

DeSIRA-LIFT Terms of Reference

Expert in E-learning Platforms in the agricultural sector for Universities in Africa (NKE 2.8, Cat I)

Support to RUFORUM in the overview of existing e-learning platforms that offers self-paced training modules on innovation management and innovation facilitation dedicated to professionals engaged in research and innovation projects in the agricultural sector in Africa

1. Context and background

The [DeSIRA Initiative](#), funded by the European Commission (DG INTPA) seeks to enhance an inclusive, sustainable and climate-relevant transformation of rural areas and agri-food systems, by linking agricultural innovation with research and education for developmental impacts at scale. It supports actions in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to strengthen agriculture and food systems resilience, the relevance of the national and regional innovation systems, and the coherence and efficiency of their agricultural public research and extension services related to climate change adaptation.

[DeSIRA-LIFT](#) is a service project (June 2021 – May 2025) to the European Commission (EC), Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) with the main objective to enhance the impact of the DeSIRA Initiative by providing (on-demand) services to DeSIRA project holders and partners. DeSIRA-LIFT includes three service areas aligned to the three DeSIRA Pillars: Service Area 1 supports country-led DeSIRA projects to enhance their impacts on climate-oriented innovation systems in line with more sustainable food system transitions. Service Area 2 supports the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) ex-pillar IV organizations in their Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) related roles. Service Area 3 supports policy makers on themes related to agricultural research for development (AR4D) and innovation policies and programming. DeSIRA-LIFT is implemented by member organisations of Agrinatura (CIRAD, ISA, NRI, SLU, WUR) and EFARD (COLEAD).

This assignment is commissioned under Service Area 2, in close collaboration with the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM). RUFORUM is a Pan-African network of 170 predominantly agriculture teaching and research universities in 40 African countries. RUFORUM's mission is to strengthen the capacities of universities to foster innovations responsive to the demands of small-holder farmers through the training of high-quality researchers, the output of impact-oriented research, and the maintenance of collaborative working relations among researchers, farmers, national agricultural research institutions and governments.

2. Rationale of the assignment

The introduction of MOOCs and e-learning platforms in African universities seeks to respond to the challenges these entities face: massification, quality of teaching, geographical distance, etc. African students are very keen to use them; however, internet connection remains a major bottleneck that leads sometimes to increased inequalities between students and across countries. In addition, the language (French or English) might represent barriers. From the perspectives of teachers, online platforms are powerful tools to help them to deliver new courses on new topics. In addition, e-learning courses are not fully integrated in curricula and, in many cases, do not offer personalized monitoring of trainees as is the case for distance or face-to-face training, nor university credits that can be used in a university course.

In addition, e-learning on the topics of agricultural innovation processes, capacities, services, policies and impacts are still very scarce.

Recognising the need to work on these gaps, DeSIRA-LIFT through its support to RUFORUM, is seeking for an expert to conduct a scoping study on an e-learning platform that offers self-paced training modules on innovation management dedicated to professionals engaged in innovation projects in the agricultural sector. The assignment will explore the potential use of the DeSIRA-LIFT and RUFORUM e-learning platforms by African Universities, exploring the potential linkages with existing e-learning platforms developed by Universities on AIS related topics.

3. Scope and results

Main objective: Exploring the potential use of the DeSIRA-LIFT and RUFORUM e-learning platforms by professionals in the domain of Innovation Management and Innovation facilitation in the agricultural sector in Africa, in relationships with African Universities and their existing curricula, i.e. managing R&I projects toward impacts; making use of open innovation and Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS) thinking and practices to transform and boost the sector of innovation support services.

The specific objectives of the collaboration between RUFORUM and DeSIRA-LIFT are to:

- a) Map and assess the quality, accessibility and the potential use of existing e-learning platforms used, or hosted or co-developed with African Universities (RUFORUM members) on the topics of: innovation management, project project management, managing for impacts; facilitating multi-actor innovation processes; making use of open innovation and AIS thinking and practices to transform and boost the sector of agricultural innovation support services.
- b) Analyse the complementarities between the e-learning platforms of RUFORUM members and DeSIRA-LIFT and other existing e-Learning Platforms not hosted by African Universities, and possible synergies in terms of pedagogic objectives, content and target groups.
- a) Analyse the lessons learnt from Trainees using the e-learning platforms and provide avenues for synergies and/or complementarities between e-Learning platforms.
- c) propose mechanisms for linking the different existing eLearning platforms to allow the trainees to access and navigate the entire existing offering.
- d) Share the results with the Principals and Deans of Colleges, Schools/Faculties of agriculture.
- e) Select "championing universities" in the above-mentioned topics and initiate a dialogue with them on their interest and willingness to engage in a collaboration with RUFORUM, Agrinatura and TAP/FAO for:
 - o 1) reflecting on the use of e-learning platforms to introduce new masters and/or university credits for recognised vocational qualifications in the sector of agricultural innovation, AIS strengthening, innovation management, and innovation facilitation.
 - o 2) Sharing experience with other continents (Latin America and Asia), through DeSIRA members and the TAP.
 - o 3) Select first initiatives to put into use the DeSIRA-LIFT e-learning platform (and related platforms) and identify avenues (modalities) for co-developing new e-modules in the future.

NB: The DeSIRA-LIFT e-learning platform on "Managing R&I project for impacts" will be functional and open to the public in December 2024. This platform will refer to other existing e-Learning platforms that are complementary such as the FAO/TAP e-training on capacities for AIS developed by the FAO e-learning academy and Agrinatura.

The assignment encompasses the following elements:

- a) Developing a framework for quality assessment of the eLearning platforms, including criteria such as (but not exclusively) accessibility, relevance, usability for professionals in the domain of innovation management and innovation facilitation.
- b) Referencing e-learning platforms on agricultural innovation AIS strengthening, innovation management, and innovation facilitation for African students & professionals, and current associated use in curricula in Universities.
- c) Consolidate lessons learnt on the use and potential of e-learning platforms to gain university credits in master programs on agricultural innovation management and facilitation) in African Universities, including views and experience from other continents (Asia, Latin America).
- d) A roadmap codeveloped with a group of Universities willing to engage in a collaboration with Agrinatura to co-develop/improve Master programmes on agricultural innovation support, building on DeSIRA-LIFT assets (and other Agrinatura assets such as PAEPARD, CDAIS, etc.).
- e) Organise a hybrid session at the RUFORUM Triennial Conference in Namibia (12th and 18th August 2024 in Windhoek, Namibia) to share initial findings and capture additional information amongst participants from universities.

4. Approach and methodology

The scoping study will make use of (grey) literature and key informant interviews to collect the information required to achieve the objectives. The expert will prepare a methodology to be validated by focal persons of RUFORUM and DeSIRA-LIFT.

5. Deliverables

Deliverables of the assignment include:

- Inception report: methodological framework and plan of work
- a framework for quality assessment of the eLearning platforms, including criteria such as (but not exclusively) accessibility, relevance, usability for professionals in the domain of innovation management and innovation facilitation.
- Referencing e-learning platforms on agricultural innovation for African students, and current associated use in curricula in Universities.
- Consolidated lessons learnt on the use and potential of e-learning platforms to gain university credits in master programs on agricultural innovation AIS strengthening, innovation management, and innovation facilitation in African Universities, RUFORUM members; including views and experience from other continents (Asia, Latin America).
- A roadmap codeveloped with a group of Universities willing to engage in a collaboration with Agrinatura to co-develop/improve Master programmes on agricultural innovation support, building on DeSIRA-LIFT assets (and other Agrinatura assets such as PAEPARD, CDAIS, etc.), in the future.
- A report which includes the process and main outcomes.
- Support for the organisation of a session at the RUFORUM Triennial Conference.

6. Duration of the assignment

The assignment will last for a maximum of 32 days to be completed between July 2024 and October 2024.

The tentative workplan is as follows:

No.	Activity	Number of days
1.	Developing an assessment framework and referencing e-learning platforms on agricultural innovation AIS strengthening, innovation management, and innovation facilitation for African students, and current associated use in curricula in Universities	10
2.	Consolidated lessons learnt on the use and potential of e-learning platforms to gain university credits in master programs on agricultural innovation in African Universities, including views and experience from other continents (Asia, Latin America)	10
3.	A roadmap codeveloped with a group of Universities willing to engage in a collaboration with Agrinatura to co-develop/improve Master programmes on agricultural innovation support, building on DeSIRA-LIFT assets (and other Agrinatura assets such as PAEPARD, CDAIS, etc.)	5
4.	Organise a hybrid session at the RUFORUM Triennial Conference in Namibia (12 th and 18 th August 2024 in Windhoek, Namibia) to share initial findings and capture additional information amongst participants from universities	2
5.	Report on main findings	5

7. Location of the assignment

The assignment will be primarily home-based and done virtually. However, in-person visit to the RUFORUM Triennial Conference in Windhoek, Namibia is foreseen. Related travel costs are covered by DeSIRA-LIFT.

8. Reporting

The activity will be coordinated by the designated RUFORUM Secretariat staff and the Service Area 1 and Service Area 2 of DeSIRA LIFT core team. Validation deliverables will be approved by the RUFORUM staff. The expert will report to the Service Area 1 and 2 Leaders and the Project Director of DeSIRA-LIFT on progress and validation of timesheets.

9. Required qualifications and experience of the expert

The expert will have:

Qualifications and skills

At least MSc/MA-level in agriculture/natural resources economics, social sciences, political science, education technology or related disciplines; 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 6 years' professional experience in Higher education, professional training and e-learning on agricultural innovation
- Education experience in (national) agricultural innovation systems
- Working knowledge of fields related to innovation systems, science-policy interface, e-learning platforms and stakeholder engagement

Soft skills

- Ability to work in a team and in a multicultural context
- Excellent communication skills
- Outstanding experience in writing
- Motivation, self-direction and proactiveness
- Methodological rigour, priority management and organizational skills

Language skills

- Excellent command of English in writing and speaking
- Good command of French language will be an advantage

10. Brief about RUFORUM

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a Pan-African network of 170 predominantly agriculture teaching and research universities in 40 African countries.

RUFORUM's vision is a network of vibrant, transformative universities catalyzing sustainable and inclusive agricultural development to feed and create prosperity for Africa.

RUFORUM's mission is to strengthen the capacities of universities to foster innovations responsive to the demands of small-holder farmers through the training of high-quality researchers, the output of impact-oriented research, and the maintenance of collaborative working relations among researchers, farmers, national agricultural research institutions and governments.

RUFORUM's focus impact sector is agriculture, the growth of which is directly related to creating jobs, wealth, food and nutrition security and livelihoods for the continent. RUFORUM investments are premised on the fact that agriculture employs about 65% of Africa's labour force, and accounts for about 30% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Moreover, growth in the agricultural sector is known to be the most effective way of moving millions out of poverty and changing their livelihood prospects. RUFORUM seeks to leverage innovation and higher education to create competent human capital and open doors for the 12 million new job seekers in Africa, who are primarily young people looking for opportunities, jobs, and skills throughout the continent.

RUFORUM and its partners implement catalytic actions that:

- a) strengthen the capacity of African universities to deliver quality graduate training, conduct research, and unlock entrepreneurial, job and wealth creation opportunities;
- b) leverage African universities capacity to produce competent human resources for research and innovation, entrepreneurship for development processes and practice;
- c) develop and support African institutions and governments to utilise science-based solutions to feed and create prosperity;

- d) generate data and knowledge to inform evidence-based policymaking, investments; and
- e) serve as an anchor and envoy for dialogues that enable national to continental integration of higher education, and research for development, with key Sustainable Development Goals 1 (zero poverty), 2 (zero hunger) and 4 (quality education).