

REQUEST FOR CONCEPT NOTES (RFCN)

COMPETITIVENESS AND BANKABILITY OF YOUTH AND WOMEN SMEs IN SEED SYSTEMS IN MALI

CONTENT

- A. Synopsis of the RFCN**
- B. Scope of work**
- C. Technical Evaluation Criteria**
- D. Eligibility Requirements**
- E. How to Apply**

A. SYNOPSIS OF THE RFA

RFCN No.	SF/RFCN 00.../2023
Issue date	Monday July 17, 2023
Title	Request for Concept Notes for Grant Application - Facilitate increased competitiveness and bankability of youth and women SMEs in seed systems: Strengthen SMEs capacities in quality compliance, bankability, processing, and trade in Mali
Issuing organization	AGRA – Sustainably growing Africa's Food Systems AGRA – Mali, Bamako SODIES building, ACI 2000, Street 286, corner behind BNDA, BP 2950
Submission of questions & Concept Note application	We only accept online submission at AGRA's online portal AMIS (the link for online submission will be live on AGRA's website upon the RFA launch on July 31, 2023)
Deadline for Receipt of Questions	By Thursday August 03, 2023
Deadline for Responding to the questions (for AGRA)	By Thursday August 10, 2023
Final deadline for Receipt of Concept note Applications	Monday, August 14, 2023, before 11:59 pm, GMT.

B. SCOPE OF WORK

1.0 Background

1.1 AGRA

Founded in 2006, AGRA is an African-led African-based organization that seeks to catalyze Agriculture Transformation in Africa. AGRA is focused on putting 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. As the sector that employs most of Africa's people, all of them small-scale farmers, AGRA recognizes that developing smallholder agriculture into a productive, efficient, and sustainable system is essential to ensuring food security, lifting millions out of poverty, and driving equitable growth across the continent.

AGRA is rolling out a new 5-year strategy to catalyze the Food System-led Inclusive Agricultural Transformation in Africa to increase incomes and improve food security for 28 million farmers across 11 countries in West, East and Southern Africa. The new Strategic Plan sets out to catalyze the growth of sustainable food systems across Africa by influencing and leveraging partners to build a robust enabling environment where the private sector thrives, and smallholders are empowered to produce sufficient, healthy food in an equitable and inclusive manner.

There is increasing acknowledgement that gender inequality and social exclusion of women, youth and rural poor continue to impede Inclusive Agricultural Transformation (IAT). State of the art evidence shows that agricultural development interventions can only be effective if they are intentional in their approaches towards gender equality and social inclusion (Quisumbing et al., 2020; Nyasimi and Huyer, 2017; Doss, 2016). Another critical component in inclusive agricultural transformation is participation by youth, a population which is rapidly growing and is expected to double to 830 million by 2050. A total of 12 million youth enters the employment market each year but only 25% are absorbed into formal jobs leaving large numbers either unemployed or underemployed (AfDB, 2016). AGRA's approach to the youth is anchored on its inclusive agriculture transformation goal, driving broad-based agricultural transformation that will make agriculture more productive and profitable, thereby creating on-farm and off-farm opportunities. To attain the levels of **scale and reach necessary to create fundamental change in youth employment in Africa**, it is critical to come up with scalable solutions that reach a substantial proportion of youth – the resilience, and agriculture productivity present an opportunity in this regard.

Building on the gains AGRA has achieved over the past decade and a half and leveraging the learnings from our recent Impact Evaluation, AGRA intends to make focused and catalytic investments that contribute to inclusive agriculture and food

systems transformation. AGRA's 2030 Strategic framework directly draws on and contributes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development and is anchored in unlocking systemic barriers and building resilience and capabilities to catalyze the growth of sustainable food systems on the African continent.

To achieve its vision, mission and strategic objectives, AGRA will build on key assets, models and key lessons accruing from past strategic investments to deliver the following core objectives:

1. to empower and build the resilience of smallholder farmers.
2. to support the development of inclusive markets that can further unlock and sustain functional agricultural and food systems; and
3. to build state capacity to scale and sustain agricultural and food systems transformation.

To achieve the vision, mission, and objectives of the new Strategic Plan, AGRA has prioritized and organized its work around four interlinked business lines to catalyze agricultural transformation which include 1) Policy and State Capability; 2) Seed Systems. 3) Inclusive Markets and Trade; and 4) Sustainable Farming. The new strategy has also prioritized cross-cutting areas which are critical to ensuring that agricultural transformation is inclusive and reflective of broad food system needs (Youth Empowerment, Gender Inclusivity, Climate' Nutrition). Intentional inclusivity is one of the cross-cutting areas which seeks to eliminate barriers to participation of women and youth for them to contribute to, and benefit from agricultural transformation.

1.2 Key business lines

This strategy 2023-2027 in Mali, with focus on *"Advancing Resilience and Productivity for Smallholder Farmers to improve their livelihood"*, and approved by the Malian Government on June 26, 2023, will be implemented in partnership with public and private organizations. The key guiding principles mainstreaming the Roadmap of the Strategy 2023-2027 are:

- i. Promoting transparent business linkages among the actors in the prioritized value chains.
- ii. Providing real business development support to implementors and beneficiaries.
- iii. Facilitating joint planning among actors in the prioritized value chains.
- iv. Promoting decentralized youth employment within the agricultural sector.
- v. Implementing crop specific road maps for prioritized value chains development, and,
- vi. Strengthening financial mechanisms.

1.3 Expected Results from the selected business lines for application.

Key expected results include those under the business lines below for which the applicant will also be contributing to:

1.3.1 Seed Systems

- Increased farmer adoption of nutrient-dense and climate-smart varieties, esp. among women/youth (SS 2.0)
- Scale-up of production, certification and extension models linked to quality varieties, esp. for women/youth (SS 2.1)
- Prioritized inclusive policies, regulations, standards, and certifications passed and implemented (SS 2.2)

This business line will also include:

1.3.2 Inclusive Markets, and Trade

- Expanded market access, investment, and capacity for inclusive market actors (IMT 2.0)

1.3.3 cross-cutting themes

1.3.3.1 Youth Empowerment:

- Diversified and increased work opportunities (on-farm, wage, etc.) for young men and women (YE 3.0).
- Strengthened delivery of SME supports, job supports and last mile services to youth (YE 2.1).

1.3.3.2 Gender Inclusivity:

- Improved enabling environment for women farmers.
- Increased revenues and employment for women-led SMEs.

1.3.3.3 Nutrition

- Increased crop diversification and adoption of nutrient-dense varieties.

In the Strategy 3.0, AGRA seeks to increase productivity of major targeted commodities (maize, rice, sorghum, millet, cowpea, groundnut, horticulture, and poultry) by 35%, enhance resilience of 1.2 million Smallholder Farmers in Sikasso, Koulikoro, Segou, Kayes, and Mopti regions, and improve their livelihood SHFs while promoting dignified and fulfilling job creation.

The Key expected results from the interventions are linked to the following grant applications.

Application

Promote Strengthening capacities in seed systems with focus on youth and women (*Facilitate increased competitiveness and bankability of youth and women SMEs in seed systems; Strengthen SMEs capacities in quality compliance, bankability, processing and trade in seed systems.*)

1.4 Call for Grant Applications

The potential partners will include, but not limited to, the following:

- NGOs or private firms providing Business Development Services, farmers organizations, and other institutions.
- Capacity building/training institutions that have a strategic focus towards training of farmers organizations involved in job creation for women and youth, sustainable and contract farming.

AGRA therefore invites submissions of grant applications from interested and qualified organizations operating in the agricultural value chains for projects that contribute to the achievement of AGRA's stated intended objectives and outcomes.

2.0 Grant Investment Area

Interested Applicants are invited for grant concept note applications covering the Koulikoro, Sikasso, Segou, Kayes, and Mopti regions on area for application below:

“Strengthen capacities in seed systems with focus on youth and women.”

Interested organizations, institutions, etc. are requested to apply for the above area of applications (Agricultural inclusive financial systems)

3.0 Period of Project Performance

The overall period of this project performance is estimated to be 3 years maximum, from 1st November 2023 to 30th September 2026.

4.0 Period concept notes Applications will be Accepted.

This Request for grant concept notes applications will remain open for a **period of 15 working days, from July 31, 2023, to August 14, 2023, before 11:59 pm GMT**. Interested organizations/ institutions must submit before the final deadline; and grant application will be evaluated on a rolling basis as indicated above in the synopsis.

Applications made after the final deadline of August 14, 2023, will not be considered.

Organizations must follow the instructions mentioned below and must submit their grant concept note applications using the AGRA guidelines and above-mentioned scope of work following AGRA's online portal link of AMIS system.

C. TECHNICAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

Evaluation Criteria		Points
1.	Technical Approach: Description of the methodology and approach which meet or exceed the stated technical specifications or scope of work in this RFA by the grant applicant:	60 Points
2.	Past Experience: Evidence of working experience in delivering assignments in the activities stated in the Scope of work linked to the selected application above listed:	25 Points
3.	Management approach: The grant application should describe how the proposed team members have the necessary experience and capabilities to carry out the scope of work (attach the brief profile of applicant organization and team):	15 points
Total		100 points

NB. Once attained the proposal development after the approval of initial concept note, for the financial proposal to be considered by AGRA, the applicant's 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.

D. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Organizations contemplating submission of concept note applications in response to this request for grant applications (RFA) must determine whether they meet the following requirements to be eligible for AGRA financial assistance: Five (5) years of demonstrable organization working experience in Promote the mechanization for farm level Agriservices and downstream agro-processing, with focus on youth and women.

If an institution/organization meets the above eligibility criteria AGRA may request additional documentation to be submitted as part of the pre-award process. Organizations are advised that any funds made available are subject to AGRA's and its funding partners accountability and audit requirements.

E. HOW TO APPLY

If eligible and interested in this Request for grant concept note Application, please provide the following via AGRA's online portal AMIS (the link for online submission with indicated concept structure will be live on AGRA's website upon the RFA launch on **July 31, 2023** by/before, **August 14, 2023, before 11:59 pm GMT**. Additionally, applicants at proposal-stage once AGRA has communicated to the applicant of the approved concept, are expected to make submission of following documents (at AGRA AMIS online system for which applicant will be informed by AGRA);

- 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 before or August 14, 2023)
- Detailed organization profile with CVs of project implementation team.
- Technical proposal - At this stage, applicants are expected to submit a brief concept note only. Once short-listed, AGRA expects submission of a detailed technical proposal from short-listed applicants clearly stating an understanding of the scope of work and elaboration of the methodology including how each of the tasks will be executed. Additional details will include:
 - Past performance:** Demonstrated evidence of undertaking at least three similar assignments done. The information shall include the legal name and address of the organization for which services were provided, a description of services provided and a current contact phone number and email address of a responsible and knowledgeable representative of the organization
 - Demonstrate availability of appropriate skills among staff in sufficient numbers and experience and attach their CVs.

7. Financial Proposal – At this concept stage, applicants are expected to provide a brief budget of the project only. Once short-listed, AGRA will request a detailed financial proposal from short-listed applicants.
8. Two (2) years Audited financial statements at proposal submission stage by short-listed applicants only (send a signed copy by the auditor).
9. A copy of your organization's registration certificate at proposal submission stage by short-listed applicants

