

Near-End Review of the Legitimate Stability Research Programme (LSRP) 2022–2026 Terms of Reference

1. Context and Intervention Rationale

Since 2022, the Clingendael Conflict Research Unit (CRU) and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) have implemented the Legitimate Stability Research Programme (LSRP), under a five-year subsidy agreement with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The programme was set up by the Department for Stabilization and Humanitarian Aid (DSH) in light of the observed need for donor governments to strengthen the evidence base for their international development policy and programming – including initiatives addressing security, rule of law, irregular migration, governance, poverty and inequality, and conflict prevention.

Establishing knowledge partnerships and engaging in joint learning processes was recognized by DSH to be a key part of building this evidence base and facilitating a feedback loop between research, policy and programming. The programme thus intends for the three partners to work together to continually advance a mutual understanding of the dynamics of contemporary conflict in the Horn of Africa, Great Lakes Region, West Africa, Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, and the Middle East. The **overall objective of the LSRP** is so defined:

To produce research outputs that can serve as relevant and timely input into the policy and programming cycles of the international community, with particular focus on the Netherlands, aiming to contribute to the development and implementation of more effective policies and programming in response to current and emerging conflict and insecurity dynamics.

This objective is pursued through four key components of LSRP engagement. Both knowledge partners provide:

- **Research** into the factors that impact on legitimate stability and sustainable peace, and how these factors are incorporated in response to conflict and fragility.
- **Policy and Programme Recommendations** based on research findings to provide independent, practical and evidence-based input that recognizes the capacity and resource realities of partner organizations

The ISS, with its wider operational portfolio supported by multiple donors also provides:

- **Technical Assistance** related to the more direct implementation of policy and programming recommendations.
- **Capacity Building** with regional institutes, civil society and in some cases the media to strengthen national knowledge and capacity on the areas covered by LSRP research.

Finally, the focus of LSRP research is structured into the following multi-annual lines of work, each of which is further elaborated in annual research proposals.

(6) CRU multi-annual research lines

1. Sahel & West Africa thematic regional research
2. Horn of Africa thematic regional research
3. Middle East thematic regional research
4. Thematic co-created learning projects
5. Conflict-sensitive private sector development
6. (Est. 2024) Strengthening Conflict Sensitivity across the Netherlands Foreign Policy

(5) ISS multi-annual lines

7. Forward looking analysis to enhance security and development
8. Advancing protection and rule of law in migration management in West Africa, North Africa and the Horn of Africa
9. Real time analysis and technical assistance in the Sahel and neighboring regions along the West African coast and in the Lake Chad Basin
10. Governance and security analysis in Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region
11. Enhancing security and governance in the Horn of Africa

Unique Contracting Arrangement

The LSRP arrangement is novel with respect to how it established a single Research Programme engaging two separate Knowledge Partners. Each institute had previously maintained its own long-standing working partnerships with the MFA (and, in the case of the ISS, other aligned donors), and still maintains their respective field of peace and security research. Internal MFA policy processes emphasizing contractual efficiency and simplifying administrative procedures prompted the need for the two institutes to operate under a single contract. The two institutes were asked to put forward a joint proposal in 2021 outlining their independent strengths¹ and how these would be brought together.

Bringing the two knowledge partners together under a single contract was **assumed to create four opportunities**:

- 1) Coordinating strategic dialogue with MFA Stakeholders to strengthen the process of identifying learning questions and opportunities for research to feed into Dutch foreign policy decision-making, with a potential upshot of improving coherence on security and rule of law (SRoL) policy between the Hague and decentralized posts.
- 2) Coordination between the ISS and CRU on their annual research agendas and planning, to ensure complementarity in areas where shared priorities emerge.
- 3) Coordinating on outreach activities and convening stakeholders to share a richer evidence base for policy and programme decision-making
- 4) Exchanging insights and learning from one another in terms of methodologies, as well as geographic and thematic areas of expertise.

These opportunities were further nuanced by two key considerations: (i) the need for the two institutes to initiate and build a working relationship under the new arrangement with the MFA; and (ii) the engagement of the MFA to help steer LSRP research toward uptake by identifying learning questions and priorities, and contributing to 'translating' research findings for policy.

In lieu of two reviews (a mid-term review and an end-of-term review), and considering that 2022 served as an inception year in which the joint frameworks were further articulated, the partners agreed on a near-end review. This review, which occurs halfway through the LSRP's penultimate year, is intended to provide the MFA, CRU and the ISS with lessons learned that may also inform the development of a new multi-annual research programme for the post-2026 period.

¹ ISS brings insights from an African perspective, and as such focuses more on impacting on policy and programming decisions within the African context, including African governments and policy stakeholders like the African Union (AU) and the regional economic communities (RECs). CRU focuses more on impacting on policy and programming decisions of international actors engaging in fragile and conflict-affected settings. with an emphasis on the Dutch MFA, embassies and other bilateral donor governments, as well as the European Union (EU).

2. Scope of the Review

The review will focus on the period of January 2022 – June 2025, and cover the following:

- **Thematic and regional research** lines autonomously carried out by each institution, as well as the demand-responsive mechanisms of co-created learning projects, advisory services, technical assistance and capacity building;
- **Engagement and research uptake with MFA stakeholders:** including policy makers in the Hague and Dutch diplomatic posts abroad; additionally, as relevant, the wider international policy community to which the Dutch contribute;
- **The relevance of LSRP research to Dutch foreign policy and programming,** including illustrative examples where LSRP work has informed strategic decision-making, priority setting, and/or policy formulation in support of Dutch interests and objectives.
- **Partnership management** and governance arrangements between CRU, ISS, and MFA

The review should apply the **LSRP Theory of Change**² (ToC) as a guiding framework in its assessment. This ToC, jointly defined by CRU and ISS during the inception year (2022), was further elaborated into a results framework, against which the knowledge partners have jointly reported since 2023. The LSRP ToC established four intermediate outcome areas to qualitatively monitor progress of the uptake of LSRP research.³

Paraphrased for concision:

- 1) **Awareness:** Decision-makers are informed by LSRP research and analysis
- 2) **Access:** Recipients of LSRP briefings influence policy/programming in LSRP areas
- 3) **Appreciation:** Users of LSRP research and analysis recognize its relevance and quality
- 4) **Application:** Users of LSRP research take up recommendations and apply input received

3. Objectives of the Review

The review will serve as both **an accountability and a learning exercise**. It should assess:

- The added value and relevance of the research Programme, and validity of current ToC
- The adequacy of its supporting arrangements, such as the tri-partite arrangement, the balance between independent agenda-setting and co-created or tailored advisory services,
- The effectiveness of efforts to leverage LSRP research to inform and adapt Dutch policies and programming as relevant to evolving Dutch foreign policy priorities, partnerships and national interests.

To meet the goals of a learning exercise, the review should also explore options for strengthening the programme's relevance, implementation, and the utility of its support arrangements.

The review should examine the performance of each institution independently, as well as their interaction with one another and the MFA under the joint framework. Taking as starting points the LSRP's proposed objective, activities and partnership model (as outlined in the 2021 LSRP Subsidy Proposal), the review will be expected to identify what is working well and where

² The Results Framework as well as a visual representation of the Theory of Change is appended to the end of this ToR.

³ While quantitative measures are also collected per outcome area, the review should prioritize qualitative evidence. This also in recognition of the fact that the outcome areas are not mutual exclusive and will require nuanced interpretation by the evaluator.

opportunities for improvement can be seized, both in terms of results achieved as well as ways of working together under the current LSRP tripartite arrangement.

In addition to developing recommendations that can inform the final year implementation, the review is expected to provide lessons and concrete ideas that could inform the design of future research partnerships.

The review will be expected to:

- Assess the **relevance, quality, and outcome** of the research produced by CRU and the ISS exclusively under the LSRP.
- Review the **responsiveness, flexibility and effectiveness** of the LSRP's two-pronged structure in supporting both strategic as well as operational decision-making across MFA departments and embassies.
- Evaluate the **tri-partite partnership arrangement** of CRU, the ISS and MFA, examining whether and how collaboration among the three actors has contributed to LSRP's objectives.
- Identify **key lessons and make practical, utilization focused recommendations** to strengthen the programme's effectiveness and impact in its final year, and to inform the design of any future knowledge partnership or subsidy arrangements.

4. Key Questions

The review team will be asked to further refine evaluation questions in its inception phase, based on the initial engagement with the main points of contact and a review of the input documentation. Initial guiding question areas include:

Relevance, Quality and Outcome

- (To what extent) Has LSRP research identified and addressed current and emerging challenges in legitimate stability and sustainable peace in the regions covered? In the case that LSRP research does address pertinent issues, to what extent has this research proven germane to adapting policies and programmes to align with Dutch foreign policy objectives?
- Are the outputs of LSRP research assessed by Dutch policy and programming decision makers to be of sufficiently high analytical quality, timely, and appropriate for policy uptake?
- Does evidence exist that LSRP research has contributed to informing and strengthening Dutch policies and programming in legitimate stability and sustainable peace in the regions covered? What can be learned from the (lack of) evidence of this?
- Does evidence exist that decision makers with influence over Dutch policies and programming seek out, access and utilize LSRP research to promote legitimate stability and sustainable peace in the regions covered? What can be learned from the (lack of) evidence of this?

Responsiveness, Flexibility and Effectiveness

- (To what extent) Has the LSRP enabled timely responses to pressing policy and programming issues identified by Dutch policy and programming partners? What can be learned from the (lack of) evidence of this?
- What are the contributing and limiting factors for the knowledge partners' credibility and influence? How is this perceived by key interlocutors?⁴
- Have LSRP outputs and activities helped bridge DSH priority issues of legitimate stability and sustainable peace into other Dutch policy domains (e.g. trade, sustainable economic growth, diplomacy)? If so, to what extent? If not, what have been limiting factors?

⁴ Key interlocutors here refer predominantly to the decision makers the LSRP research is meant to inform; and to a wider extent their policy and programming partners as broader LSRP stakeholders.

- What factors appear to increase the likelihood of uptake among different thematic and geographic interlocutors, in the Netherlands and international posts? What are lessons learned in this regard?

Partnership Functioning and Strategic Engagement

- (To what extent) Has the tripartite partnership functioned as envisioned, with CRU, ISS, and MFA contributing jointly to the identification of aligned priorities and uptake strategies?
- What forms of engagement efforts by the ISS, CRU, and the MFA have contributed to or detracted from coherence in terms of capitalizing upon the four opportunities identified in the original subsidy proposal?
- What lessons can be drawn from ways in which the partnership has functioned in terms of enabling strategic cooperation and coherence between the three partners (CRU, ISS, and MFA)? And how can it be improved to strengthen future partnerships?

5. Methodology

The review team will develop a detailed methodology in the inception report, in line with the [IOB evaluation quality criteria](#) as well as OECD-DAC evaluation standards. The review should include:

- Desk review of key documents (e.g. annual reports, MEL framework, research outputs, external references to LSRP work including citations);
- Semi-structured interviews with CRU, the ISS, MFA staff and stakeholders from target entities included in the annual plans
- Semi-structured interviews with key LSRP interlocutors, e.g. policy officers at both central level in The Hague, among selected embassies, and international policy actors;
- (Potentially) Survey of broader swaths of the LSRP audience; review of other indicators of public traction of LSRP outputs and activities as well as incidental examples of LSRP uptake beyond key interlocutors and Dutch foreign policy stakeholders.
- Select case studies to illustrate research access, appreciation and/or outcome among Dutch stakeholders in the MFA as well as posts abroad
- Sense-making exercise with key internal and external stakeholders to validate and refine initial findings as well as test potential recommendations to ensure these resonate with those expected to take them up
- To help mitigate potential bias, the consultants are requested to (where possible) also include perspectives from relevant external actors — such as decision-makers from other governments, peer research organizations, or other potential users of publicly available LSRP outputs and activities

6. Management and Governance

CRU and ISS will jointly commission the review in consultation with the MFA. A commissioning group with representatives from CRU, ISS and MFA will, in conjunction with a Reference Group, oversee the process, validate key deliverables, and ensure quality assurance.

Primary points of contact Commissioning Group:

- CRU: Megan Price, Head of Conflict Research Unit, mprice@clingendael.org
- ISS: Ottilia Anna Maunganidze, Head of Special Projects, omaunganidze@issafrica.org
- MFA: Joost Vos, Senior Policy Officer DSH, joost.vos@minbuza.nl

The role of the Commissioning Group is to provide consultant with main point of contact, guidance, requisite data and materials, as well as pertinent logistical information (e.g. contact information of key stakeholders). The Commissioning Group is also specifically responsible for:

- Coordination of the Reference Group; ensuring process and roles are clarified
- Shortlisting strongest (3-6) proposals submitted and coordinating interviews
- Coordination of feedback on and (eventual) final approval of the Inception Report
- Identifying key interlocutor and wider stakeholders to be interviewed or surveyed
- Coordination of feedback on and (eventual) approval of the Final Review Report

A **Reference Group** comprised of the Commissioning Group and at least three external, impartial-yet-relevant experts will be established to:

- Review shortlisted proposals and support candidate interviews
- Provide feedback on the inception report;
- Help guide stakeholder identification and external outreach;
- Participate in the sensemaking session.

7. Budget & Application Process

The **indicative budget** for the Near-End Review is **90.000 Euro all inclusive**. This includes all costs such as VAT, meeting venue arrangements, project support, and travel and accommodation costs. Interviews and data collection are expected to take place either in the Netherlands or via online meeting platforms (e.g. Teams, Webex, Zoom).

Interested parties are invited to apply by sending an evaluation proposal (no more than 10 pages), and relevant CVs (no more than 3 pages each). An example of a previous analogous evaluation assignment is appreciated, though not required.

The evaluation proposal (max 10 pages) should include:

- A summary of the consultant's understanding of the ToR
- A succinct explanation of the proposed overall approach (e.g. analytical framework, methodological approach, anticipated limitations and biases, and proposed mitigations)
- A presentation of the project team, including consultants' proposed roles and experience
- An indicative workplan including timeline and (intermediate) deliverables
- A financial proposal, with total cost, including VAT, and a breakdown of anticipated professional fees and direct reimbursable expenses.
- Annexes may include (a.o.): Consultant CVs; Ethical standards and protocols; Evaluation matrix; References; Example of an analogous review completed by consultants put forward.

Please send proposals to: NearEndReview@clingendael.org with "Review Proposal: LSRP" as the subject line. **Application Deadline: 14 July 2025 17:00 CEST**

7. Deliverables and Review Timeline

Deliverables (all deliveries in English)

1. Inception Report (including methodology, workplan, and evaluation questions/matrix);
 - draft reviewed by the Reference Group; approval by Commissioning Group
2. Draft Review Report submitted in advance of Sense-making exercise
3. Sense-making exercise with key stakeholders (steering group, reference group);
 - report capturing main points of feedback submitted max. 5 days post-exercise
4. Final Review Report (max. 40 pages + annexes) for approval by Commissioning Group, including an Executive Summary (5-7 pages with key findings and recommendations)

Timeline

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan ('26)	Feb
Contract Evaluator								
Document Review								
Stakeholder Interviews								
Initial Drafting								
Draft Rev/ Sensemaking								
Final Draft/Submission								

Indicative Dates

- Contracting of review team: 30 July 2025
- Draft Inception report due: 19 August 2025
- Final Inception report due: 25 August 2025
- Interviews and analysis: 25 August – 6 November 2025
- Draft report: 21 November 2025
- Sensemaking session with key stakeholders: 10 December 2025
- Final report: 10 February 2026

9. Profile of the Review Team

The review team should demonstrate:

- Strong understanding of research-policy linkages in conflict and fragility contexts;
- Track record in carrying out reviews of research or knowledge partnerships;
- Familiarity with both Dutch foreign policy as well as political contexts of relevant regions;
- Strong qualitative research and synthesis skills;
- Strong English writing skills with the ability to present in a succinct and accessible style
- Fluent in English; preferably also in French
- Independence from the institutions under review; this implies no recent (past two years) employment or consultancy role with CRU, ISS, or MFA related to LSRP implementation.
 - Prior involvement in independent evaluations does not automatically disqualify applicants, but any potential conflict of interest — including personal or institutional affiliations — must be disclosed and will be assessed during selection

Annex: LSRP Results Based Framework and Theory of Change

Joint LSRP results-based framework

Results	Indicators	Data sources		
Impact			Examples of evidence (quantitative)	Examples of evidence (qualitative)
Policies and programming responding to legitimate stability and sustainable peace challenges in Africa and the Middle East are improved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved policy frameworks and strategies are used to inform efforts to advance legitimate stability and sustainable peace in Africa and the Middle East LSRP influence is recognized by stakeholders in Africa and Middle East stability and security policy processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey of views, of sample of stakeholders in human security and legitimate stability policy processes and programming 		
Results	Indicators	Data sources	Examples of evidence (quantitative)	Examples of evidence (qualitative)
Outcomes				
<p>1. Decision-makers on African and Middle East human security and legitimate stability challenges are informed by LSRP research and analysis. <i>(Awareness)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number & level of requests from institutions seeking and/or receiving LSRP expert advice Understanding of stability and sustainable peace issues in Africa and Middle East is deepened among relevant groups of decision makers / influencers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record of requests received for briefings/advice Feedback from users of LSRP analysis/advice Visibility of LSRP research in the public domain Survey of LSRP target audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissemination figures (#) of publications/products Presentations (#) of LSRP research at relevant national, regional or international events and meetings, etc. References to (#) of LSRP research by decision makers in public domain Appearances (#) in broader public discussions (workshops, conferences, news media, etc) Citations (#) or use of research by others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback (+/-) on LSRP products, analysis from decision makers with influence on policy and/or programming Pubic or directly communicated references to or citations of LSRP research, recommendations, and insight by decision makers

<p>2. Participants in policy briefings & gatherings organized by/with LSRP researchers influence policy debates and programming about human security and legitimate stability in Africa and the Middle East (Access)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number and type of dialogues, briefings & gatherings convened or engaged by LSRP researchers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [Event participant profile data in LSRP-convened events, as available (to indicate whether participants are influential)] ● Case studies of policy processes influenced by dialogues, gatherings and/or briefings by LSRP researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant profile data (from event records) ● Record of invitations to participate in (closed) briefings, government discussions, policy dialogues ● Feedback from participants in dialogues, gatherings ● Case studies of policy processes affected by dialogues, briefings and gatherings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Events (#) convened and/or hosted by LSRP experts ● Participant profile data from event records ● Requests (#) for general expertise, informal advice ● Invitations (#) to participate in policy processes ● Invitations (#) to respond to or comment on specific draft policy documents or strategy papers; submit evidence to government or parliamentary committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Quality of engagement/outreach with targeted decision makers ● Quality of post-event follow-up engagement with key participants ● Feedback from participants in events convened/engaged by LSRP ● Meeting reports describe key policy processes ● Quality of participation from decision makers in LSRP-convened events
<p>3. Users of LSRP research and analysis recognize the relevance, added value and utility of (tacit) knowledge and insights gained through LSRP (Appreciation)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number & type of policy inputs by LSRP sought out by key institutions dealing with stabilization and security in Africa and Middle East ● Case studies of policy processes influenced by insights, knowledge from LSRP research and analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feedback from users on quality of LSRP advice ● Record of direct requests received for policy briefings ● Feedback from participants in dialogues, events or briefings delivered by LSRP researchers ● Survey of LSRP target audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Portion of target audience survey (%) that report valuing LSRP research and analysis for its relevance, quality, insight ● Commendation (#) of LSRP research from decision maker with influence on policy or programming ● Direct, targeted requests (#) for closed briefings, advice to decision makers on specific strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reports describing LSRP relevance to and consideration in key policy processes ● Feedback that LSRP research and analysis is viewed as practical, applicable, relevant, easily digested, etc. ● Feedback that LSRP research and analysis has shifted ideas, concepts, mindsets on policy topics among decision-makers

<p>4. Users of LSRP research and analysis take up recommendations/input in policies, strategies, programmes to improve human security and legitimate stability in Africa and the Middle East (Application)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number & type of policy inputs by LSRP taken up by key institutions dealing with stabilization and security in Africa and Middle East ● Issues raised and solutions proposed in LSRP research are considered in key institutions' policy processes. ● Revisions and improvements to policies and programming mechanisms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feedback from users on application of LSRP advice ● Survey of LSRP target audience ● Case studies of policy processes informed by LSRP research/analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Direct citations (#) of LSRP analysis in government/official policy or strategy documents ● LSRP recommendations (#) reflected in policy directions adopted by the Government/Institution ● Direct quotes or citations (#) of LSRP analysis in parliamentary committees, speeches, documents, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● LSRP experts prepare drafts, inputs, comments into policy processes ● Feedback and confirmation from decision makers that LSRP input was a determining ● Extent to which policy directions adopted by the Government/Institution align with LSRP recommendations, insights
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GOAL: An increase in legitimate stability, good governance, human security, justice and the rule of law which contributes to sustainable peace and reductions in the suffering of people in conflict-affected areas of Africa and the Middle East

OUTCOME: Policies and programmes responding to legitimate stability and sustainable peace challenges in Africa and the Middle East are improved.

Outcome assumptions:

- Research carried out under the LSRP is well connected to policy relevance and programme design
- Policy partners play a strategic role in ensuring LSRP knowledge partners are kept informed of opportunities for LSRP research to be developed or applied (within NL-MFA, embassy programmes, or International Policy forums and discourse)
- Policy partners are motivated to integrate the evidence produced into their decision making
- MFA communicates a clear vision of the strategic role the LSRP can play in pursuing its own Theory of Change & results
- Coordination between the Knowledge Partners increases the potential for research uptake
- Knowledge Partners have regular access to (and implied trust) of decision-makers

Intermediate Outcome Area 3: Appreciation

Users of LSRP research and analysis recognise the relevance, added value and utility of (tacit) knowledge and insights gained through the LSRP

Intermediate Outcome Area 4: Application

Users of LSRP research and analysis take up recommendations and input in policies, strategies, activities, programmes to improve human security and legitimate stability in Africa and the Middle East

Intermediate Outcome Area 1: Awareness

Decision-makers on African and Middle East human security and legitimate stability challenges are informed by LSRP research and analysis

Intermediate Outcome Area 2: Access

Participants in policy briefings & gatherings organised by and with LSRP knowledge partners influence policy debates and programming about human security and legitimate stability in Africa and the Middle East

Indirect influence

Direct influence

Output assumptions:

- Knowledge partners consistently offer high-quality evidence-based research
- Engagement levels (e.g., NL-embassies, Hague-MFA) of the knowledge partners are complementary
- Knowledge partners maintain strong partnerships with country-based researchers and networks
- Timing, substance and presentation of interventions are well aligned to the needs of decision-makers
- Capacity across all partners (CRU/ISS/MFA) is maintained or strengthened for the duration of the LSRP

Intervention 1: Research for Impact

Research outputs delivered by knowledge partners in written or visualized form and communicated either directly to policy partners or to policy audience and broader public

Intervention 2: Convenings

Critical discussions, dialogues and briefings between knowledge partners and policy partners (at times with public) informed by research findings, knowledge and insight

Intervention 3: Technical Support

Knowledge and insights of knowledge partners leveraged to respond to specific requests from policy partners for technical input on policies, programs, and strategies

Interest

Influence

Control