics:** What do the case studies tell us about the effects of the pandemic on trade, labor migration, population movements and other border issues? What do they reveal about economic and other forms of interdependency between the capital and the periphery, and between Afghanistan's border areas and neighboring countries?

V. Methods and sequencing of activities

Activities will be sequenced in two phases. During an initial preparatory phase, the project will collect general information on local COVID impacts in Herat, Kandahar, Nangarhar and Kabul. This information will be used to identify and select case studies. During the second phase, the case studies will be implemented (along with perceptions surveys, if deemed useful).

Phase 1 activities (duration: 4 weeks) will include:

- a) A desk review of existing information on the health and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in Afghanistan, focusing on the research questions above, with particular attention to border areas generally and the provinces of Herat, Nangarhar, Kandahar and Kabul specifically. The desk review will include a mapping of existing or planned research by other organizations on similar themes, in order to avoid duplication.
- b) An initial round of interviews with informants in each province in order to identify issues and test assumptions pertaining to the research questions above. The interviews will be used to identify potential case studies. Informants may include officials, journalists, researchers, representatives of the business community and civil society, aid agencies etc.



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The information collected in Phase 1 will be summarized in an initial short report covering the following items:

- Rapid overview of available information on COVID-19 impacts in each province, including prevalence, health impacts and access to healthcare issues (one page overview + one page or 500 words maximum per province), and socio-economic aspects (one page overview + up to two pages or 1000 words per province), with a focus on the above research questions. The data will be disaggregated by sex and other variables where viable.
- Summary of measures taken by the national and provincial government, as well as by non-state actors such as the Taliban, to prevent/mitigate the pandemic in selected provinces, as well as an initial assessment of their effectiveness (one page overview + one page or 500 words maximum per province).
- Overview of local COVID-19 impacts on conflict dynamics and on other social tensions (one-page overview + up to one page or 500 words per province). This section will document how armed groups have responded to the pandemic locally, and whether the crisis has resulted in changes in tactics, in attitudes towards the peace process or in the frequency and intensity of attacks. It will also cover any relevant information related to social unrest, risks of communal violence, protests over social distancing and other measures or over the distribution of aid etc.
- Identification of population groups particularly vulnerable to COVID-19's health and socio-economic impacts (one-page overview + up to one page or 500 words per province). The report will ideally propose more than one option for each province. It will locate and define each proposed group, explain what makes them highly vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, briefly discuss how these groups have so far adapted or responded and whether they are receiving assistance. Finally, this section will also include a brief assessment of practical options to research each group: Is the group easily accessible? What options exist to overcome possible issues and challenges?

Finally, the report will make recommendations regarding Phase 2 design, including about the value of complementing case studies with a survey component. It will address any issue related to the design or implementation of the study, and make corresponding suggestions to adapt design, research questions or method. This report will be a stand-alone output mainly intended for internal use. It may be shared with a limited audience depending on content relevance and sensitivity.

Phase 2 activities (approximate duration: 8 weeks), pending the results of Phase One, are expected to include:

- a) 4 case studies (1 per province), each focusing on a population group identified as particularly vulnerable based on information collected in Phase 1. The case studies will rely primarily on qualitative interviews and, if/when deemed useful and relevant, FGDs. Respondents will include members and representatives of selected vulnerable groups, as well as people with relevant knowledge of their situation (community leaders, employers, NGO/CSOs providing assistance etc.). The sample of respondents should include a fair balance between men and women.
- b) In addition to the qualitative field work, the research design may include a survey instrument if deemed useful and relevant by The Asia Foundation and the implementing partner. A survey of a broader sample of selected population groups and/or the general population of the selected provinces could be used to provide background to the case studies, back up qualitative findings with empirical data, provide a reference for how vulnerable groups compare to the provincial



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average, or compare provincial results with national attitudes and views (national data on COVID-19 impacts are collected separately by The Asia Foundation as part of a national perceptions survey).

It will be the responsibility of the implementing partner to propose to The Asia Foundation a suitable implementation strategy for the case studies, including a) number and profile of respondents for each case study, b) approach to data collection with respect to social distancing and other COVID-19 prevention measures, and c) gender balance. The implementing partner will also advise on the value of a survey component. If a survey is indeed decided, the implementing partner will be responsible for exploring methodological options (in-person survey, phone survey etc.), as well as developing the questionnaire and sampling strategy.

Results from Phase 2 will be summarized in a report that will include the four case studies, along with a synthesis of key findings from the case studies and survey (if a survey is decided). Besides the health impacts and economic effects of the crisis on vulnerable groups, the report should also touch on the effects of the crisis on conflict, communal and social tensions, as well as the implications of the crisis for border trade, labor migration, population movements and other border issues.

VI. Research and COVID-19 prevention

Under the present circumstances, it is important to ensure that every step is taken to protect researchers and respondents and avoid that research activities contribute to the spread of the virus. The implementing partner must ensure compliance at all time with official guidance, as well as guidance from The Asia Foundation on social distancing and other prevention measures. When in-person interviews are not feasible or not recommended, the implementing partner must propose other options such as remote interviews via phone or teleconferencing applications. Possible issues attached to the use of remote field work methods, such as inherent selection biases, will be transparently acknowledged in technical proposals, implementation plans and final outputs.

VII. Deliverables

Because the design of Phase 2 will be dependent on Phase 1 results, the project will be procured as two separate contracts for each phase.

Under **Phase 1**, the implementing partner will deliver the following outputs:

- Report summarizing Phase 1 findings regarding COVID-19 impacts in each province, as described in greater detail above.
- Technical proposal and budget for Phase 2 activities, i.e. case studies and possibly survey work. The technical proposal should include a transparent assessment of options for conducting interviews while respecting guidance on social distancing and COVID-19 prevention in relevant areas, and for ensuring an adequate representation of women among case study interviewees and survey respondents.

Under **Phase 2**, the implementing partner is expected at this stage to deliver the following outputs:

- =4x case studies of COVID-19 socio-economic impacts on vulnerable groups in Herat, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kabul.



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- (If a survey component is proposed by the implementing partner and agreed by TAF), survey data including crosstabs and descriptive analysis of survey results.
- Summary report including an edited version of the four case studies and a discussion of key findings from the case studies and the survey data, as described above.

VIII. Timeline and budget

Phase 1 is expected to last up to four weeks starting in September 2020. Phase 2 (8 weeks) should be completed by the end of November 2020. Applicants will propose a budget and detailed implementation timeline for Phase 1. After completion of Phase 1, the selected implementing partner will prepare a separate budget and work plan for Phase 2. Budget and timelines will be based on the above Terms of Reference and discussions with The Asia Foundation.

IX. Eligibility, selection process and evaluation criteria

As stated above, Phase 1 and Phase 2 activities will be the object of two separate contracts. Applicants will propose a detailed technical and financial proposal for Phase 1, along with initial thoughts on possible approaches to Phase 2 and corresponding budget estimates (ballpark). Upon completion of Phase 1, the selected partner will produce a detailed technical and financial proposal for Phase 2, to be discussed with The Asia Foundation. It would be The Asia Foundation’s preference to partner with the same organization for both phases. However, we reserve the right to open Phase 2 to competitive bidding if the performance of the Phase 1 partner has not been satisfactory, if the Phase 2 technical and financial proposals submitted by the Phase 1 partner do not meet expectations, or for any other legitimate reason. Similarly, The Asia Foundation also reserves the right to not proceed with Phase 2 after completion of Phase 1.

Eligibility criteria:

- Applicants must be able to demonstrate successful past performance in mobilizing effectively a variety of research instruments, qualitative and quantitative, to deliver high-quality social science research in **Afghanistan** –(*most desirable*)
- Preference will be given to applicants with experience conducting sensitive research in Afghanistan’s border provinces, including in rural areas.

Review criteria:

Applicants must propose a detailed technical and financial proposal for Phase 1 that is responsive to these Terms of Reference. Proposals should also include initial thoughts on methods and approach to implementing Phase 2, and ballpark budget estimates. Full applications will be evaluated against the merit review criteria in the table below:

Merit review criteria	Points
Technical methodology and approach	40
Past performance and track record	25
Proposed team and organizational capacity	15
Cost efficiency	20
Overall rating (out of 100 points)	100

Technical Methodology and Approach: The technical approach must be responsive to the expectations set out in this ToR. To receive full points, the proposed methodology for Phase 1, and initial thoughts on Phase 2, should demonstrate expert understanding of the requirements and propose convincing



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responses that are well-tailored to the activity's requirements in all aspects. The level of detail and quality of information should provide a high degree of confidence in certainty of delivery, with due regard to the adjustments required to ensure the safety of researchers and respondents in the current context (security and COVID-19) and to the cost-effectiveness of the approach proposed. Particular attention will be paid to the applicants' proposed approach to ensuring an adequate representation of women's voices in this study.

Past Performance: Demonstrated track record and experience with studies of similar scope and size. Preference will be given to applicants with experience mobilizing effectively both quantitative and qualitative instruments in past research and/or experience conducting sensitive research in Afghanistan's border provinces, including in rural areas. Applicants shall provide references for a minimum of two examples of relevant past work.

Proposed personnel and organizational capacity: Evidence of the capability to undertake and accomplish the proposed activities, both at the individual and organizational levels, in the period of time prescribed. The applicant's process for quality assurance should be discussed. Any additional staff the applicant wishes to include should be discussed and will be evaluated here. The applicant shall provide CVs for key positions.

Cost Efficiency: The applicant is expected to submit a detailed budget for Phase 1, and indicative budget for Phase 2. This information will be reviewed for cost reasonableness, cost eligibility and thoroughness. Cost efficiency will be evaluated in comparing the budget to the proposed methodology, work plan and project deliverables. A good budget is one that is clear and reasonable and reflects best use of resources to deliver agreed objectives and deliverables.

The proposal must be in English and accompanied by the following documents:

- Technical proposal (**not to exceed 20 pages**). Please use 12-point times '**New Roman**' font, single-spaced, with appropriate margins;
- CVs of key staff and core personnel. Please limit individual CVs to three pages;
- Detailed implementation plan with clear milestones and deliverable showing major activities and how they will be implemented. Please include start up activities;
- Risk assessment plan;
- Detailed Budget along with budget narrative. Please use the prescribed budget template being provided along with this RFP.
- M&E strategy (preferably M&E manual).
- Gender equity policy;
- Copies of the agency's annual audit reports (Last two years, or if new organization written explanation)

X. Type of Award Instrument

The Foundation-AG will issue an Agreement (type of agreement to be determined) to the IP, which will be as per the Foundation's internal policies and will be governed by the Foundation's Rules, Regulations and Guidelines. Payments to the IP will be made as per the payment schedule, which will be negotiable and finalized while signing the agreement.



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XI. Other Terms and Conditions

The Foundation project-specific Marking and Branding regulations may apply to all deliverables produced from this assignment.

Finally, this RFP does not obligate the Foundation to award a contract nor does it commit TAF to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of a proposal. Award of a Contract under this ToR is subject to availability of funds and other internal Foundation approvals.

The Foundation reserves the right to visit the IP for due diligence purposes.

In case of you should be submitting your proposal in hard copy than it needs to be directed to:

THE PROCUREMENT UNIT

The Asia Foundation

House # 861, Street # 1

Shirpour, District-10, (Sub Street of Shirpour Project)

Kabul, Afghanistan.

Owing to the COVID -19 situation we would encourage you to submit your proposal in soft version (**PDF form**) duly signed and stamped (Technical Proposal & Financial Proposal) at the following email - country.afghanistan.procurement@asiafoundation.org

XII. TIME FRAME

The project work plan shall be designed in a way to allow the local partner organization one to two months to adequately prepare and perform all necessary preparatory activities.

Announcement of RFP	August 05, 2020
Last date for submission of Proposal	August 15, 2020 <u>Via email in PDF format no later than 04 :00 pm kabul time</u>
Proposal review and pre-contract negotiations	August 20, 2020
Agreement Signing off	August 25, 2020

XIII. TYPE OF AWARD INSTRUMENT

The Foundation-AG will issue a Service Agreement to the selected agency, which will be as per the Foundation’s internal policies and will be governed by the Foundation’s Rules, Regulations and Guidelines. Payments to the selected agency will be made as per the payment schedule, which will be negotiable and finalized while signing the agreement.

XIV. OTHER TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The Foundation project-specific Marking and Branding regulations may apply to all deliverables produced from this assignment. **Foundation reserves the right to visit final selected agency for due diligence purposes if required.**

ANNEXES:

ANNEX I -Proposal Budget Template with sample budget worksheet.

ANNEX II -CV template - for Proposed Staff