

DeSIRA-LIFT Terms of Reference

Assignment: Supporting regional calls for Regional Centres of Excellence for agroecology in sub-Saharan Africa

General information on the team assignment

Background information

The agroecological transition towards sustainable food systems and the development of both productive and resilient smallholder farming systems and value chains are complex processes. It requires new knowledge, competencies and policies to address complex problems and co-create solutions based on agroecological principles and on the integration of scientific and local/indigenous knowledge. The production of innovative knowledge requires the mobilisation of different stakeholders. Part of the competencies are located in African universities and agricultural research organisations. Interactions with the private sector, farmers' organisations and civil society (organisations) are crucial to bring additional expertise on agroecological innovations and to orient research. The challenge is to build quality in research and education while breaking silos and mobilizing different types of actors to advance the agroecology research agenda in Africa.

The Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) for sub-Saharan Africa (2021-2027) of the European Commission (EC) aims at funding interventions in Africa in several domains, namely: Health, Education, Green Transition, Science, Technology & Innovation (STI). The STI component aims at supporting Regional Centres of Excellence (RCoE) to address different priority themes of the MIP in sub-Saharan Africa. DG INTPA F3 in collaboration with the African Sub-Regional Organisations (SROs) wishes to launch three regional calls for the identification of RCoEs for agroecology under this STI component of the MIP.

Rationale of the assignment

Three regional calls for Expressions of Interest will be launched in 2023 to identify research-led consortia (consisting of national agricultural research organisations, universities, and possibly non-academic partners) that can jointly establish an RCoE to advance research capacities and knowledge in agroecology in Africa. The regional calls for Expressions of Interest will be launched in each sub-region (Central/Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Western Africa), managed by the three Sub-Regional Organisations (SROs) ASARECA, CCARDESA and CORAF respectively.

The design of the regional calls for RCoE for agroecology will be defined in consultation with key African organisations (CAADP-XP4 organisations, Regional Economic Organisations, RUFORUM, etc.). These organisations will play different roles in the call for RCoE for agroecology and the subsequent implementation.

The call procedure will be based on: i) EU criteria for RCoEs as part of its broader support to RCoEs in Africa, ii) exchanges with and experiences of African Regional Research and Extension Organisations (AUC, FARA, ASARECA, CCARDESA, CORAF, RUFORUM, AFAAS) also taking into consideration the administrative practices of the three Sub Regional Organisations responsible for the regional calls, and iii) past experiences to design complex proposals.

Operationalization of the calls

It is expected that the regional calls for RCoEs will be implemented in phases.

Pre-selection and selection

- Regional calls for Expressions of Interest to identify research-led consortia to form a RCoE for agroecology

- First selection of proposals by the selection committee including the SRO in the respective region, FARA, RUFORUM, AFAAS, DG INTPA and relevant EU Delegations (composition to be defined). The selection will be based on pre-defined selection criteria.

Improvement and final selection of proposals

- Technical support to the best proposals (between the first and the final selection) to improve the content (and check the capacities) with contribution of the SROs, FARA, AFAAS and RUFORUM.
- Final selection of the RCoEs by the committee with a balanced representation per region, taking into account the quality of the proposals (which could influence the number of RCoE per region and the budget per RCoE).

Contracting

- Grant contract between EU Delegation and respective SROs

Scope of the assignment

Two experts are to be recruited to support and coordinate the entire process as described above, in close collaboration with the SROs. This includes preparing the regional calls for Expressions of Interest (EoI), providing secretarial support to the selection committees, providing technical support to the best proposals, advising the lead SROs and DG INTPA during the call process, and drafting the contracts to be signed with the EU Delegations. The two experts are as follows:

- Expert in international research partnerships (NKE 3.11, Cat 1)
- Expert in research for agroecology transitions (NKE 3.12, Cat I)

Timeline of the assignment

- Elaboration of the regional calls for Expression of Interest: March 2023
- Launch of the call and first selection: 2nd quarter 2023
- Support to the best proposals: 3rd quarter 2023
- Contracting between EU Delegations and SROs, and Memoranda of Understanding between SROs and RCoEs: 4th quarter

Expert in international research partnerships – team leader (NKE 3.11, Cat I)

Specific Expert Tasks

The expert in international research partnership will be overall responsible for identifying the Expressions of Interest call procedures and proposals selection process as well as provide core support to SRO contract preparation. In this process, the expert will collaborate closely with the expert in research for agroecological transitions, the lead SROs and DG INTPA (and EU Delegations).

The NKE 3.11 will be responsible for the following tasks:

- Elaboration of the regional Expression of Interest calls for each RCoEs (approx. 20 days):
 - o Review of existing documents, including call procedures of the SROs and INTPA criteria for RCoE
 - o Rapid review of lessons learned on RCoEs and experiences in similar calls to develop specific criteria for the call (with help of DeSIRA-LIFT and Agrinatura)
 - o Develop the selection criteria and analytical grid for the selection procedure
 - o Discussions with SROs and DG INTPA to further develop the final call text
- First selection of Expressions of Interest (approx. 5 days):
 - o Serve as a secretary in the selection procedure and committee
- Support to best proposals (approx. 10 days):
 - o Identify areas for improvement for selected proposals
 - o Prepare meetings or workshops for further development of the proposals (per region)
 - o Provide support to selected consortia to improve final proposals
- Final selection of full proposals (approx. 5 days):
 - o Serve as a secretary in the selection procedure and committee
- Support preparation of the draft contract(s) (approx. 20 days)
- Assist the SROs to establish Memoranda of Understanding with the RCoEs organisation(s) (10 days)

NB The expert is overall responsible for coordination with the expert in research for agroecological transitions (NKE3.12), and has the final responsibility for the deliverables

Deliverables

- Call text (process and procedure x3)
- Dashboard of the proposals to support the first and final selection
- Draft Terms of Reference/Memoranda of Understanding between the SRO(s) and the co-applicant RCoE(s).
- Draft full grant application (x3) submitted by SRO(s) to EU Delegation using relevant EC grant templates
- Activity report briefly describing the procedure, main activities and lessons learned

Reporting

The expert (NKE 3.11) will report to the DeSIRA-LIFT Project Director, including for the validation of his/her timesheets.

The expert will collaborate closely with the expert (NKE 3.12) in research on agroecological transitions.

Duration of the assignment

The assignment for the expert (NKE3.11) includes 70 working days during the period March 2023 – December 2023.

Location of the assignment

The assignment will be home-based and includes a desk review. Occasional travel to Brussels (DG INTPA) or the Global South may be required for meetings or workshops in person. Related costs will be covered by DeSIRA-LIFT.

Required qualifications and experience

The expert will have:

Qualifications and skills

- At least MSc/MA-level in a discipline related to Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security, Agronomy, Rural Development, International Development, Sociology, or, in its absence, equivalent professional experience.

General professional experience

- At least 12 years' professional experience in areas directly relevant to international development, innovation with a social science perspective, knowledge and innovation systems, or likewise.

Specific professional experience

- At least 10 years' professional experiences of working in an international research environment, preferably with experience in collaborating with African research organisations
- Professional experience in international research partnership and/or consortium building
- Professional experience in the development of calls for proposals; knowledge of call procedures of the SROs and/or the EC is an advantage
- Experience in both fundamental and applied research in agriculture and development in the Global South, preferably Africa
- Knowledge of research in agroecology or most related domains
- Experience working in Africa with research or higher education organizations (SROs from the CAADP Research and Innovation pillar, FARA, RUFORUM), and non-academic partners (e.g. NGOs, private sector associations, farmer organisations)
- Expertise in facilitating multi-stakeholder processes

Soft skills

- Ability to work in a team and in a multicultural context
- Motivation, self-direction and proactiveness
- Sensitivity to interests and capacities of multiple stakeholders

Language skills

- Excellent writing and oral presentation skills in English.

Expert in research for agroecological transitions (NKE 3.12, Cat I)

Specific Expert Tasks

The expert in research for agroecology transitions will prepare the content for the calls for RCoEs and then subsequently support the organisations with the best proposals to develop them further. The expert will collaborate closely with the expert in calls for international research partnerships who has overall responsibility for the assignment as well as the lead SROs and DG INTPA (and EU Delegations).

The expert in research for agroecological transitions (NKE 3.12) will be responsible for the following tasks:

First phase:

- Elaboration of the regional calls for RCoEs (approx. 5 days):
 - o Outline priority themes and contribute to the content of the calls for RCoEs
- Support to best proposals (approx. 40 days):
 - o Identify areas for improvement for selected proposals
 - o Prepare meetings or workshops for further development of the proposals (per region)
 - o Provide support to selected consortia to improve final proposals

Second phase:

- Support the NKE 3.11 in preparation of the draft contract(s) between the EU Delegation(s) and SRO(s), with the RCoE organisation(s) as co-applicants, specifically focussing on the thematic content of the contract, in line with the requirements of EU grant contracts and in close cooperation with the relevant EU delegation (approx. 5 days)

The expert will work in close consultation with the expert in international research partnerships (NKE 3.11) and contribute to the final deliverables under guidance of NKE 3.11.

Deliverables

- Call text (content on agroecology)
- Dashboard of the proposals to support the first and final selection
- Activity report briefly describing the procedure, main activities and lessons learned

Reporting

The expert (NKE 3.12) will report to the DeSIRA-LIFT Project Director, including also for the validation of his/her timesheets.

The expert will collaborate closely with the expert (NKE 3.11) in international research partnerships – team leader.

Duration of the assignment

The assignment for the NKE Cat I includes 50 working days during the period March 2023 – December 2023.

Location of the assignment

The assignment will be home-based and includes a desk review. Occasional travel to Brussels (DG INTPA) or the Global South may be required for meetings or workshops in person. Related costs will be covered by DeSIRA-LIFT.

Required qualifications and experience

The expert will have:

Qualifications and skills

- At least MSc/MA-level in a discipline related to Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security, Agronomy, Rural Development, International Development, Sociology, or, in its absence, equivalent professional experience.

General professional experience

- At least 12 years' professional experience in areas directly relevant to international development, innovation with a social science perspective, knowledge and innovation systems, or likewise.

Specific professional experience

- At least 10 years' professional experiences of working in an international research environment, preferably with experience in collaborating with African research organisations
- Professional experience in international research partnership and/or consortium building
- Experience in both fundamental and applied research in agriculture, agroecological transitions and development in the Global South, preferably Africa
- Strong research track record in agroecological transitions in Africa
- Expertise in facilitating multi-stakeholder processes

Soft skills

- Ability to work in a team and in a multicultural context
- Motivation, self-direction and proactiveness
- Sensitivity to interests and capacities of multiple stakeholders

Language skills

- Excellent writing and oral presentation skills in English.