Covid-19 Learning, Evidence and Research Programme in Bangladesh (CLEAR)

Call for Expressions of Interest

April 2022

The Covid-19 Learning, Evidence and Research Programme in Bangladesh (CLEAR) is seeking to award up to 8 grants of a maximum value of GBP 100,000 each. These will support research organizations in generating new evidence on the secondary impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic to support the national governance and policy response, improving service delivery and promoting innovation.

If you are planning to submit an Expression of Interest please could you email clear.bgd@ids.ac.uk to notify us of your intention to submit and letting us know the main point of contact for your proposal. This will allow us to get in touch if we have any further information or guidance before the submission deadline.

Expressions of Interest should be submitted by 12pm midday (BST) Thursday 19th May 2022. Successful applicants will then be asked to submit full proposals for funding.

1. Introduction

1.1. About the CLEAR Programme

CLEAR is a two-and-half year research programme, launched in 2021, which aims to create a coalition of actors who can generate and champion research to support an evidence-informed Covid-19 response and recovery and improve preparedness to tackle future crises in Bangladesh. It is led by the UK-based Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in partnership with the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), and is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Bangladesh.

Aims:

- To deliver policy relevant Covid-19 research and evidence tailored to Bangladesh;
- To influence and increase evidence uptake among policymakers; and
- To learn lessons from the Covid-19 response to better prepare for future shocks.

1.2. CLEAR Thematic Areas

CLEAR commissioned a series of scoping papers and consultations to inform the design of the research agenda for the programme, links to these can be found in Annex 3. These focus on what is known about the secondary impacts of Covid-19 in Bangladesh so far, the knowledge gaps that exist and the potential for new research to inform future policy and practice. They propose a number of possible research questions that fall broadly under the following themes:
Poverty and vulnerability: Exploring how Covid-19 has impacted livelihoods, health, nutrition, education of the poor and increased vulnerability.

Service delivery, accountability and governance: The effectiveness of state responses in education, health, nutrition, social protection, justice and other sectors to address the social impact of Covid-19 at the national and local levels. How well are the various accountability mechanisms functioning to ensure service delivery, what has been the role of civil society in engaging with the state on accountability gaps, and how have the interactions between citizens and the local government shifted?

Protection of rights: How Covid-19 has impacted vulnerable populations and their rights (workers in export processing zones, informal workers, women, disabled, minorities, migrants) and the measures taken by the state and civil society organisations and social movements to ensure their rights

Innovations: The use of various digital platforms to share information on health, education, justice and other services, and alternative channels/programmes designed for service delivery.

These are provided as guidance to inform possible grant applications, but we recognise this is not a definitive list. Applicants are free to suggest other research questions that address a different sector, knowledge gap or opportunity.

Theme 1: Poverty and Vulnerability

Covid-19 has impacted the poor and vulnerable groups in Bangladesh. Loss of employment and livelihoods during the pandemic has led to the emergence of a ‘new class of poor’ which includes returnee international migrants, informal sector workers in urban areas, workers in specific types of precarious employment. Women compared to men have experienced loss of livelihood and have withdrawn from the labour force. Many of the studies and evidence generated on livelihood loss has been through rapid surveys during the different phases of the pandemic. There is a need for longitudinal data for effective policy design. Research on policy responses to minimise livelihood loss by the government has been limited to generating data on various interventions – particularly social protection. There is a need to move beyond the focus on expansion of social protection measures and explore how vulnerabilities experienced by the new class of poor, particularly in urban areas, are interconnected.

Studies on public health service delivery have focused on serosurveillance, but gaps still exist in our understanding of the risks and exposure to Covid-19 for the different groups of poor. The secondary health impacts of Covid-19, particularly provision of maternal health care, sexual and reproductive health services and other forms of provisions were affected by the lockdown and pandemic-related supply chain and staff shortages. The impact of these gaps varies for different vulnerable groups – adolescent girls, the elderly, disabled people etc. The rising food prices and loss of livelihood due to Covid-19 implies that nutritional impact will have a long term deep intergenerational effect. Disruption in delivery of education and lack of access to alternative platforms (digital or other modes) has meant that learning loss will have a deep impact on children from the poor and vulnerable households. School closures also mean that girls and boys from poorer households will lack access to school meals and protection.
Scrutiny of the planning, design, programming, and delivery of the various government programmes during the Covid-19 pandemic reveals a number of drawbacks in health, education, social protection and nutrition programmes. Based on the scoping studies commissioned by CLEAR, below are some of the questions to consider under this theme. Please note that you can also develop your own research questions if these are relevant to the thematic areas.

- How have communities themselves, as well as lower-level governance institutions (including traditional ones), and civil society networks responded to the pandemic? What kinds of innovations, adaptations, and locally-based resources have they leveraged to support SRHR and MNCH during the pandemic?
- How is the private and public sector coordination within the health system and cross-sector coordination beyond health (e.g. with economic and social welfare domains) in responding to the pandemic?
- How has social protection measures worked in addressing vulnerability of the new class of poor in the urban context?
- How have school closures effected the learning attainment of children from most marginalised groups (children in remote areas, slums, low-income households, disabled etc)?
- How effective were the alternative learning measures implemented by the government during the pandemic in accessing the most marginalised group? Do these measures have potential to be used in the post pandemic period?
- What has been the experience of women and girls from poorer households in accessing sexual and reproductive health (abortion, menstrual hygiene, STI, HIV related services etc) care during the pandemic? Which measures that are in place were effective in addressing these needs?
- How have the most marginalised and vulnerable groups navigated access to health care during the pandemic (youth, disabled, sexual minority etc)?
- What has been the social, health and psychological impact of the pandemic on the urban poor?
- What are the social, economic and psychological impact on returnee migrants and their households? What are the gendered dimensions of these impact?
- What are the various coping strategies and alternative options for migrants stranded in Bangladesh and aspirant migrants who face an uncertain future and enormous debt burdens? What may be the gender dimensions of these aspects?
- How has state interventions and / or other measures worked to reintegrate returnee migrants?
- Following the school reopening in the post Covid period, what is the current enrolment status? What are the, reasons for non-enrolment, and non-attendance at the national level?
- Are there any low-tech remedial education approaches to ensure student inclusion and to minimise the impediments from digital divide in ensuring equitable learning recovery?

**Theme 2: Service Delivery, Accountability and Governance**

Mechanisms of accountability and responsiveness matter during a crisis because they help determine the effectiveness of public policy responses (whether they target the key issues and reach the people necessary), and shape trust in the government response. In Bangladesh,
the government used existing mechanisms and set up various ad hoc mechanisms to track prevalence of the virus and disseminate information on safety measures and various services.

The focus of the studies under this theme may be around the established mechanisms of accountability and responsiveness such as the role of the parliamentary committees, anti-corruption and human rights commissions, and grievance redress mechanisms, and how these were effective or not to ensure accountability in specific cases. The studies may also explore the social accountability mechanisms established ad hoc during the pandemic such as beneficiary selection committees, telephone hotlines and online public meetings and their effectiveness. Did the setting up of these mechanisms and the responsiveness to public health and other needs lead to a change in how state-citizen relations are perceived within the bureaucracy and at the local level? Did these service delivery measures change how citizens perceive the state and the legitimacy of the government?

CSOs and communities at the local and national levels have also made efforts to co-ordinate crisis response during the peak level of the pandemic. There is a need to map these various responses to Covid-19 by communities and CSOs for better co-ordination of crisis response efforts. Civil society actors have produced evidence on different state measures, co-ordinated relief efforts at the local level, and extensively lobbied the government or raised questions on performance of various state agencies. The media was a key actor, in drawing attention to areas where services needed to be strengthened and raised questions in public interest. However, these actions were undertaken in a context when various restrictions on use of print and electronic media were also placed. Given that the state has been highly responsive towards addressing the crisis but there are accountability gaps and shifts in the way engagement takes place between the state and civil society at the national level, there is a need to explore how the nature of the relationship between CSO and the state changed during the pandemic and where are the opportunities for engagement? Also, what kind of role the media may play in facing future shocks and crisis.

The research questions may include but are NOT limited to the following:

- How effectively did the official complaints systems, including in-person, hotlines, and online mechanisms, function to gather, assess, and respond to citizens’ needs? How did other institutions of accountability (the Anti-Corruption and Information Commissions, for instance) function in ensuring effective service delivery (health, relief, social protection and other services)?
- To what extent has an evidence-basis for policymaking been mainstreamed across government during the successive waves of the pandemic (in health, education, nutrition, justice, social protection Ministries and Departments)? What are the entry points and opportunities within the various policy spaces in government for evidence based policy making?
- How did the reliance on customary systems of identifying social protection beneficiaries work to mitigate the crisis engendered by the Covid-19 pandemic? What may be the implications for responsiveness and accountability?
- How effective were the accountability mechanisms within public health systems to tackle challenges by the successive waves of the pandemic? How effective were the measure to tackle leakage and corruption?
- In what ways have services in a specific sector (e.g health, education, social protection and other infrastructure) been affected to urban informal settlements during the pandemic? What strategies have people in urban informal settlements used to mitigate these?
• How have politicians and the administration been using social media platforms to communicate various Covid-19 related measures, and how has this shaped the discourse on state performance and legitimacy? To what extent are these platforms more about transmitting – rather than for listening to public opinion?
• How has the government evaluated its own policy response with respect to education delivery and what learning has been absorbed by key actors within the government around responsiveness and accountability?
• Was food security and nutrition perceived as a key area for action by the government during the successive waves of crisis? What has been the experience of the urban poor with respect to this issue?
• In what ways have civil society actors at the national level mobilised to make their voices heard? How effective were the strategies and mechanisms they used? What impact has it had on accountability relations?
• How effective were the social accountability platforms for citizens engagement at the local level (for example with respect to health service delivery, education, welfare provision, justice etc)?

Theme 3: Protection of Rights

Lockdowns and economic downturn have meant that certain rights that guaranteed livelihoods and job security are under threat. Increased control over what forms of information is shared on the disease, has had spill-over effects on what kinds of issues related to the pandemic can be discussed openly in the media. There is an urgent need to explore what may work better for the protection of rights of vulnerable groups guaranteed under the law. These will include a focus on the social impacts of Covid-19 on legal protections for marginalised and vulnerable groups – informal workers such as street vendors, beauty salon workers, formalised labours like the RMG workers, workers in the road transport sector etc. Apart from worker’s rights, prolonged lockdown and economic downturn have acted as stressors leading to increased levels of domestic violence reported in the news media. However, there is a lack of rigorous evidence on this issue. There are increased reports in the media on various forms of sexual violence against women during the pandemic – the reasons for these remain unexplored and databases are scanty. In addition, how lockdowns and closures had affected justice seeking behaviour of survivors of violence and what alternative measures have been taken by justice providers and security agencies remain under-researched. The following are some indicative research questions on the protection of rights:

• How have worker’s rights been affected by the advent of the pandemic in different sectors? What kinds of measures have the government tried to promote to ensure rights of workers (job security, health safety at work etc)? Where are the ambiguities and contradictions and how can these be addressed?
• In what ways have workers (for example, RMG workers or informal sector workers etc) tried to organise and protect their rights? What may be the possible avenues for collective organisation? Where are the entry points for engagement with employers and the state?
• What are the gaps and challenges in providing access to emergency services to women and girls facing violence during the various waves of the pandemic? What are the institutional capacity issues and implementation challenges? Where are the coordination gaps between different agencies? What are the strategies that work best to increase access?
• In what ways have social, and community-level mechanisms and practices that are effective in preventing violence against women, worked in times of crisis?
• What has been the experience of women and girls who are in accessing justice systems during the pandemic?
• How can government sources of data gathering, processing, and dissemination be strengthened to address VAW during periods of crisis? What strategies are effective for the sharing and coordination of data and research findings between government and non-government agencies?

Theme 4: Innovations

Work on innovations may include the use of digital technology platforms and alternative channels to continue the delivery of health, education, migration, justice, welfare and social protection services. Innovations in the accountability and governance mechanisms in the Covid-19 response of the government could also be explored. The following are some indicative research questions on innovation:

• During the Covid-19 period, how far has digital technology been able to increase access to services for persons experiencing violence?
• In what ways do utilisation of remittances through innovative products to stimulate savings and spur investments benefit migrants?
• What has worked so far in targeting social protection beneficiaries during the successive waves of the pandemic?
• What are the various programmatic innovations in delivery of SRHR and MCH at the point of access that were effective during the pandemic?
• To what extent has the ‘Aspire to Innovate’ government agency a2i been able to institutionalise its innovations, so that they are in position ready to help Bangladesh manage the next crisis?
• Is the digital beneficiary database effective in reducing (perceived) corruption and leakage and to improve transparency about social protection programmes?

1.3. Call specifics

Maximum budget of each application: GBP£100,000.

All grants will be paid in Great British Pounds (GBP) and any currency fluctuations will be expected to be managed by the grantee.

Timeframe of grant activities: 1 year.

Grants will commence work in September 2022 and complete all research including analysis and write up by September 2023.
2. Eligibility

- Organizations (NGOs, Academic organizations, companies eligible to receive grants) can apply individually or as part of consortia for the large grants. We require that all grant recipient consortia should include at least one Bangladesh-based organization in a role that is not limited to data collection. Organisations that are not based in Bangladesh are not eligible to apply for the call unless they do so as part of a consortia which includes at least one Bangladesh-based organisation.

- Under this call, CLEAR requires researchers to submit proposals through a research institution/organisation (University, NGO, etc). We will not accept proposals submitted by an individual researcher who is not institutionally affiliated.

- A single institution is allowed to submit multiple proposals under different priority themes of CLEAR. A single researcher can also be included in more than one proposal (but can be the PI in only one application). If multiple proposals are submitted, the researcher and/or institutions involved should have the capacity to conduct the research according to the proposed timescales.

- Applicants must be prepared to submit a full proposal and budget within four weeks on notification of successfully passing the expression of interest stage.

- Lead organisations must be ready to sign the agreement and start work immediately from 1 September 2022 for up to 12 months. The expected time for field research should be limited to maximum 9 months within this 12-month period.

- Lead organisations must confirm that the proposed research will be possible within the budget envelope of GBP£100,000.

- All organisations must meet the due diligence requirements (please see Annex 2 Due Diligence Guidelines and Requirements). A due diligence submission will be requested from successful applicants as part of the Grant Agreement process. There is no requirement to submit this information at the proposal stage.

- Applications that are in line with CLEAR research priorities, research based in Bangladesh, empirically rigorous, advance our knowledge about inclusive growth policy, and have strong value for money will be prioritised.

- The applicant will need to manage the organisation and delivery of research activities, including tracking expenditure of personnel, and agreeing and managing contracts with all external consultant researchers brought into the project.
3. Call Process

3.1. Application timetable

Applications will be shortlisted for funding through a 2-stage process:

1. Initial Expressions of Interest (EOI's) will be verified for completeness and eligibility and then assessed according to the evaluation criteria detailed below. The CLEAR Programme Steering Committee (PSC) will then shortlist applicants whose EOI is deemed sufficiently promising who will then be asked to submit a full, formal proposal.

2. Full proposals will be further peer-reviewed and the PSC will decide which applications will receive funding. Successful applicants will then be asked to submit due diligence information for the lead organization as detailed in Annex 2.

3.2 Timeline of call and awards process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Submission Deadline for Expressions of Interest EOI</th>
<th>12pm midday (BST) Thursday 19th May 2022</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EOI's verified for completeness and eligibility</td>
<td>20 May to 8 June 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Review of EOI's according to scoring criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Sign off by CLEAR Programme Steering Committee (PSC)</td>
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<td>All applicants informed of decisions</td>
<td>8 to 10 June 2022</td>
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<td>Successful applicants invited to submit full formal proposals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline for full proposals</td>
<td>12pm midday (BST) Thursday 7 July 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>EOI's verified for completeness and eligibility</td>
<td>7 July to mid-August 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Review of EOI's according to scoring criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLEAR PSC meets to make final decision on grants that will be awarded. Applicants informed of outcome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant Agreements set up. Due Diligence submission completed by lead organisations. Queries resolved and any revisions to plans finalised.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant duration</td>
<td>12 months from September 2022 to September 2023</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grantees to submit financial and narrative progress reports</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
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3.2. EOI Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be anonymized and sent to 2 reviewers to score according to the criteria below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Application Section</th>
<th>Criteria assessed</th>
<th>Score/weighting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Outline: What you will research,</td>
<td>Alignment with CLEAR research priorities and known evidence gaps</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>why this is important for Bangladesh to</td>
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<td>tackle challenge posed by Covid 19 and what</td>
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<td>evidence gap the research will fill</td>
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<td>Research Design: Research design and</td>
<td>Quality of research design</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>methodology, ethics approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Team: Consortium partners (if</td>
<td>Experience of managing similar work.</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>applicable) and lead individuals who will</td>
<td>Engagement with local institutions and involvement of local researchers.</td>
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<td>be carrying out the proposed work and their</td>
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<td>capabilities and responsibilities, Track</td>
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<td>Record</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Engagement: Expected outcomes. Key</td>
<td>Expected impact on policy or practice and pathway to impact.</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>stakeholder groups to be engaged, pathway</td>
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<td>to impact</td>
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4. Submitting your EOI application

4.1. Instructions

• Please email clear.bgd@ids.ac.uk straight away indicating you will be submitting an EOI. This will allow us to contact you with any further information on the process that may be needed.

• Fill in the EOI form and submit, with CV’s, by email to clear.bgd@ids.ac.uk by **12pm midday (BST) Thursday 19 May 2022**

• Follow the guidance on word count in the application form.

• Applications that are submitted late, are incomplete or are submitted in the incorrect format breakdown will not be considered for funding.

4.2. Detailed Guidance on completing the EOI application form

More detail can be found below on what we expect to be included in each section of the EOI form:

**Research Outline**

The research outline should:

• Clearly articulate a research problem/issue.

• Demonstrate how the proposed research/issue responds to a known knowledge gap in one of the priority areas of CLEAR.

• Demonstrate why the proposed research is important to tackle the social/political impact of Covid-19.

**Research Design**

• Clearly articulate an approach that is appropriate to the research problem and show that it is feasible to conduct within the available timeframe.

• Briefly mention the kinds of methods and tools that would be used and, if applicable, which sites or cases have been identified and explain the criteria for their selection (e.g. the research will conduct surveys in secondary cities among homeless population covering about 200 people)

• Briefly mention any specific risks or challenges that may affect the research process, for example access to previous data, and how ethics will be maintained (consent etc.)

**Research Team**

• Outline the track record and capacity of consortium partners. Detail their role and responsibilities clearly and show that there are no overlaps between roles.

• Demonstrate the ability and track record (publication, leadership) and role of lead individuals (the PI and Co-Is) in conducting similar work and show their reputation in the field.

• Demonstrate consortium members ability and experience in the design of activities and outputs for effective engagement with policy and practitioner audiences.
**Policy Engagement**

- EOs should firstly demonstrate that there is clear demand among policy audiences in Bangladesh for the proposed research to inform the Covid-19 response and improve preparedness to tackle future crises.
- It should articulate a clear pathway showing how evidence generated could inform future policy and programming, who would be key stakeholders to engage with to achieve this, how this engagement will be achieved and what the expected outcomes would be.
- Supporting examples should be given demonstrating the experience and capacity of the research team in delivering timely, accessible, and relevant research outputs, that meet the needs of policy and practitioner audiences.

**4.3. Additional Support**

A list of FAQs can be found in Annex 1. A full FAQ is also available on the CLEAR website [here](#) and may be updated during the call process as needed.

Please send us an email at: clear.bgd@ids.ac.uk with your specific queries.

**5. Submission Checklist**

- Application Form. This must be completed fully and follow all guidance, including the eligibility criteria and section word counts.
- CVs of all named project staff (Each CV should be no more than 2 pages long).
- Submit all documents by email to clear.bgd@ids.ac.uk
Annexes

Annex 1: FAQs

Note that a full FAQ is also available on the CLEAR website here and may be updated during the call process as needed.

1. **Can one organization apply for more than one grant?**

Yes. One organization can apply for more than one grant. However, given the small number of grants available, we encourage you to prioritise!

2. **Can individual researchers apply for grants?**

No. Applicants will need to be based at a suitable institution with proven capacity to conduct research and manage grants in line with the financial ethical and governance requirements of the programme.

3. **Can Bangladeshi organizations apply in consortiums?**

Yes, Bangladeshi organizations (NGOs, Academic organizations, companies eligible to receive grants) can apply individually or as part of consortia for the large grants. We expect that all grant recipient consortia should include at least one Bangladesh-based organization.

4. **Are International NGOs eligible to apply in collaboration/ consortium with any Bangladeshi research institute/university?**

Yes, international organisations can apply for CLEAR research grants as part of consortia. We expect that all consortia should include at least one Bangladesh-based organisation.

5. **Does the applying Bangladeshi organizations have to hold an NGO Bureau permission?**

At least one of the applicant organizations under the consortium must hold an NGO Bureau permission to receive the grant.

6. **Is there any specific study location or target population to be covered in the research proposed for the grants?**

We do not have any specific target population, sectors or study locations as criteria for the research proposals. As long as proposals cover one of the major themes (see above) they can make a case to study any group, industry or geographic area. When considering your research focus it would be sensible to consider whether your proposed research is too similar to work already being done and funded under other FCDO or other programs.

7. **Are there any specific requirements for proposing the methods and research designs?**

No, we are not limiting the scopes in terms of the choice of research methods and research design. We are open to qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods research proposals that are feasible to be initiated and completed within the 12-month timeline.
Annex 2: Due Diligence – guidance on documentation required on successful sub-granting of the award

If an applicant is awarded a grant, as part of the due diligence procedure, applicants will be asked to provide some or all of the following documentation and evidence:

**Partner details**
- Public liability insurance
- Employers’ liability
- Professional indemnity insurance
- Company registration documents

**Governance and control**
- Last 3 years’ annual financial statements
- Evidence of external auditing
- Anti-money laundering policy
- Whistle-blowing policy
- Data protection policy
- Organisational risk management policy
- Evidence of capacity and resources
- Confirmation of no terrorist funding or offences in the past 3 years

**Finances**
- Audited accounts for the past 2 years
- Financial controls and safeguards

**Downstream management**
- Contract management policy
- Up-to-date record keeping on subcontractors
- Processes to screen potential subcontractors in relation to terrorism and corruption sanctions lists
- An anti-fraud and anti-corruption policy
- A process of due diligence assessment on sub-contractors

**Safeguarding and ethics**
- Policies demonstrating good and ethical employment practices, which may include: Anti-discrimination policy
- Safeguarding policy relating to children or vulnerable adults

**Duty of Care**
- Duty of care or travel security policy
- Travel insurance policies

This information should be made available immediately on the granting of the sub-grant agreement and must be received and assessed before project work can begin. If your organisation is unable to supply some elements of documentary evidence in relation to the due diligence assessment this will not automatically prevent your ability to proceed with the project. It may be possible to adopt IDS policy and procedure directly relating to any missing elements. Each due diligence application will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
Annex 3: CLEAR Scoping Papers

CLEAR commissioned a series of scoping papers and consultations to inform the design of the research agenda for the programme. Links to these scoping papers and research briefings can be found below:

Scoping Papers:


Research Briefings:


