

HMG independent monitoring programme

Report for Syria Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) – Taallum Initiative

Northern Syria

July 2017 (First Monitoring Round)

About IMPACT

IMPACT Initiatives is a Geneva based think-and-do-tank, created in 2010. IMPACT operates with operational support from its sister organisation ACTED.

IMPACT's teams implement assessment, monitoring & evaluation and organisational capacity-building programmes in direct partnership with aid actors or through its inter-agency initiatives, REACH and Agora. Headquartered in Geneva, IMPACT has an established field presence in over 19 countries. IMPACT's team is composed of over 400 staff, including 100 full-time international experts, as well as a roster of consultants, who are currently implementing over 50 programmes across Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Central and South-East Asia, and Eastern Europe

Table of Contents

Introduction and Background	4
Presentation of the project monitored	4
Monitoring Methodology	5
Challenges and Limitations:	7
Findings	8
Key Findings.....	8
Findings by Research Question.....	10
Concluding Remarks	17
Annexes	18
Annex 1: Indicator matrix.....	18

Introduction and Background

Upon request from Her Majesty's Government (HMG) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK), IMPACT Initiatives has monitored the HMG-funded *Taallum Initiative* (hereafter referred to as "Taallum" or "project"), a pilot project designed and implemented by Adam Smith International, working with selected provincial Education Directorates (ED) and Education Assemblies (EA) in moderate opposition-held areas in four Governorates in Syria (Aleppo, Idleb, Rif Damascus and Dara'a).

The purpose of the monitoring exercise was to independently collect and analyse data to improve the understanding of the implementation status of the project, and give beneficiaries the opportunity to provide feedback on the intervention. The information collected aims to help identify intervention results and areas that require adjustment within the project.

Monitoring exercises in Syria are challenging due to the highly volatile context and the unstable security environment. A general lack of reliable information in a rapidly changing context, notably concerning population movements and figures, does not allow for representative sampling to be implemented on a regular basis. Access constraints mean that contact between monitors, partner field teams and beneficiary communities has to be organised and coordinated by the Implementing Partner (IP) in order to guarantee a safe environment where participants feel secure and comfortable to share information that supports the monitoring exercise.

Presentation of the project monitored

Launched in February 2016, Taallum is one of the projects supported by HMG under the 'Governance through Education' programme, that seeks to strengthen governance structures to deliver education services to people in areas of Syria administered by the moderate opposition. The main objectives of this project are:

- to improve the capacity of provincial education institutions to prioritise and deliver education services;
- to train officials of the Education Directorate and Assemblies (EDs and EAs) in identifying needs, prioritising them based on the resources available and using this information to develop action plans for submission and approval by the Taallum Initiative Committee¹;
- to support EA and ED officials to procure goods and services effectively, communicate results and conduct monitoring and evaluation on actions undertaken, and;
- to improve the conditions for teaching and learning in the provincial pilot locations.

To achieve the four objectives described above, the project delivers capacity building support to EA/ED staff and releases funds through three Modules: (i) operations and maintenance; (ii) improving the learning environment for teachers and children; and (iii) strengthening opportunities to learn. Through these Modules, Taallum trains key ED and EA staff to be able to design suitable and sustainable responses to existing barriers to education, enhancing conditions for teaching and learning. Between each Module, participating EA/EDs produce action plans with corresponding budget to respond to the identified needs of schools² in their locations. Once these plans are validated by a committee within Taallum, funds are released and EA/ED institutions proceed to deliver services following the set of procedures and know-how introduced during the Modules. In this context, Taallum seeks to

¹ These committees are convened by Taallum and are comprised of a Team Leader (technical), a Programme Manager (contractual), and a Finance Manager (budget). It also includes additional technical experts as appropriate to the Module under question (e.g. pedagogical specialists for Module 3), while the Syrian Interim Government's Ministry of Education (MoE) is invited to take part in an observing capacity.

² For example, the reparation and refurbishment of school facilities.

build system level capacity to support the long-term, moderate opposition led development of education in Syria, replicating, to the extent possible, a standard government planning process and cycle.

Monitoring Methodology

The IMPACT monitoring exercise was designed in cooperation with HMG and the Taallum project team. Research questions (c.f. Box 1), indicators and tools were discussed and designed in close collaboration between HMG, Taallum and IMPACT prior to their implementation.

Box 1. Research Questions

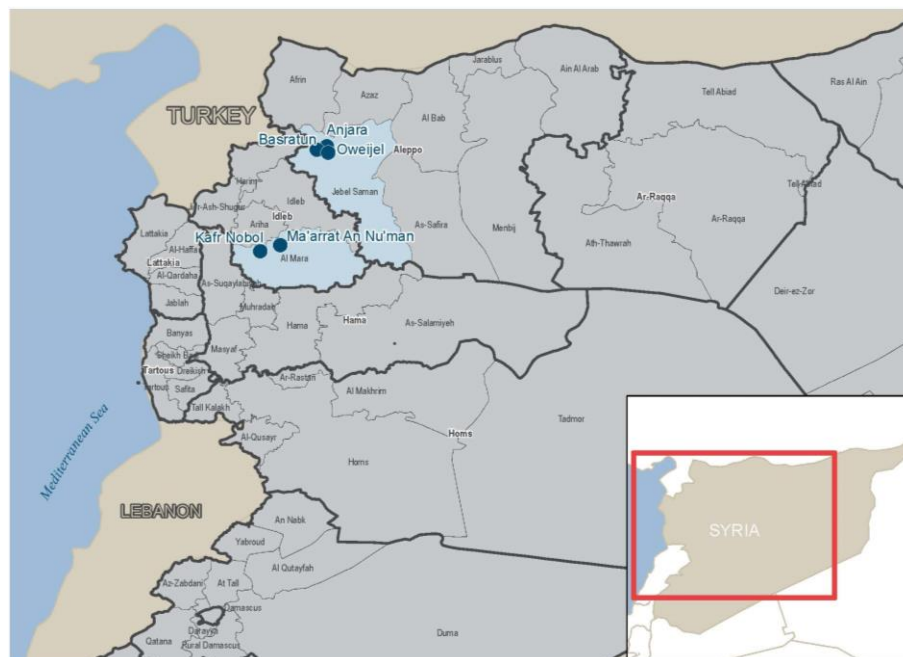
1: What difference is Taallum making to the capacity of EAs/EDs to prioritise and deliver education services? *What works and why? Have counterparts been able to effectively complete Modules (why)? What have they learnt? Have they been able to apply this (how)? What is making the biggest difference to the capacity of EA/EDs, and ability to deliver education services? What is preventing them from doing this?*

2: What difference is Taallum making to conditions for teaching and learning in pilot locations? *- How have conditions for teaching and learning changed (why)? What are the barriers for parents in sending their children to school? How have these changed (why)?*

Please see Appendix 1 (p.18) for more detailed information on research questions and indicators.

The monitoring exercise consisted of two rounds in Northern Syria in locations selected by the IP³. Monitoring Round 1 was conducted from 7 to 15 November 2016 in Anjara (Aleppo Governorate), Kafr Nbol (Idleb Governorate) and Ma'arat Al Nouman (Idleb Governorate). Monitoring Round 2 was conducted from 10 January 2017 to 18 January 2017 in Oweijel and Basratun (Aleppo Governorate), Kafr Nbol (Idleb Governorate) and Ma'arat Al Nouman (Idleb Governorate).

Map 1. Taallum locations where monitoring exercise was implemented.



³ The selection of locations to be covered in this monitoring exercise was based on Taallum's implementation timeframe. Visited locations were those where activities were the most advanced and where Phase I had been completed by November 2016 – thus being eligible for monitoring activities.

Monitoring Round 1 aimed at capturing the perception of EA/ED representatives regarding their ability to deliver quality education services, and if this had changed through the support provided by Taallum. In Monitoring Round 2, the IMPACT monitoring exercise examined the perception of parents and teachers/school leaders regarding the access to quality education.

The monitoring exercise took place for either one or two days in each Governorate in Monitoring Round 1 (MR1) and two days per school in Monitoring Round 2 (MR2). IMPACT conducted two FGDs with EA/ED's representatives, eight FGDs with parents of children attending schools supported through the project (one male and one female FGD in each location monitored), 26 KIIs with different target groups (Taallum staff, EA/ED representatives, and teachers/school leaders) and three direct observations (one in each school monitored⁴). The number of participants for each FGD varied from four to eight. The details of monitoring activities conducted per location can be found in the table 1 and 2.

Table 1. Monitoring activities in Monitoring Round 1 (MR1)

Location	Day 1	Activity	Day 2	Activity
Idleb Governorate				
Kafr Nbol	14.11.2016	1 FGD with EA/ED ⁵ representatives 1 KII with EA/ED representative		
Ma'arat Al Nouman			15.11.2016	3 KIIs with EA/ED representatives 1 KII with Taallum staff
Aleppo Governorate				
Anjara	07.11.2016	1 FGD with EA/ED representatives 1 KII with Taallum staff	08.11.2016	4 KIIs with EA/ED representatives ⁶

Table 2. Monitoring activities in Monitoring Round 2 (MR2)

Location	Day 1	Activity	Day 2	Activity
Idleb Governorate				
Kafr Nbol (Zi Qar School)	10.01.2017	1 FGD with male parents' representatives 1 FGD with female parents' representatives	11.01.2017	4 KIIs with teachers/school leaders 1 KII with Taallum staff DO of classroom activity ⁷
Ma'arat Al Nouman (Al Quzaiz School)	17.01.2017	1 FGD with male parents' representatives 1 FGD with female parents' representatives	18.01.2017	4 KIIs with teachers/school leaders 1 KII with Taallum staff DO of classroom activity ⁸
Aleppo Governorate				

⁴ IMPACT monitors were not able to conduct direct observation in one of the four schools monitored given the school was not functional. This will be further addressed in the report.

⁵ EA: Education Assembly; ED: Education Directorate

⁶ These activities were planned. However, they had to be cancelled due to constant airstrikes in the location.

⁷ Direct Observation of classroom activity could not take place, as the school chosen by Taallum and visited was not functional.

⁸ Direct Observation of classroom activity had to be rescheduled due to exam period.

Oweijel (Oweijel School)	10.01.2017	1 FGD with male parents' representatives 1 FGD with female parents' representatives	11.01.2017	4 KIIs with teachers/school leaders 1 KII with Taallum staff DO of classroom activity ⁹
Basratun (Basratun School)	17.01.2017	1 FGD with male parents' representatives 1 FGD with female parents' representatives	18.01.2017	4 KIIs with teachers/school leaders 1 KII with Taallum staff DO of classroom activity ¹⁰

Challenges and Limitations:

During the implementation of the monitoring exercise, IMPACT field team experienced some challenges, linked mostly to remote management and the conflict context inside Syria:

- Information collected in Anjara (Aleppo Governorate) is partial. This is because the second day of monitoring in Monitoring Round 1 in Anjara had to be cancelled due to security reasons. Therefore, IMPACT was not able to conduct KIIs with EA/ED representatives in this location.
- The participant lists provided by the IP in advance of the monitoring activity for the parent representative FGDs had to be, in some cases, revised by the IP. This is because as a number of participants were unable to attend the monitoring exercise, and had to be replaced by alternative participants. This occurred exclusively in Monitoring Round 2.
- The participants in the FGD with male parents in Oweijel on January 10th were predominantly second degree relatives, mostly uncles or brothers of children attending the school, instead of fathers as required by the monitoring protocol. Adding second degree relatives to this particular FGD did not comply with the homogeneous sampling strategy planned for this exercise. In addition, these participants often demonstrated limited knowledge of the assessed topics and thus were not the most suited participants attending this FGD. Consequently, information collected in the male FGD in Oweijel does not adhere to the same level of confidence as information collected in other locations.
- The existence of exam periods/midterm breaks was unknown by the IP at the time of the monitoring exercise. Therefore the Direct Observation activity (in MR2) had to be rescheduled, resulting in a delay of monitoring activities.
- On January 11th, IMPACT did not conduct direct observation activities planned in Zi Qar school in Kafr Nbol (Idleb Governorate) as this school was not functional at the time, despite having been selected by the IP for this activity. Unstructured direct observation done in the site provided evidence that the school seemed to have been used temporarily as shelter for IDPs¹¹. The building seemed unfinished and under construction. During this monitoring visit, the IMPACT monitor was informed that students were attending different schools about 1 km away¹² from the one originally indicated. The IP later informed IMPACT that the Zi Qar school had been affected

⁹ Direct Observation of classroom activity had to be rescheduled due to midterm break.

¹⁰ Direct Observation of classroom activity had to be rescheduled due to midterm break.

¹¹ Internally displaced persons.

¹² Male students were said to attend Alaziza primary school. No additional information was given as to what school female students were attending.

by an airstrike and been selected for the monitoring activity due to its importance to the project – as a school under rehabilitation. However, given the school's overall state, the information collected during this Direct Observation activity did not fully address pre-defined research questions¹³.

- On January 11th, IMPACT monitors faced challenges in conducting one KII in Zi Qar School. Due to a last minute problem, the high school manager, meant to be interviewed, sent a teacher in replacement. This KI refused to answer any question, stating to have received directives from the Education Department Deputy Manager (based in Hama) not to answer. This incidence should be addressed by the IP as it demonstrates a non-collaboration from the project's institutional counterparts in Syria.

Findings

Key Findings

Overall, beneficiaries demonstrated having acquired knowledge of the sequence of steps and procedures leading to the delivery of education services, as had been introduced by the Modules. EA/ED¹⁴ staff participating in this monitoring exercise found the webinar Modules useful and having led them to work “professionally and with a high level of accuracy”. Participants demonstrated a great appreciation for the Module addressing key challenges in their daily work, particularly emphasizing the relevance of the budget component. Of the overall training on budgeting, the training on the registration of assets and the quotation process was considered to be particularly useful.

Although demonstrating overall satisfaction with the webinar, a few participants indicated having faced challenges throughout the process. The reasons mentioned include files being complicated to fill out due to participant's limited computer skills; insufficient time allocated to the completion of the Modules, and; poor Arabic translation of the forms. Suggestions given by most beneficiaries as well as by Taallum staff to improve the project include: (i) inclusion of computer training in the Modules; (ii) provision of transportation and communication allowances to compensate additional expenses of beneficiaries engaging in the activities; (iii) distribution of certificates by Taallum to participants after the completion of the Module, and; (iv) increase of available budget attributed to Module 1.

Regarding interviewees perception on Taallum's contribution, EA/ED representatives indicated “material support” to the EAs/EDs as being Taallum's major contribution. This includes the provision of office furniture, internet devices, heaters, fuel, as well as a solar energy device to EAs/ ED offices. At the school level, provision of fuel for heaters was perceived by EA/ED staff as well by teachers and parents as the most significant contribution the project has made to the learning environment in the pilot locations, said to have contributed to increase the attendance rate in the school visited in Basratun¹⁵.

Findings do not allow IMPACT to confirm if the reparation and refurbishing of schools has been fully achieved¹⁶. Nonetheless, both Taallum and EA/ED staff described the implementation of the reparation and refurbishing plans as having been subject to delays for reasons such as: limited skills of EA/ED staff in managing the plan implementation, delay of the Taallum team in delivering the financial support, as well as other external factors such as inflation (increase in equipment prices) or lack of suppliers.

¹³ Pictures of Zi Qar school are available for verification and will be shared by IMPACT assessment team upon request.

¹⁴ EA: Education Assembly; ED: Education Directorate

¹⁵ This is linked to the fact that the monitoring exercise was conducted during the winter season.

¹⁶ This was scheduled to be accomplished throughout Module 2 – still ongoing during the monitoring exercise.

With respect to the overall needs to improve the teaching and learning conditions in their location, EA/ED staff, teachers and parents interviewed pointed towards the lack of resources (both human and financial) as the major challenge that should be addressed. School buildings were said to often be in a poor state, lacking doors, windows and functional sanitary facilities. The absence of furniture as well as of books and other supporting pedagogical materials were also mentioned as factors affecting the quality of the learning environment. The number of teachers available was said to be insufficient relative to the quantity of students and teachers were said to lack training and experience.

Finally, interviewees also stressed the existence of other factors negatively impacting the learning and teaching conditions as well as the access to education in assessed locations. The first factor was said to be the volatile security situation, schools often being targeted by air strikes. As a result parents remain reluctant in sending their children to school. In addition, interviewed teachers reported facing difficulties in dealing with children due to the impact of the ongoing conflict on both students and teachers' psychological wellbeing. The other two factors were said to be the lack of separation between genders in some classrooms, and the dire financial conditions of families requiring children to work instead of attending school. These factors are beyond the scope of Taallum Initiative but should be considered as factors potentially affecting the project's success.

Relevance:

- Through the provision of online trainings, Taallum has contributed to build capacities of EA/ED staff in planning and delivering education services. All 20 EA/ED representatives interviewed considered the Taallum webinar Modules useful in addressing their main gaps in knowledge.
- Taallum has also contributed to improving the functioning of schools. This has been done through different elements:
 - Delivery of fuel and heaters: teachers and school managers in Oweijel and Basratun (Aleppo Governorate) found that the fuel Taallum provided has a positive effect on student attendance and parents confirmed the lack of heating devices in school as one of their major concern.
 - Delivery of furniture and pedagogical materials (desks, books, stationaries, among other things).
 - Reparation of infrastructure damaged in strikes and other consequences of the conflict.

Effectiveness:

- All 20 EA/ED representatives interviewed in Anjara (Aleppo Governorate), Kafr Nbol (Idleb Governorate), and Ma'arat Al Nouman (Idleb Governorate) reported that they acquired skills in Taallum's webinar Modules on budgeting, planning, needs assessment, prioritizing, and operations and management.
- However, the effectiveness of the Modules was negatively affected by factors such as poor internet connection, limited computer literacy of Module participants and the volatile security environment.
- In regard to the action plans (school level reparations), expected to be conducted by participating EAs/EDs during Module 2, the implementation process was said to be long-lasting and subject to delays. Given the recurrent inflation and increase in commodity prices currently observed in Syria, these delays might have significant budgetary implications.

Findings by Research Question

Overall Research Question 1: What difference is Taallum making to the capacity of EAs and EDs to prioritise and deliver education services? What works and why?

Completion of Modules and challenges faced

Throughout the period preceding the monitoring activity, Taallum delivered capacity building support through two webinar Modules. As previously stated, Module 1 supported the development of general skills, such as operations and maintenance. During this Module EA offices were provided with office material to assure they were well equipped to work throughout the following Modules. Module 2 aimed to improve the learning environment for teachers and children, giving institutions the opportunity to assess needs, prioritise, plan and budget, and then implement activities in the area of school level repairs. Regarding Module 2, the webinar phase had been completed by most assessed groups, however, the plan implementation phase was still ongoing.

As outlined in Table 3, webinars were completed by the majority of enrolled EA/ED participants. Regarding the participants not completing the Modules, no information was provided on the reason for this.

Table 3. EA/ED participating and completing Modules¹⁷

Location	Module 1			Module 2		
	Enrolled	Completing participants	Participants not completing	Enrolled	Completing participants	Participants not completing
Anjara	19	19	0	17	17	0
Oweijel	13	11	2	17	17	0
Ma'arat Al Nouman	9	9	0	12	10	2
Kafr Nbol	16	13	3	13	13	0

Two of the four EA/ED staff interviewed in Idleb Governorate affirmed facing no challenges in completing the Modules. The other two respondents mentioned the following elements as having been challenges faced throughout the webinar: (i) files being complicated to fill out; (ii) insufficient time allocated to the Modules, and; (iii) poor Arabic translation¹⁸ of the forms. One beneficiary in Ma'arat Al Nouman indicated that the Modules had been conducted in a "routine-like" manner with "unimportant talks" during the lectures, suggesting this as factors reducing his interest for the activity.

From the viewpoint of Taallum staff in both Governorates, the main challenges faced in conducting the webinars was insufficient or complete lack of internet connection and intense shelling. One of the interviewees in Ma'arat Al Nouman indicated that ED/EA representatives lacked computer skills and experience in filling out the files requested in the Modules. In addition, this interviewee mentioned participants did not consistently attend the training sessions. No information was provided as to why participants did not attend but this could be linked to the above mentioned factors. Taallum staff interviewed in Ma'arat Al Nouman and Kafr Nbol suggested the lack of financial compensation to participants as a factor potentially reducing participants' interest in the webinar. Finally,

¹⁷ Data collected through KII.

¹⁸ Interviewee referred to the translation as being "literal".

one interviewee in Ma'arat Al Nouman mentioned the lack of trainers experienced in the topics covered by Module 2 as an additional challenge faced in conducting this activity.

Challenges faced by Taallum staff during the implementation of the Module plans were diverse. Four of the six interviewed Taallum staff specifically mentioned the lack of expertise of EAs/EDs staff with regard to the implementation procedures as a difficulty faced – confirming the relevance of the project itself. The lack of qualification within the EA/ED staff was said to have caused delays in the implementation process as information provided was sometimes inaccurate and, as a consequence, budgets were often subject to revisions. Taallum staff interviewed in Aleppo Governorate also mentioned distances to reach locations where plans were being implemented and limited transportation as being a challenge faced throughout the implementation process. Delays in providing the financial support were mentioned by Taallum staff as shortcomings of the project. Finally, lack of needed material¹⁹ and fluctuating prices²⁰ in existing markets were external factors said to have added difficulty to the implementation of the Module plans.

Application of what has been learned and suggested improvements

Overall, interviewed participants demonstrated having acquired knowledge of the sequence of steps and procedures leading to the delivery of education services as had been introduced by the Modules. In regards to the applicability of the Modules, all four EA/EDs representatives interviewed in KIIs in Kafr Nbol and Ma'arat Al Nouman (both in Idleb Governorate) found covered topics to be useful and relevant to their daily work. According to these representatives, the Modules addressed the most important knowledge gaps of staff in the EAs and EDs. Much related to the limited budget availability within EAs and EDs, the budgeting Module has been found most useful by interviewed staff, including the registration of assets and the quotation process²¹. Another sub-Module positively rated by one respondent was the monitoring and evaluation, referred to as a mechanism against corruption.

EA/ED staff interviewed also reported that Taallum's capacity building programme has increased their ability in planning and delivering education services, affirming they currently have a greater ability to fulfil their daily work in comparison to the previous six months. An example given of the application of the acquired skills in Ma'arat Al Nouman was the case of the Hass School, one of the schools in the location having been hit by airstrikes. According to the interviewed EA staff, within 48 hours the assembly had developed a response plan that "met the needs of reality ... (and) the budget of the assembly". Additional benefits were attributed to the webinar, such as the development of computer skills. One participant in Ma'arat Al Nouman demonstrated the willingness towards transferring knowledge acquired through the webinars to colleagues in the Education Assembly.

Both Taallum staff and EA/ED staff interviewed mentioned an increase in the budget allocated to Module 1 as a key action to be taken to improve the project. Providing communication and transportation allowances²² was also suggested by both groups as a mean to increase participation. Both parties also agreed on the time-consuming nature of the activities, suggesting financial compensation be given to individuals taking part in the activities²³. Finally, one EA representative from Ma'arat Al Nouman suggested that computer courses could be included in the Modules and that Taallum distribute certificates at the end of the Modules to increase the interest of participants in the webinars.

¹⁹ Respondents mostly referred to assets (such as heaters and build in pieces), but also included elements such as specialized construction contractors into this category.

²⁰ To a certain extent, this is correlated to the delays in the provision of funding for the plans and in the lengthy gap said to exist between planning date and the date financial support is actually provided.

²¹ Three of the four respondents mentioned electronic forms (excel sheets) and budget templates as having improved their work capacity allowing them to work "professionally and with a high level of accuracy" (Ma'arat Al Nouman Key informant interview conducted on the 15th of November, 2016).

²² EA/ED interviewees suggested Education Assemblies be provided with permanent means of transportation (such as a van or minibus) for internal use to facilitate the implementation of activities.

²³ According to interviewed EA/ED representatives taking part in the webinar, this activity is done out of official working hours and participation generates transportation costs covered at their own expense.

Perception of Taallum contribution

Overall, the perception of EA/ED representatives of Taallum's contribution is mostly related to the material assets provided throughout the Modules, seen as "concrete action on the ground". All eight EA/ED representatives in Anjara and the seven ED/EA representatives in Kafr Nbol, agreed that the support provided by Taallum contributed to facilitate the work of the administrative apparatus and increased their capacity to support schools. For example, Taallum supplied EA/ED offices with a solar energy device to overcome the problem of power outages, and supplied office furniture, laptops, internet network and printers. As mentioned by one EA staff in Kafr Nbol, Taallum assistance, both through the Modules and through the provision of material support helped in "...keeping the work going".

In Anjara, ED/EA staff interviewed emphasised "motivational support" as one of the key contributions made by Taallum. According to one participant: "capability has increased even if it is moral ... there is (now) a strong desire and hope for the development of the educational process". An interviewee in Kafr Nbol reinforced the importance of this "moral support", stating that the fact of being supported by a donor motivates them and gives them the feeling of working in an "integrated institution".

Although they view Taallum overall positive, the ED/EA representatives in the FGD in Kafr Nbol mentioned that Taallum has been very slow in responding to their demands. No further details were given on the subject, however, it is likely that this is related to the delays in the implementation due to both the lack of experienced²⁴ staff within the assembly (as mentioned by interviewed Taallum staff), and by late responsiveness of Taallum in providing the expected financial support (mentioned by both Taallum staff and EA/ED staff).

Obstacles currently faced by EA/ED and ways forward

EAs and EDs continue to face obstacles in delivering educational services. At school level, poor security conditions due to intense airstrikes targeting educational facilities was mentioned by all EA/ED staff as a major issue faced. Furthermore, respondents pointed to the insufficient number of available teachers preventing them to ensure adequate staffing at all schools. Findings of the FGD in Anjara indicated that teachers often leave the position to find other jobs due to inconsistent and low salaries. In addition to the insufficient quantity of teachers, the educational quality is further compromised by the lack of experience of current teachers and the outdated curricula and teaching methods²⁵. In Anjara, the increasing number of enrolled students and the frequent displacement of families²⁶ is also mentioned as an obstacle faced in managing the school system. Respondents in Kafr Nbol pointed towards a different issue in their context of intervention – the high dropout rate (40%)²⁷ due to the financial situation of community members. In moving forward with improving the educational system at school level, respondents suggested reconstruction of damaged schools (including construction of shelter rooms), provision of teaching material in schools, enhancing salaries and providing training to school teachers. The provision of meals to students was also suggested by respondents in Anjara to ensure students attendance.

On the level of the EA/EDs, eight EA/ED representatives interviewed in a FGD in Anjara, as well as seven EA/ED representatives interviewed in a FGD in Kafr Nbol pointed towards limited financial resources as the main obstacle to their activities. Limited means of transportation available for the staff to conduct their activities was mentioned by respondents in Anjara as an obstacle limiting EA/ED's activities.

Finally, findings suggest that the presence of international actors within the area is sometimes perceived by institutions within Syria as problematic. In Anjara, two interviewees qualified the current support provided by INGOs

²⁴ Particularly in relation to planning, designing balance sheets, and dealing with the purchases.

²⁵ This criticism has been most widely mentioned in Anjara.

²⁶ In the Syrian context, displacement of family can contribute to the instability of the enrollment rate in schools both by increasing and decreasing number of students.

²⁷ Said to be of 40% of enrolled students in schools managed by the Education Assembly in Kafr Nbol. This number is suggestive given there were no means of verification confirming this.

as “random”²⁸. A new felt “obligations towards the donor” was reported as a challenge for educational structures according to one respondent in this location. This respondent further stated that, in this context, “ED decisions do not prevail, and as a result, actions of INGOs do not support teachers (and) their work in the school”. EA/ED representatives in this location also referred to the current lack of hierarchy and structure in the educational system, consequence of the conflict, as another existing obstacle preventing the educational system from functioning well.

To move forward, concluding remarks from FGD conducted with EA/ED staff in both Anjara and Kafr Nbol point towards the need to unify efforts of all actors involved in the efforts to improving the education sector. According to the FDG results, this unification should be done particularly through the Education Directorates (ED). FGD participants in Kafr Nbol were entirely ED staff, introducing a bias to results and reducing the relevance of this statement in this location. However, FGD participants in Anjara were mostly EA staff and, although pointing out existing limitations of the Education Directorate, participants’ concluding remark was “support should be unified and directed towards the ED exclusively”.

Overall Research Question 2: What difference is Taallum making to conditions for teaching and learning in pilot locations (including in the classrooms)?

School level activities led by Taallum

Results from the interviews conducted with Taallum staff indicate that 12 out of 14 teachers have completed the training in emergency education provided by Taallum in Ma’arat Al Nouman (Idleb) as part of this project. In Kafr Nbol and in Oweijel, all participating teachers completed the training (nine out of nine and 17 out of 17 respectively). In Anjara and Basratur, this specific training has not been implemented yet.

IMPACT planned to assess the contribution of Taallum led activities to the improvement of the learning environment in targeted locations by assessing the number of repairing and refurbishing plans completed, however, monitoring activities were done while Module 2 was still ongoing. For this reason, many of these activities were pending or ongoing.

In Ma’arat Al Nouman, two schools were repaired by Taallum, and two educational facilities had been refurbished (instead of the three planned). In Anjara, no information was available as Taallum field staff interviewed had limited information on how many facilities had been repaired. In addition, several refurbishing activities had not yet been implemented. In Kafr Nbol, Taallum had repaired three out of four educational facilities planned for repairs. Refurbishing of the facilities was still pending²⁹. In Oweijel, Taallum had repaired four education facilities, and refurbishing was still pending. Taallum field staff interviewed in Basratur did not know the number of education facilities that had or should have been repaired or refurbished with Taallum support. IMPACT monitors did not collect information on the reasons why the refurbishing were not done, as this was not part of the monitoring questionnaires. Thus, no conclusion can be drawn as for the reasons of this – if this was due to delays or shortcoming in project implementation, or if activities were following its due course.

Challenges faced in schools, improvements in the last six months and remaining needs³⁰

All teachers and school headmasters interviewed in Oweijel, Basratur, Kafr Nbol and Ma’arat Al Nouman in monitoring round 2 reported that the main difficulties regarding the conditions for teaching and learning are the

²⁸ Respondent made no specification towards one particular INGO.

²⁹ This information is based on responses provided by interviewed Taallum staff for the following questions: “How many education facilities should be repaired according to the plans approved in the framework of Taallum initiative?” and “How many education facilities have already been repaired in the framework of Taallum initiative?” Direct observation made in one school in Kafr Nbol at the time of the monitoring exercise suggests that reparation activities were still ongoing, and were not close to completion. This could be due to the fact that IMPACT monitors were visiting different schools than those mentioned by interviewees as having been refurbished and repaired.

³⁰ On this section, it is important to note that schools observed during the monitoring exercise were indicated by the IP, and no measure was taken by the assessment team to assure schools mentioned by interviewed Taallum staff as having already been repaired and refurbished match the schools being visited.

lack of security due to air strikes, the lack of educational materials, such as maps, models or coloured printouts, lack of qualified teachers, and the financial challenging situation (many teachers do not receive any salary at all). All teachers mentioned that financial support would make the greatest difference to the conditions for teaching and learning.

According to three teachers and school leaders interviewed in Kafr Nbol, the state of the building that serves as school was not suitable for teaching and learning, as the building was partially destroyed (lacking doors or windows) and lacked furniture (no desks). In Basratun, teachers and school leaders expressed similar concerns, as the school building is in a poor condition and not adequate for cold weather during the winter time. In addition, classrooms often consist of up to 50 students, which severely affects the students' ability to concentrate, as a teacher in Basratun explained. The school in Ma'arat Al Nouman had been damaged by air strikes and also had no windows or doors, and lacked furniture and educational aids. Teachers and school leaders in Oweijel did not share this difficulty, as there are available desks and school material³¹, and heating is available most of the time. All teachers interviewed in all locations, with the exception of the four teachers in Oweijel mentioned that learning materials are close to non-existent.

Spot checks in schools monitored:

IMPACT carried out Direct Observation spot checks in three schools on the 31st January 2017:

Location	Number of children attending school	Number of children per classroom	Variation on attendance in the past two months	Ability of teacher to manage classroom behaviour	Classroom suitable for teaching
Oweijel	1050 ³²	~40	↑	N/A ³³	N/A ³⁴
Basratun	840 ³⁵	~35	↑	Good	The classroom was not clean and not an adequate space for learning.
Ma'arat Al Nouman	220 ³⁶	~10	↓	Good	The classroom is not clean, but has desks, doors and windows.

Random admission of students into the schools and rearrangement of school shifts due to recurring security incidents were also mentioned by teachers as challenges faced in their work and said to cause disagreements within school staff³⁷. Interviewed teachers in Awajil and in Kafr Nbol reported facing in dealing with children in a conflict context suggesting additional psychological support be provided to the students and teachers, and/or that teachers be given training in child psychology to assist them in dealing with difficulties children are facing.

From the parental point of view, challenges faced by schools are similar to those stated by teachers. According to male parents in Kafr Nbol, Oweijel and Basratun, there are no educational materials available in schools, particularly emphasizing the lack of books. The majority of interviewed parents said to be satisfied with the curriculums in place but indicated the need of additional supporting material and mentioned the existing problem

³¹ Learning material had just been delivered to this school by IHSAN, a local Syrian NGO providing humanitarian aid inside Syria.

³² The IMPACT monitor verified this information by checking 28 documents in the school.

³³ The information could not be obtained as no classes were taking place during the visit of IMPACT monitors.

³⁴ The information could not be obtained as no classes were taking place during the visit of IMPACT monitors.

³⁵ The IMPACT monitor verified this information by checking 12 documents in the school.

³⁶ The IMPACT monitor verified this information by checking 21 documents in the school.

³⁷ For example, one teacher in Anjara mentioned that the way the educational process in schools was governed in that particular location was problematic among teachers. This due to the fact that they had to relocate the students to a new school, in an afternoon shift, due to the airstrikes, which was deemed to be less adequate.

as being the lack of competent teachers. While female parents in Kafr Nbol indicated that the quality of education provided at the schools is good and the teachers are competent, fathers interviewed mentioned that the quality of education is not good at all. Although they also found the teachers to be competent, they mentioned that many schools are destroyed or damaged, and this implies an increase of the number of students in the rest of the schools available. For example, there is often a large number of students in the classroom (40 or more). Some of the male parents in Kafr Nbol mentioned that they are not satisfied at all with the education because children systematically pass grades, no matter if they have acquired the necessary skills or not³⁸. Some female parents in Basratun mentioned that teachers are not sufficiently qualified and do not possess any experience or knowledge in how to deal with the students. The teaching methods are deemed old and reportedly based on scaring the children instead of encouraging them. In Oweijel, the male parents interviewed were more satisfied with the quality of education. This is because the school had recently been provided with educational materials by Ihsan.

In regards to the changes to the teaching environments, findings points towards no significant change in Ma'arat Al Nouman and Kafr Nbol over the 6 months preceding the monitoring exercise. On the other hand, one teacher in Oweijel explained that the conditions for learning and teaching there had improved in the past months due to the support provided by Ihsan, who repaired the damaged school building and distributed schoolbags, provided stationery and educational materials³⁹. According to this participant, this support has increased the number of students. In Basratun, the increased bombardment of the community was said to have negatively affected the learning conditions. All female parents participating in the monitoring activities agreed that the conditions for teaching and learning have not changed in the past months and they did not notice any improvements.

Perception of Taallum contribution to the improvement of schools

Regarding the teachers' perception of the contributions of Taallum to schools, two teachers in Awajil mentioned the positive impact of the delivery of fuel during the winter in the schools. Another school leader in Basratun, mentioned the same support – provision of fuel and heating during winter time. Although he insisted that the fuel came too late as it was only delivered at the end of the first semester, the teacher highlighted the positive effect this had in stimulating parents into sending their children to school and increasing attendance rate. In Ma'arat Al Nouman, one responded indicated that there was currently little support from Taallum, only a few books and stationery.

Barriers for parents to send children to school and suggested solutions

All parents interviewed agreed that the lack of safety is the main barrier preventing parents to send their children to school. Teachers and school leaders in all four locations also confirmed that the deteriorating security situation is one of the main reasons for parents to not send their children to school, mostly due to air raids. Male parents in Kafr Nbol added that air raids that directly target schools is one of the main factors that affects the quality of education. In Kafr Nbol, teachers as well as parents interviewed pointed out to an additional security risk affecting this particular location: kidnaping of female students on their way home from school⁴⁰. As a consequence, the distance between the school and homes, and the lack of transportation was also indicated by female parents in Kafr Nbol as a factor keeping parents from sending their children to school. On the security issue, one female parent mentioned the psychological damages the recurrent bombing have caused on her children as a secondary reason for not sending her kids to school.

³⁸ This participant's remark suggests students are admitting students into higher grades without assessing knowledge. This could be done as a practice to avoid accumulation of number of students in classrooms.

³⁹ These activities are similar to those of Taallum at school level. On the one hand, the high level of satisfaction demonstrated by this teacher with the results reiterate the relevance of these actions in this given context. On the other, it exposes the existence of uncoordinated support provided by NGOs to education structures given this school, already having benefited from material support by a different NGO, was one of the schools being supported by Taallum.

⁴⁰ Such kidnaping incidents were only reported in Kafr Nbol and were said to not have been successful in the abduction attempt. Additional information provided by IMPACT monitors indicates there were not recurrent but had happened at the particular time of the monitoring activity. Perpetrators were said to be masked and no information was available as for who was conducting these acts.

Another important factor keeping parents from sending their children to school is the poor infrastructure available – schools lack drinking water and sanitary facilities and buildings are often damaged. Schools not having a functional heating system during winter was particularly emphasized by parents as a reason for parents to withhold their children from school – they worry their children may fall ill.

Additionally, school periods have been divided into morning periods and evening periods, which is deemed problematic as the students are reportedly more alert during the morning period than the evening period, and returning home late after the evening period increases the danger for the students. Furthermore, classrooms tend to be very crowded (40 students or more per classroom), and it is more challenging for teachers to effectively deliver their lessons. Lack of separation between male and female students was also reported by interviewed parents as negatively influencing parent's disposition to send children to school⁴¹. The difficult financial situation that many families are in, which forces children to work in order to aid their families instead of attending school, was also mentioned by parents as a reason keeping children from attending school.

Parents interviewed in all locations agreed that education is very important, worrying that if the situation persists their children will grow up in ignorance. According to mothers interviewed in Oweijel, parents that are not sending their children to school lack awareness of the importance of education. According to these parents, the barriers for not sending their children to school have not changed in the past months.

As for tackling the problem of not sending the children to their schools, the opinion of one of the participants was that there are many schools, so as not to be there a far distant to the student, and that there should be one unified attendance period and providing regular patrols when the students get out of schools. Female parents in Ma'arat Al Nouman and male parents in Kafr Nbol suggested to rent basements instead to teach the students; however, doing so would further increase the difficulty for female students to attend school as parents would not feel comfortable letting them go to other houses for school. Regarding the safety of students in Kafr Nbol, where kidnapping attempts had taken place, one of the interviewed teachers suggested providing a transportation system to schools to escort children back home in safety.

⁴¹ In the Syrian educational system, gender separation is the common rule for middle and high school, but not for elementary school. This may vary across Governorates. In the current context, marked by a limited school offer, some schools operate with mixed gender classrooms. As a result, some parents withhold their children from attending school for this reason.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, beneficiaries demonstrated having acquired knowledge of the sequence of steps and procedures leading to the delivery of education services as had been introduced by the Modules. Participants demonstrated a greater appreciation for the Module addressing key challenges in their daily work, particularly emphasizing the relevance of the budget component. Although demonstrating overall satisfaction with the webinar, a few participants indicated having faced challenges throughout the process, attributing this mostly to their limited computer skills to fill out forms to the insufficient time allocated to the Modules. Suggestions given by most beneficiaries as well as by Taallum staff to improve the project include:

- Distribution of certificates by Taallum to participants after the completion of the Module;
- Inclusion of computer training in the Modules;
- Provision of transportation and communication allowances to cover additional expenses of EA/ED staff engaging in the activities, and;
- Increasing available budget attributed to Module 1.

Regarding the perception of Taallum's contribution to the EA/EDs and to the schools, interviewees focus mostly on the "material support" provided by Taallum as this responds to what was said to be the major challenge faced by education institutions: limited resources. However, findings suggest that the needs to deliver quality education in assessed locations go beyond material support. Measures to ensure a safe learning environment (to the extent possible), to address the psychological wellbeing of teachers and students were also indicated as being a necessary to improve the learning environment.

Finally, concluding remarks of FGDs conducted with EA/ED staff pointed towards a growing legitimacy of the Education Directorates. However, respondents also suggested that the presence of multiple international actors intervening inside Syria in the education sector may also represent a challenge to EAs and EDs. Given the disparity between local institutions and international actors in terms of available resources, the current diversity of international actors operating within Syria may represent an undermining factor to projects aiming to strengthen and empower local institutions, such as Taallum Initiative.

Annexes

Annex 1: Indicator matrix

Research questions	Related Outputs	Indicator measured	Indicator type	
Overall Research Question 1: What difference is Taallum making to the capacity of EAs and EDs to prioritise and deliver education services? (What works and why)				
<p>- Have personnel in key positions in pilot education institutions been able to effectively complete training Modules? <i>Why/why not?</i></p> <p>- What have they learnt?</p> <p>- How have they been able to apply this?</p> <p><i>Why/why not?</i></p> <p>- What is making the biggest different to the capacity of EAs and EDs, and their ability to deliver education services?</p> <p>- What is preventing them from doing their work, including internal and external factors?</p>	<p>Personnel in key positions in pilot education institutions trained, coached and mentored in design and delivery of services (and have increased knowledge and skills as a result)</p>	Number and percentage of participants who have completed each Module webinars	Quantitative	
		Perception of the participants concerning the main challenges in completing the Module webinars	Qualitative	
		Perception of participants concerning the usefulness/relevance of the different Modules of the capacity building programme for their work as education professionals	Qualitative	
		<p>High quality plans and budgets developed by pilot education institutions, well prioritised against relevant framework criteria</p>	Number and percentage of plans approved that are implemented according to the established timeline since the beginning of Taallum programme	Quantitative
			Perception of ED and EA on their ability in planning and delivering education services, before and after the Taallum capacity building programme	Qualitative
	Research Question	Related Outputs	Indicator measured	Indicator type
Overall Research Question 2: What difference is Taallum making to conditions for teaching and learning in pilot locations (including in the classrooms)?				
		Perception of teachers concerning the quality of learning material over the lifetime of the Taallum	Qualitative	

<p>How have conditions for teaching and learning changed? Why? Why not? (What has caused these changes?)</p> <p>What are the barriers for parents in sending their children to school? How have these changed? Why? Why not? (What has caused these changes?)</p>	<p>Service delivery plans executed by pilot education institutions to improve access and quality of education for teachers and students</p>	intervention and on how that has changed/not changed	
		Perception of teachers and school leaders on their ability to provide quality education (over the lifetime of Taallum intervention) and if this is changing and why	Qualitative
		Perception of teachers and school leaders on the main barriers to providing quality teaching	Qualitative
		Perception of parents on main barriers for the children to receive quality education	Qualitative
		Number and percentage of education facilities where refurbishing/repairing activities have been completed since the beginning of Taallum programme	Quantitative
		Number and percentage of teachers that have completed trainings in emergency education since the beginning of Taallum programme	Quantitative
		Number and percentage of students that have received learning materials since the beginning of Taallum programme	Quantitative
	<p>Coordination, communication and consultation mechanisms for good governance established by pilot education institutions as the basis of service delivery</p>	Ability of teacher to manage classroom behaviour	Qualitative
		Perception of parents concerning the quality of the teaching over the lifetime of the Taallum intervention	Qualitative
		Willingness and ability of parents to send their children to school (and how this may have changed) including	Qualitative

		perception of parents concerning the level of security risk involved in their children attending school before and after Taallum intervention	
		Evidence of changes in learning outcomes - based on any available data collected by teachers or schools	Quantitative
		Number of children attending school (based on school attendance records)	Quantitative
		Number of children in classroom in schools supported by Taallum intervention	Quantitative