



REQUEST FOR CONCEPT NOTES (RFCN)

Implementation of The Agrifood System Transformation for Youth Employment (ASTYE) Uganda program, 2026 – 2030

Issue Date: Jan 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

1. Synopsis of the Request for concept note (RFCN).....	3
2. Background.....	4
2.1 AGRA.....	4
2.2 The Agrifood System Transformation for Youth Employment (ASTYE) Uganda program.....	5
3. The Grant Funding Opportunity.....	6
4. Eligibility Criteria.....	9
4.1. Who should apply.....	9
4.2. Partner capacity.....	10
5. Period of Performance and estimated value.....	10
6. Period Grant applications will be accepted.....	10
7. How to apply.....	11
8. What do we expect from applicants.....	11
1.1. Application Format.....	11
1.2. Application Technical Evaluation Criteria.....	11

1. Synopsis of the Request for concept note (RFCN)

Ref No:

Issue date:

Country/geographical location:

Region	Country
Eastern Africa	Uganda

Timeline of Proposal Development:

Lot No	Deadline for C.N. submission	Concepts Review	Notification of successful Grant concepts	Development of Proposals	Review, Internal/External approval of Proposals	Fund Approval, Award and Inception meetings
1	30 Jan 2026	13 Feb 2026	17 Feb 2026	27 Feb 2026	20 Mar 2026	27 Mar 2026

Title: Implementation of The Agrifood System Transformation for Youth Employment (ASTYE) Uganda program, 2026–2030

Issue organization: AGRA Head office: West End Towers, 4th Floor Kanjata Road, off Muthangari Drive, Off Waiyaki Way P.O. Box 66773 Westlands, 00800 Nairobi, Kenya

2. Background

2.1 AGRA

AGRA has, over the years, partnered with the Government of Uganda, private sector actors, farmer organizations, and development partners to strengthen agricultural systems, improve smallholder productivity, enhance market access, and promote policy and institutional reforms. AGRA's work in Uganda has focused on building resilient, inclusive, and market-oriented value chains, with increasing emphasis on agribusiness development, climate-smart agriculture, and post-harvest management.

The Mastercard Foundation has a strong commitment to enabling dignified and fulfilling work for young people in Africa, particularly young women and marginalized groups. Through its Young Africa Works strategy, the Foundation seeks to unlock systemic constraints to youth employment by supporting market-driven solutions, skills development, enterprise growth, and access to finance. Agriculture and agri-food systems are recognized by Mastercard Foundation as high-potential sectors for large-scale job creation, especially when linked to value addition, entrepreneurship, and inclusive market systems.

The AGRA–Mastercard Foundation partnership in Uganda is therefore anchored in a shared vision of transforming agriculture into a viable and attractive sector particularly for young women and men, while strengthening food systems to be more productive, resilient, and inclusive. The partnership builds on complementary strengths: AGRA's deep technical expertise, policy engagement, and value-chain networks, and Mastercard Foundation's catalytic financing, youth-centered programming, and systems-change approach. Together, the partnership seeks to address binding constraints across the agricultural ecosystem—spanning skills, finance, markets, technology adoption, climate resilience, and enabling policies.

By supporting scalable, market-led interventions in priority agricultural and agri-food value chains, the AGRA–Mastercard Foundation programme in Uganda aims to create sustainable on-farm and off-farm employment opportunities for youth and women, strengthen agribusiness SMEs, reduce post-harvest losses, and contribute to national development priorities such as Uganda Vision 2040, the National Development Plan (NDP III), and relevant agricultural sector strategies. The

programme is designed to work with and through local institutions, private-sector actors, and youth-led enterprises to ensure long-term sustainability and systemic impact.

2.2 The Agrifood System Transformation for Youth Employment (ASTYE) Uganda program

The Agrifood System Transformation for Youth Employment (**ASTYE**) **Uganda program** is a transformative initiative designed to create dignified and fulfilling work opportunities primarily for financially disadvantaged young women and vulnerable groups by addressing structural barriers¹ in Uganda's agrifood ecosystem. Aligned with **Uganda's Vision 2040**, the **National Development Plan and Agriculture Value Chain Development Strategy**, the program contributes to national efforts toward poverty alleviation, economic growth, and food and nutrition security.

The AGRA's focus component in the ASTYE program aim to reach 300,000 financially disadvantaged young people, with 120,000 engaged in work and 60,000 securing dignified and fulfilling work. As the program is young women-centric, **270,000 (90%) of the total outreach target will be young women within Uganda's agrifood ecosystem. Of these, 108,000 (90%) will be young women in work, of which 54,000 (90%) will transition into dignified and fulfilling work.** Furthermore, **5%** of the total **youth in work** target will be **people with disabilities**.

Despite being a key resource for social, economic, and technological development, young women in Uganda face significant barriers to economic participation. Women account for 70–80% of the agricultural labor but own only 7–20% of the land.² They play a traditional role influenced by their reproductive roles and are responsible for food production and food security for their families. Because they do not control the earnings from their produce, they also earn the lowest incomes and comprise most of the rural poor. In Uganda, the socialized belief that women are custodians of the home along with their care giving duties limits their mobility and exposure to activities outside the home, while cultural and religious attitudes about gender roles deter women from participating actively in decision making at the household and all levels.³ This coupled with high school dropout rates/high illiteracy rates serve to perpetuate the continued marginalization of women from accessing information, services and participating in activities outside the home to their full potential.

The ASTYE Uganda program will address **structural bottlenecks in the national agrifood system and economic and social barriers on young women which can hinder the**

¹ Structural barriers are foundational challenges in that limit the participation of young people, women and other actors in the sector, requiring long-term, systemic solutions driven by policy coherence, institutional alignment, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to transform the sector, thus unlocking investments and enabling full participation and investment by young people, women and the private sector in the sector.

² DIIS, *Land Tenure and Economic Activities in Uganda, 2012*

³ *Rural Women and Information in Uganda*, by Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng for FAO

achievement of the work enablement targets highlighted above. In addition to the gendered challenges faced by the young women above, they also face several challenges as smallholder farmers in the sector. At production level smallholder farmers face challenges related to land fragmentation, post-harvest handling, and weak extension services. Farmers practice rainfed agriculture and are highly vulnerable to environmental and climate-related challenges, including prolonged droughts and heavy rains or floods, and with low adoption of technologies such as irrigation and mechanization, they suffer devastating losses during bad seasons. Market failures in input systems in which actors lack sufficient capacity to produce and distribute high-quality seeds to the last mile and plagued by outdated soil-mapping and widespread counterfeit inputs that are enabled by weak regulatory oversight and under-resourced agencies. Poor integration between input and output systems constitutes a major weakness with multiple negative impacts along agri-food chains. In the absence of a strong pull-factor, output markets are unable to drive yield improvement technology uptake at the farm level, nor to send market signals, transmit end market requirements, or facilitate the flow of investments to the farm level. The ecosystem activities can help improve these by addressing the underlying systems which enable access for young people to high-quality inputs, mechanization, renewable energy and the sustainable utilization of soil and water resources. By addressing fundamental challenges in food supply chains, the investments made in the value chain components of the program will enable increased participation of young people, particularly young women, in the target value chains and beyond, enabling the Program to achieve the work enablement targets of the program.

3. The Grant Funding Opportunity

The program will directly contribute to Mastercard Foundation's charitable purpose to alleviate poverty by enabling work opportunities for young women engaged in the focus value chains of **maize, cassava, and sorghum**, with **dry beans, soybeans, and groundnuts** as rotation crops.

The program will focus on four main output areas or sub-components namely:

- i. **Promoting youth voice and agency.** The sub-component focuses on empowering youth, especially young women, including the vulnerable and marginalized groups such as people with disabilities, to actively participate in agriculture by addressing the cultural, social, and structural barriers. It promotes young women's voice and agency
- ii. **Engaging youth in agricultural production.** Enhance agricultural production and productivity through sustainable practices and gender-responsive technologies
- iii. **Creating access to markets and trade.** Facilitates market access and trade linkages

- iv. **Enabling financial inclusion.** Strengthens financial inclusion by focusing on making young people bankable and through business development support

Each of the four sub-components will be implemented through a set of activities and sub-activities. Below are the descriptions of activities envisaged for each of the four sub-components.

1 Promoting Youth Voice and Agency

1.1. Strengthen Youth Groups: Provide technical, financial and legal support for the formation and formalization of new or existing young women groups to meaningfully participate in agriculture

1.2. Foster Mindset Change: Engage and partner with Civil Society Organizations (incl CBOs) and other stakeholders to provide mindset change and soft-skills, governance, leadership and agricultural enterprise selection training to young women to influence duty bearers for opportunities in agriculture

1.3. Community Mindset Change: Provide leadership training and facilitate opportunities for young women to conduct community conversations that encourage mindset change among duty bearers and gatekeepers regarding participation of women in the agrifood system, enabling access to opportunities in agriculture

1.4. Strengthen Youth Platforms: Provide technical and financial support for the development and utilization of platforms that enable young women to showcase their work and influence duty bearers for opportunities in agriculture

1.5. Strengthen Youth-Led Evidence Gathering: Identify and train youth champions to conduct community level evidence gathering on the needs and challenges related to young women in agriculture

1.6. Facilitate Youth Linkages: Connect young women's groups with private sector market players to access business opportunities, mentorship, and market information

2. Engaging Youth in Agricultural Production

2.1. Facilitate access to land for young women through different models such as block farming models using tripartite collaborations (landowners, youth, and private sector)

2.2. Establish or strengthen existing groups to enable collective action (demand aggregation and input purchase), resource sharing, and market access

2.3. Improve access to high-quality, climate-smart and nutrient dense inputs with technical training and embedded services to enhance adoption of improved management practices and CSA technologies that increase productivity and transform agrifood ecosystems

2.4. Promote and improve access to labour-saving and gender-responsive technologies for priority value chains

2.5. Facilitate access to improved post-harvest handling technologies, best practices, and on-farm storage solutions

2.6. Utilize platforms to improve access to timely and updated information for decision-making (input markets, advisory services, weather, early warning systems, prices, etc.)

2.7. Partner with public and private actors to scale the provision of advisory extension services, particularly for young women farmers

2.9. Strengthening the capacity of Local Seed Businesses to boost access to produced Quality Declared Seed (QDS)

3. Creating Access to Market and Trade

3.1. Develop Local Market Agents: Build the capacity of young women to become local market agents (Local Market facilitators / VBAs)

3.2. Leverage Digital Platforms: Deploy innovative technology platforms to streamline linkages between value chain actors (off-takers, transporters, producers, aggregators)

3.3. Create Linkages with Local Agro-processors: Partner with local agro-processors to increase off-take from young women producers

3.4. Strengthen Quality and Standards: Enhance traceability, quality, and standards of commodities in priority value chains

3.5. Deploy Marketing Linkages Models: Implement models that effectively coordinate youth SMEs to agrifood markets (contact farming, commodity exchange, warehouse receipt systems)

4. Enabling Financial Inclusion

4.1. Provide Financial Literacy Training: Deliver training to address the financial needs of young women, including mindset, culture norms, money management, and business planning

4.2. Bridge the Gap with Fintech: Support fintech solutions to improve access to financial services and products for young women in agriculture

4.3. Facilitate Enterprise Formalization: Support group registration, compliance, and regulation for enterprises owned by young women

4.4. Link to Formal Financial Services: Create linkages with formal financial institutions to provide access to value chain financing, tailored banking products, agency banking, and insurance services

4.5. Conduct Linkage Meetings: Organize meetings for young people to engage with financial institutions and off takers

4.6. Develop Tailored BDS: Develop tailored Business Development Services to support young women in transitioning to successful enterprises

4.7. Collaborate with Financial Institutions: Collaborate with financial industry associations to raise awareness, increase uptake of financial services, and influence for better financial products for young women

The program will target select districts in Teso and Karamoja sub-regions of Uganda indicated in the table below:

Karamoja sub-region	Teso sub-region
Nabilatuk	Katakwi
Napak	Soroti
	Soroti City
	Bukedea
	Serere
	Kabaremaido

AGRA is looking for implementing partners for this program. The selected implementing partners will demonstrate experience and competence to successfully roll-out the program along one or several of the sub-components described above. Moreover, the selected implementing partner will demonstrate capacity and experience in implementing projects in the target sub-regions and districts. Organizations may choose to submit joint bids if by doing so they demonstrably strengthen their capacity to implement the program. Organizations can submit bid covering one or several sub-components depending on their experience, capacity, competence, and interest.

4. Eligibility Criteria

4.1. Who should apply

The applicant must meet the following criteria:

- i. NGOs, community-based organizations, last-mile agent developers, networks of extension services providers
- ii. Civil Society Organizations (youth led and women led where possible)
- iii. Market facilitators who link (good quality) smallholder produce to premium markets
- iv. Offtake companies active in the target value chains, seeking for premium produce sourced from small scale producers
- v. Value chain actors such as SMEs, or BDS professionals with a track record of service delivery to value chain actors that work with smallholder farmers.
- vi. Business Member Organizations (BMOs) with a track record of delivering impact for smallholder farmers.
- vii. Women or youth group with experience, competencies, and track record of implementing development projects.



- viii. Private Sector Companies (e.g., agribusinesses, financial service providers)

4.2. Partner capacity

Institutions/organizations intending to work with AGRA in this area of work must demonstrate that they meet the following requirements to be eligible to receive financing from AGRA:

- i. Unless specifically stated otherwise in this section, they must be registered in the national country with valid registration documents
- ii. For its stated area of expertise, organization must produce certifications, marks or permits as required by national legislations, demonstrating adherence with relevant codes of practice, industry standards etc
- iii. Organization's primary business activity must be in the Host Countries
- iv. Organization must be in a sound financial condition
- v. Organization must have sufficient existing capability/capacity to perform as required. AGRA may consider limited funding for capacity building only if the entity's proposal is determined to be of interest to AGRA
- vi. Organization must have demonstrated favourable past performance record
- vii. Organization must have accounting systems, procurement practices and corporate integrity/ethics aligned to AGRA systems and values
- viii. Organization must not have been previously excluded from the eligibility to receive funding from any of AGRA's partners; and
- ix. Demonstrate inclusivity and promote sustainability principles in past project activities.

5. Period of Performance and estimated value

The overall period for implementation of the programme is estimated to be up to 48 months, spanning from 2026 to 2030, with grant funding issued on an annual basis, in instalments, as per the performance terms and conditions.

6. Period Grant applications will be accepted.

This Request for Expression of Interest (concept note) will close **on February 18th, 2026, at 11.59pm East African Time (EAT)** . Interested organizations/ institutions must submit their concept notes before the final deadline. Grant applications will be evaluated on a rolling basis as indicated in the synopsis above. Applications made after the final deadline will not be considered.

7. How to apply

If eligible and interested in this Request for Expression of Interest, please submit your application by following the steps described below:

- 1) Request a new account from here: <https://amisprod.agra.org/login>
- 2) Create an account as an applicant
- 3) Log in to the system with your credentials: <https://amisprod.agra.org/portfolio/requests>
- 4) Choose the request and submit your application via Create New Response section of the form
- 5) If you face any challenges in using the SYSTEM, send your query to rfcn@agra.org. All applications must be submitted through the AMIS system to be considered.

8. What do we expect from applicants

1.1. Application Format

AGRA expects a short and concise overview of your organization, experiences, technical expertise and competencies in implementing projects of the scope and activities described above.

We expect an innovative concept note on how the ASTYE program can create dignified and fulfilling work opportunities primarily for financially disadvantaged young women and vulnerable groups by addressing structural barriers in Uganda's agrifood ecosystem.

A format for the concept note is provided for under AGRA Management information system (AMIS) which is accessible under the link <https://amisprod.agra.org/login/>

1.2. Application Technical Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Description	Point
Organizational Capacity	The application should describe the organization capacity to implement the activities. The organization should have the necessary experience and capabilities to carry out the scope of work in the country they apply for Proper leadership, governance, financial management, internal, controls, and monitoring systems.	30
Experience	Evidence of experience in delivering assignments in the activities stated in the call for expression of interest. Proven performance in implementing similar activities.	30

	Team members' requisite experience and capabilities to carry out the scope of work.	
Technical Approach	<p>Description of the methodology, approach, and innovations that meet or exceed the stated technical specifications or scope of work in this call for EoI.</p> <p>Clear demonstration of your understanding of the country context and working with women and youth to create employment opportunities in the agrifood value chains.</p> <p>Clear understanding of the most promising approach for mobilizing and engaging financially disadvantaged women to address binding constraints in agrifood system and create dignified and fulfilling work opportunities for them</p> <p>Practical delivery model that demonstrates a clear link between efforts and outcomes (how everything comes together to deliver the objective/goal).</p>	40

The following must be presented with your submission.

- 1)** A copy of your organization's registration certificate
- 2)** Profiles of senior staff in the organization
- 3)** Detailed organization profile together with CVs of the key project team members
- 4)** Project implementations note
- 5)** Project implementation brief budget
- 6)** Most recent Audited Financial statements, where applicable