

REQUEST FOR CONCEPT NOTES (RFCN)

IMPLEMENTATION OF RWANDA AGRA COUNTRY STRATEGY 2023–2027

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1. Synopsis of the RFCN

Ref No.							
Issue date	August 2023						
Title	Proposals for the implementation of Rwanda AGRA Country Strategy 2023-2027						
Region	Eastern Africa						
Country	Rwanda						
Timeline of Proposal Development:	Lot No:	Deadline for CN submission	Concepts Review	Notification of successful Grant concepts	Development of Proposals	Review, Internal/ External approval of Proposals	Fund Approval, Award and Inception meetings
		30/Aug/2023	28/Sep/2023	03/Oct/2023	5 th through 20/Oct/2023	23 rd October through 15/Nov/2023	16 th November through 15/ Dec/2023
Issuing organization	AGRA – Sustainably growing Africa's Food Systems Head office: West End Towers, 4 th Floor Kanjata Road, off Muthangari Drive, Off Waiyaki Way P.O. Box 66773 Westlands, 00800 Nairobi, Kenya						

2. Scope of work

2.1 AGRA

Established in 2006, AGRA is an African-led and Africa-based institution that puts smallholder farmers at the center of the continent's growing economy by transforming agriculture from a solitary struggle to survive into farming as a business that thrives. Together with our partners, we are working to sustainably grow Africa's food systems. In Rwanda, AGRA will focus on supporting SMEs that are small, informal, and underfinanced, with a special focus on youth and women led SMEs during the current strategy period with interventions that cut through four business lines and three cross-cutting areas. AGRA selected four complementary and integrated business lines: the seed systems, sustainable farming, inclusive markets & trade (IMT), and policy & state capability (PSC). Besides the four business lines, AGRA and its partners selected three cross-cutting areas (a) inclusivity (enabling women and youth to contribute to agriculture for their economic empowerment) (b) climate change adaptation (equipping farmers and strengthening food systems to absorb and recover from shocks, and (c) nutrition (improving nutrition outcomes by diversifying crops and ensuring food availability).

The primary business line for Rwanda for the 2023-2030 strategy is inclusive markets and trade (IMT) while being complemented by other business lines to support the country in building inclusive and competitive markets through value addition and trade.

The Rwanda AGRA Country Strategy 2023-2027 will also focus on creating employment opportunities for youth and women in the agricultural value chain. More youths are entering Rwanda's labor market to compete for the limited employment opportunities. Today, 60% of the employed youth are in the agricultural sector. By transforming the agricultural sector, and growing private sector companies, more job, work and entrepreneurship opportunities emerge for young people to gain meaningful (self) employment. As such, AGRA Rwanda is seeking to create 132,000 fulfilling and dignifying jobs for youth and women through investment and strengthening of work pathways that benefit them.

AGRA is a champion of an inclusive agricultural transformation where youth and women are given the opportunity to play their commensurate role in driving food systems transformation. More information: <https://agra.org/>.

2.2 Ethiopia Strategy of AGRA

The entry point for this Country Strategy is to focus on making SMEs more competitive so that they can better perform their intermediary role between research, technologies, and value addition on the one hand and small-scale producers on the other. SMEs should be equipped to know what the market wants and what technologies respond to that demand and can be adopted by farmers. Selection of the entry point emerged organically from participatory consultations with the government, private sector, CSO, and AGRA implementing partners. The entry point is also in alignment with The Government strategy that recognizes that agricultural growth must be private sector driven, with the Government becoming a market enabler as opposed to a market actor. Beyond wealth contribution, the agricultural sector is also pivotal to improve climate resilience and food security. Furthermore, there is a large gender gap in employment in the agriculture sector. Addressing this gender gap is not only a task of Government but also requires SMEs to become gender inclusive or transformative.

The long-term outcome that the Strategy seeks to deliver are:

- Enhanced farmer resilience, esp. for women and youth.
- Greater food security and nutrition.
- Increased (and more stable) production and yields.
- Increased farmer surplus, sales, and profits
- Dignified and fulfilling work for young men and women.
- Increased revenues for women/youth-led SMEs and women/youth entrepreneurs.

These outcomes will be achieved within the context of four business lines and four cross-cutting issues.

AGRA will continue to focus on the crops that are produced by most farmers, on the largest share of agricultural land and that are key to food security and crop intensification in Rwanda. These crops are maize, beans, soyabean and potato. Yields of these crops remain below their potential, hence the opportunity for AGRA to invest and ensure Rwanda makes the next step in the IAT where agriculture start to contribute to economic growth. These crops will be complemented by interventions in the fruit tree, vegetables, and poultry sectors as these offer the best work, entrepreneurship and SME creation opportunities for women and youth.

3. The Grant Funding Opportunity

To support the implementation of Rwanda AGRA Country Strategy 2023-2027, AGRA Rwanda is seeking potential partners, to manage the necessary sub-awards, to deliver the following three strategic objectives:

SO1: Agricultural SMEs and youth entrepreneurship are thriving by servicing small scale producers in a competitive manner.

SO2: Markets for financial and non-financial services delivery to agri-food SMEs are inclusive of youth and young women, private sector led, sustainable and less dependent on public funding.

SO3: Government has enhanced capacity to coordinate and to create an enabling environment for SMEs and work opportunities in Agri- food sector.

NB: Applicants can submit one or more concept notes, but each concept note must focus on one specific strategic objective. Applicants will select the strategic objective where they have competence and experience.

The concept note must also incorporate and reflect one or more of the following cross cutting issues:

1. **Youth Empowerment:** Diversified and increased work opportunities (on-farm, wage, etc.) for young men and women; Increased competitiveness of youth-led SMEs and ag. enterprises; Improved enabling environment for youth ag. employment; increased youth uptake of training, finance, and new technologies; Strengthened delivery of SME supports, job supports and last mile services to youth; Finance, and other inclusive reforms and programs passed, cascaded, and implemented.
2. **Gender Inclusivity:** Improved enabling environment for women farmers; Increased revenues for women-led SMEs; Increased employment for women
3. **Climate:** Improved national climate strategies; Increased farmer readiness for climate shocks
4. **Nutrition:** Improved policies supporting nutrition; Increased production and consumption of nutrient-dense crop varieties; Increased crop diversification and adoption of nutrient-dense varieties

4. Eligibility Requirements

4.1. Type of Organization

The applicant must meet the following criteria:

- i. Well established private company or NGO engaged in agricultural development with demonstrable track record of delivering positive social impact for smallholder farmers in Rwanda.
- ii. Well established private company, SMEs, or BDS professional with a track record of service delivery to value chain actors that work with smallholder farmers.
- iii. Business Member Organization (BMOs) with a track record of delivering impact for smallholder farmers.
- iv. Civil society organization or local think-tank organization engaged in agricultural development or developing knowledge products used in policy formulation or designing programs that are beneficial to farmers.
- v. Conversant with continental mutual accountability frameworks such as CAADP and the related BRR process
- vi. Currently not blacklisted from participating in AGRA's project implementation.

4.2. Partner capacity

- i. Proven performance in implementing agricultural development programs and projects.
- ii. Relevant experience in building capacity of SMEs in business management and investment facilitation

- iii. Adequate assets, systems, structures, and presence in the main agricultural regions of the country. Presence here refers to availability of staff, assets such as vehicles and other field tools in the Rwanda AGRA target geographies.
- iv. Proper leadership, governance, financial management, internal controls and monitoring systems, and accountability.
- v. In-depth understanding of mainstreaming approaches for climate resilience, nutrition sensitive agriculture and participation of vulnerable groups such as women and youth in regional value chains will be considered an asset.
- vi. Excellent understanding of agriculture food trade systems and youth and women empowerment in African context.
- vii. Excellent grasp of markets systems analysis and design of interventions that have the potential to sustainably capture large number of smallholder farmers.

AGRA therefore invites submission of grant applications from interested and qualified organizations operating in agriculture and or related sectors. In terms of geographical presence, an organization needs to demonstrate that it is well established in at least one of the regions cited above. Applicants will be required to possess requisite technical capacities and present CVs of key staff who will implement the project.

AGRA may request additional documentation or references to ascertain declarations that applicants will submit in response to this call for concept notes. Applicants do so on their own volition and motivation, and AGRA will not reimburse any expenses related to preparation and submission of the concept notes.

5. Key work packages

AGRA Strategy will be delivered around four business lines namely markets and trade; seed systems; sustainable farming; and policy & state capability (PSC). Therefore, the work packages will be organized around the business lines. To be successful, applicants will be required to demonstrate how their proposed interventions address the country's entry point while integrating the AGRA Work Packages along with one or more of the cross-cutting issues which are: youth employment; gender inclusivity; climate & farmer resilience; and nutrition.

Work package 1 (WPI): Inclusive Markets + Trade

Supporting the country to building inclusive and competitive markets is the entry point for the Rwanda AGRA strategy. An entry point is a key bottleneck in the food system removal of which creates large-scale changes and contribute to the country's transformation of food system. Some of market and trade challenges prioritized in the strategy are:

- Fragmentation and breakdowns along supply chains and in the SME service provision
- High volatility and uncertainty in the agricultural markets due to missing both physical and soft market infrastructures.
- Inadequate coordination of institutions and markets actors, poorly integrated markets
- Limited agricultural finance
- Limited value addition
- Inadequate effective preservation and processing technologies alongside inadequate post-harvest storage facilities resulting in high post-harvest losses.
- Inadequate capacity of SMEs and cooperatives to serve farmers' produce.
- Need for improved regional food trade prospects within Eastern, Southern and at Africa continental level.

The contemplated interventions include but are not limited to:

- Innovative backward and forward smallholder engagement
- Inclusive financial models promoted.
- Partnerships, consortia, and other platforms established.
- Strengthen BDS for SMEs, industry associations.
- Support trade facilitation measures

IMT Strategic Targets: Key expected results from this work include the following, for which the investments will be contributing:

- At least 264,742 youth and women in work opportunities created.
- Reduction in non-tariff barriers in supported trade corridors/value chains particularly those that affect participation of women and youth in domestic and regional markets.
- Increase in the number of policies, regulations, certifications, and standards related to markets and trade that are adopted and implemented in the targeted countries.
- Increase in the number of supported countries using improved market data and information systems for supported commodities.
- Increase in the number of targeted countries adopting reforms for improving the functionality of the national Strategic Food Reserves.
- Increase in volume and value of net agricultural exports of supported commodities and corridors in the targeted countries.
- Reduction in the cost of doing business in the targeted countries particularly in the reduction of cost/time of obtaining trade documents.
- Increase in the number of new SMEs/agribusinesses established (including women and youth led) within the selected value chains in the targeted countries.
- Increase in the number of targeted smallholder farmers and SMES in the targeted countries that are able to increase volume and value of agriculture food trade.
- Increase in volume and value of off-taker sales for supported market actors.
- Increase in the number of targeted smallholder farmers/SMEs/agripreneurs accessing and using business development services including financial and or market information services.

Work package 2 (WPI): Policy and State Capability

An enabling policy, regulatory, and administrative environment is essential for smallholder farmers, agribusinesses, traders, and other actors in the commodity value chains. That calls for evidence-based advocacy and policy reforms and support for the implementation of the already enacted policies and regulations. Moreover, governments capability to design, implement, and coordinate programs is important as it is by far the biggest investor in agriculture. Thus, supporting the government to better

design and implement its programs such as BBT-YIA, agenda 10/30 and others, will catalyze food systems transformation in Rwanda. Some of the challenges that the strategy has prioritized in this work package include:

- Need for improved capacity for implementation of policy and flagships.
- Need for improved capacity for analytics to facilitate evidence-based planning (including the ability to carry out feasibility studies of new projects)
- Inadequate capacity for analytics and mutual accountability (e.g., CAADP, BRR)
- Need for updating policy and institutional frameworks for supporting extension, irrigation, agro-processing, and agricultural trade,
- Need for fast-tracking implementation of the blueprint for regulatory reforms.
- Need for improved sector coordination (vertical and horizontal),
- Need for improved capacity of agriculture institutions.
- Need for improved coordination of private and public extension.
- Need for acceleration of investment in research and technology development.

The contemplated interventions include but are not limited to:

- Support sector coordination initiatives
- Support use of evidence-based policy reforms and implementation
- Support government capacity for planning, delivery, and accountability
- Support strengthening CAADP mutual accountability (including BR and M&E)
- Strengthening policy, regulatory, and administrative environment for markets and trade (e.g., more predictable cross-border trade).

Work package 3 (WP3): Seed Systems

Improved systems for production and supply of certified seeds is the foundation of a strong food system. However, there is insufficient quality and quantity available to meet the certified seed production needs of nutrient dense crop varieties. Increased efforts are required for diversification into a larger set of crops, exploring climate-smart varieties and crops with high nutritional value. The scope of ongoing interventions is not addressing the entire seeds systems needs from maintenance of EGS to seed multiplication and distribution of quality certified seeds. Examples of challenges in the seed systems that the strategy identified include:

- Inadequate availability of drought-tolerant seeds
- Need to reduce deficit (leading to seed imports) while greater potential for local seed production.
- Required improvement of commercialization of the seed sector
- Inadequate access to improved seeds

The interventions under seed systems include but are not limited to:

- Support public and private entities in EGS and certified seed production
- Implement SEEDSAT recommendations.
- Deploy digital tools in quality control, seed planning, tracking.
- Scale seed sector interventions in Rwanda.
- Elimination or policy and regulatory bottlenecks facing seed agribusinesses.

Work package 4 (WP4): Sustainable Farming

Under this business line AGRA seeks to identify, validate, and catalyze Sustainable Farming models which tackle policy and systemic constraints and therefore enable smallholders to achieve sustained yields and profitability and adapt to climate risks. Our approach will therefore build on the following components: (i) Sustainable model of downstream delivery; (ii) Crop diversification and intensification; (iii) Soil fertility and health restoration; (iv) Community-based land restoration; and (v) Climate-smart partner models. Some of the challenges prioritized under this work package include:

- Low utilization of productivity-enhancing inputs such as improved seeds and chemical fertilizers by smallholder farmer
- Land and water resources degradation
- 14% of cropland affected by soil acidity.
- Low levels of mechanization – only 10.2% farming households used tractors.
- High deviation between actual and potential productivity: national average for maize is 1.5 tons/ha against 3.5-4 tons/ha under improved management practices. Average rice productivity is 1.5 tons/ha, a full ton less than the average in Africa, and 3 tons less than average in Asia.
- Underutilized irrigation potential with only 6.5% of the 7.1 million ha suitable for irrigation has improved infrastructure.

The contemplated interventions include but are not limited to:

- Scale VBA model to improve extension service delivery and input delivery systems.
- Scale digital solutions to improve extension delivery, input delivery, access to markets, finance, and mechanization services.
- Promote soil health and regenerative agriculture practices in the acidic soils.

6. Period of performance

The overall period of performance is estimated to be 36 months maximum, from October 2023 to September 2026.

7. Period Grant applications will be accepted.

This Request for grant applications will remain open for a period of 30 working days, from August 1st 2023 to August 30th 2023 before 11.59pm East African Time (EAT). Interested organizations/ institutions must submit before the final deadline; grant applications

will be evaluated on a rolling basis as indicated above in the synopsis. Applications made after the final deadline will not be considered.

8. Technical evaluation criteria

Evaluation Criteria		Points
Management Team	The grant application should describe how the proposed team members have the necessary experience and capabilities to carry out the scope of work based on the country entry point (attach their team member's CVs). Proper leadership, governance, financial management, internal, controls and monitoring systems	30 Points
Experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of working experience in delivering assignments in the activities stated in the scope of work based on the entry point and in alignment with relevant business lines. Proven performance in implementing agricultural development programs and projects and demonstrable track record of delivering positive social impact for smallholder farmers in Rwanda. Team members' requisite experience and capabilities to carry out the scope of work (attach the team member's CVs). 	30 Points
Technical approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the methodology, approach and innovations which meet or exceed the stated technical specifications or scope of work in this RFCN by the grant applicant. Clear demonstration of your understanding the country entry point and how it will drive food systems transformation Clear understanding of the Rwanda's agriculture sector, challenges, and most promising solutions to address the challenges and constraints. Practical delivery model that demonstrate a clear link between efforts and outcomes (how everything comes together to deliver the objective/goal) An Integrated approach that draws interventions across various related business lines 	40 points
Total		100 points

NB. For financial proposals to be considered the organization technical proposal must score 70 points and above. The financial proposal will be reviewed against the proposed approach and methodology, and cost negotiations held if applicable.

9. How to apply

If eligible and interested in this Request for concept note, please submit your application by following the steps described below;

- Request a new account from here: <https://agra.synisys.com/>
- Create an account as an applicant
- Log in to the system with your credentials: <https://agra.synisys.com/portfolio/requests>
- Choose the request and submit your application via Create New Response section of the form

The following must be presented with your submission;

- A copy of your organization's registration certificate
- Detailed organization profile together with CVs of the project team
- Project implementation brief budget
- Most recent Audited Financial statement

