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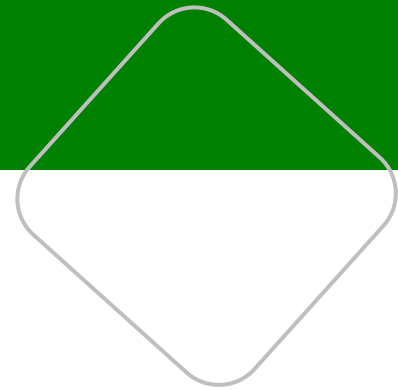
Business Support Organizations (BSOs)

CALL FOR PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

To support local BSOs to provide business development services to cassava value chain businesses and enterprises in the South East of Liberia

Deadline For Application

04/01/2022



Implementing Partners



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I. BACKGROUND

About CERATH Development Organization

CERATH Development Organization (CDO) is a development organization focused on catalysing development in Africa through five main intervention areas. These include Agriculture and Forestry, Fisheries, Renewable Energy, Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH), and Inclusive Finance. The organisation is operational in Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. In Liberia, CDO is currently operating in the South-East namely; Sinoe, Maryland, River Gee, Grand Kru and Grand Gedeh counties.

About the Cassava Transformation Project

The Cassava Transformation Project (CASTRAP) is funded by the European Union (EU) under the West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP). WACOMP is a partnership initiative between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the EU. The aim of the programme is to support selected value chains at national and regional level to promote structural transformation and better access to regional and international markets, while taking into account social and environmental concerns. The principal objectives of the programme are to strengthen the competitiveness of West African countries and enhance their integration into the regional and international trading system. The WACOMP consists of one regional component and sixteen national components in West Africa.

CASTRAP is the Liberia national component of WACOMP and targets the cassava value chain and the South-Eastern counties of Sinoe, Maryland, River Gee, Grand Kru and Grand Gedeh. The project aims to enhance the competitiveness and regional integration of Liberia's cassava sector through a value chain approach focused on sustained production, value addition, entrepreneurship, and sustainable markets. Specifically, CASTRAP aims at (1) strengthened efficiency of actors engaged in the cassava value chain to improve access to inputs, and markets; (2) enhanced production, processing, and commercialization of the cassava value chain; (3) cassava value chain enhanced to be financially sustainable, and commercially viable; and (4) policies, programs, and incentives to stimulate the commercialization of the cassava sector advocated for and implemented. The target groups/beneficiaries of the project include smallholder cassava farmers/cooperatives, agribusinesses and agri-focused entrepreneurs, financial institutions and the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (collectively called regulators).

The project is implemented by a consortium led by CDO. The consortium includes the Rural Integrated Center for Community Empowerment, Liberia, Conservation Alliance – Liberia, and the Center for Enterprise Learning, Ghana. The project which is expected to run until March 2025 commenced in April 2021.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE BUSINESS SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS (BSOs) CALL

The **objective** of the *Business Support Organization Call* is to support local BSOs to provide tailor-made business development services to cassava value chain businesses and enterprises in the South East of Liberia.

The businesses and enterprises include well organized and/or registered farmer cooperatives with ongoing processing activities. CASTRAP's baseline findings indicate that sustainability and growth of agribusinesses in the South East are challenged by the neglect of organisational structures. The project, therefore, aims to enhance the organizational capacity development of cassava sector businesses and enterprises in the landscape. This Call is to support BSOs to undertake this component of the CASTRAP.

BSOs are defined in terms of “structures that provide support services to enterprises such as (but not only) chambers of commerce, and also include incubators and accelerators.”

III. SCOPE OF THE BUSINESS SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS (BSOs) CALL

The expectation of CASTRAP is that beneficiary enterprises within the cassava value chain in the project landscape will be financially sustainable, and commercially viable. CASTRAP is currently targeting 20 businesses and enterprises; 10 existing and 10 new ones to be launched. The proposed projects must:

- enhance the dissemination of best practices and models which help in the growth of businesses, and
- stimulate growth of cassava value chain businesses.

Specifically, the BSOs will have to:

1. Review capacity assessments and develop capacity development plans in consultation with the CASTRAP team, and beneficiary business owners/leaders and staff
2. Implement capacity development services

Thematic domains

The services will include (but not limited to)

- Business plan development
- Organizational structuring
- Investment planning
- Marketing
- Human resources/staff management
- Accounting
- Coaching
- Partnerships building

Duration of Project

- Minimum of 6 months
- Maximum of 12 months

Financial Allocation Provided by the Contracting Authority

The overall indicative amount made available for applicants under this Call for Proposals is **EUR 180,000**. The contracting authority reserves the right not to award all available funds.

Size of grants:

- Minimum: EUR 30,000
- Maximum: EUR 60,000

Within the framework of this Call for Proposals, the Contracting Authority may finance up to 100% of the total eligible cost of the project.

Issuance of this call for proposals does not constitute an award or commitment on the part of CDO to make any awards, nor does it commit CDO to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application.

IV. ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility of applicants

In order to be eligible, the Applicants must be legally registered in Liberia and be one of the following type of organisations:

- Non-Governmental Organisation
- University or Training / Research Institution (public or private)
- Business Advisory Entity
- Entrepreneurship Hub
- Business Service Centre

The applicants shall:

- Have financial and operational capacity to undertake the proposed Project.
- Have necessary professional competences and qualifications to complete proposed Project.
- Be located in, or have operations or representatives in the South East landscape.

Women-led and youth-led BSOs are encouraged to apply.

As a general principle, but in observance of the principle of proportionality, CDO shall exclude from participation applicants which are found in situations of:

- a) bankruptcy, insolvency or winding-up procedures;
- b) breach of obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions;

- c) grave professional misconduct, including mis-representation;
- d) fraud;
- e) corruption and bribery;
- f) conduct related to a criminal organisation;
- g) money laundering or terrorist financing;
- h) terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorist activities;
- i) forced and compulsory labour, child labour and other trafficking in human beings.

Eligibility of Projects

- As a general requirement, projects must take place in the territory of Liberia.
- Projects targeting **ALL** the above-mentioned thematic domains.
- Projects must be based on specific, clear and achievable objectives, a realistic work plan and achievable timeline and measurable outputs / outcomes.
- Projects must be based on a clear sustainability analysis and demonstrate possibility of duration beyond the timeline of CASTRAP (ex. complementarity with ongoing initiatives).
- The proposals have to take into account a risk assessment for implementation, including an assessment for the current Covid-19 pandemic and similar events, with a mitigation plan describing how implementation can be ensured in the presence of community transmission, and/or preventive and restrictive measures (for instance, to movements).
- Projects should not involve activities that could harm the safety and security of beneficiaries, partners and organisations during implementations, or otherwise expose them to risks (in any case, CDO shall not take any responsibility in this regard).
- The objective of the Project cannot be commercial.

No grant may be awarded retroactively for Projects already completed.

Visibility

The Beneficiary(ies) shall take all necessary steps to publicise the fact that the Contracting Authority and the European Union through WACOMP in Liberia has financed the Project. Such measures shall comply with WACOMP branding guidelines, and the EUTF Toolkit for communication and the Communication and Visibility Manual for European Union External Actions¹, laid down and published by the European Commission, and should insure the necessary visibility of the contracting authority.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/comm-visibility-requirements_en

Eligibility of costs

Only 'eligible costs' can be covered by a grant. The categories of costs that are eligible and ineligible are indicated below. The budget is both a cost estimate and an overall ceiling for 'eligible costs.'

In principle, only costs related to activities implemented after the signature of the Award contract can be considered eligible. In exceptional and duly justified cases, costs incurred before contract signature may be considered eligible retroactively. In such cases, the Contracting Authority must be informed and has to formally accept, prior to the signature of the Grant Contract any retroactive costs. Eligible costs are actual costs incurred by the Beneficiary(ies) which meet all the following criteria:

- a) they are incurred during the implementation of the Project. In particular:
 - i. Costs relating to services and works shall relate to activities performed during the implementation period. Costs relating to supplies shall relate to delivery of items during the implementation period. Signature of a contract, placing of an order, or entering into any commitment for expenditure within the implementation period for future delivery of services, works or supplies after expiry of the implementation period do not meet this requirement;
 - ii. Costs incurred should be paid before the submission of the final reports. They may be paid afterwards, provided they are listed in the final report together with the estimated date of payment;
 - iii. An exception is made for costs relating to final reports, including expenditure verification, audit and final evaluation of the Project, which may be incurred after the implementation period of the Project;
 - iv. Procedures to award contracts may have been initiated and contracts may be concluded by the Beneficiary(ies) before the start of the implementation period of the Project, provided that the procurement rules of the Annex IV of the contract are respected.
- b) they are indicated in the overall budget for the Project;
- c) they are necessary for the implementation of the Project;
- d) they are identifiable and verifiable, in particular being recorded in the accounting records of the Beneficiary(ies) and determined according to the applicable accounting standards of the country where the Beneficiary(ies) is established and according to the usual cost accounting practices of the Beneficiary(ies);
- e) they comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation;
- f) they are reasonable, justified and comply with the requirements of sound financial management, in particular regarding economy and efficiency.

Eligible direct costs

The following direct costs of the Beneficiary(ies) shall be eligible:

- a) the cost of staff assigned to the Project, corresponding to actual gross salaries including social security charges and other remuneration-related costs; salaries and costs shall not exceed those normally borne by the Beneficiary(ies), unless it is justified by showing that it is essential to carry out the Project;
- b) travel and subsistence costs for staff and other persons taking part in the Project, provided they do not exceed those normally borne by the Beneficiary(ies) nor the rates published by the European Commission at the time of such missions;
- c) costs deriving directly from the requirements of the Contract (dissemination of information, evaluation specific to the Project, expenditure verification,² translation, reproduction, insurance, etc.) including financial service costs (in particular the cost of transfers and financial guarantees where required according to the Contract);
- d) duties, taxes and charges, including VAT, paid and not recoverable by the Beneficiary(ies).

Contingency reserve

A reserve for contingencies and/or possible variations in exchange rates, not exceeding 5% of the direct eligible costs, may be included in the budget for the Project. It can be used only with the prior written authorisation of the Contracting Authority.

Indirect costs

The indirect costs for the project are those eligible costs which may not be identified as specific costs directly linked to the implementation of the project and may not be booked to it directly according to the conditions of eligibility. However, they are incurred by the Beneficiary(ies) in connection with the eligible direct costs for the project. They may not include ineligible costs or costs already declared under another costs item or heading of the budget of this Contract.

The indirect costs incurred in carrying out the project may be eligible for flat-rate funding, but the total must not exceed 7% of the estimated total eligible direct costs.

The applicant may be asked to justify the percentage requested before the grant contract is signed. However, once the flat rate has been fixed in the special conditions of the grant contract, no supporting documents need to be provided.

² Please note that costs for expenditure verification should be foreseen in the budget. The applicant must bear in mind that in case of award of grant, the applicant will make the necessary arrangements for expenditure verification before the contract signature.

Ineligible costs

The following costs shall not be considered eligible:

- a) debts and debt service charges (interest);
- b) provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- c) costs declared by the Beneficiary(ies) and financed by another project or work programme receiving a CDO grant or European Union grant;
- d) purchases of land or buildings;
- e) currency exchange losses;
- f) credits to third parties, unless otherwise specified in the Special Conditions;
- g) contributions in kind.

No profit principle

The grant may not produce a profit for the applicant. Profit is defined as a surplus of the receipts over the eligible costs approved by the Contracting Authority when the request for payment balance is made.

V. HOW TO APPLY

All applications **must be received before** the deadline of:

07/01/2022, 18:00h (CEST); corresponding to 17:00h (Liberia local time)

All application documents must be sent to procurement@cerathdev.org. The subject line for the submission should be "Name of organization/Business support organizations."

Applicants must use the templates for Application Form (Annex A) and Budget (Annex B) and all other required annexes listed below. Annex A and Annex B are available for download on the CDO Website, <https://cerathdev.org/>.

Applicants should keep to the format of the Application Form and Budget and fill in the paragraphs and pages in order. The Application Form and Budget should be completed carefully and as clearly as possible so that it can be assessed properly. Any major inconsistency or error in the application form or budget may lead to the rejection of the application. Applicants must apply in English. Hand-written applications will not be accepted.

Besides the Application form and the Budget, the applicants must submit the following documents:

- The statutes or articles of association of the applicant³.

³ Where the applicant is a public body created by a law, a copy of the said law must be provided.

- A copy of the applicant's latest accounts (the profit and loss account and the balance sheet for the last financial year for which the accounts have been closed).

Documents must be supplied in the form of scanned versions of the originals (i.e., showing legible stamps, signatures and dates).

If the abovementioned supporting documents are not provided together with the application form the application may be rejected.

By submitting an application, applicants accept to receive notification of the outcome of the procedure by electronic means (through email from procurement@cerathdev.org). Such notification shall be deemed to have been received on the date upon which CDO sends it to the electronic address used for registration on the platform.

Clarifications and Correspondence

The Call for Proposals Guidelines should be so clear that applicants do not need to request additional information during the procedure. If the contracting authority, on its own initiative or in response to a request from a prospective applicant, provides additional information on the Call for Proposals Guidelines, it shall be advertised on the CDO website.

Prospective applicants may submit questions to procurement@cerathdev.org before the deadline specified under section "VII. INDICATIVE TIMELINE", specifying the *Business Support Organization* Call.

Any clarification of the Call for Proposals Guidelines will be issued to prospective applicants simultaneously before the deadline as specified under section "VII. INDICATIVE TIMELINE" by email. CDO has no obligation to provide clarifications after this date.

To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the contracting authority cannot give a prior opinion on the eligibility of applicants, a project or specific activities.

Meetings and/or site visit

Any prospective applicants seeking to arrange individual meetings with the contracting authority during the application period may be excluded from the Call for Proposals procedure.

VI. EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF APPLICANTS

During the administrative and eligibility check the following will be assessed:

- If the deadline has been met. Otherwise, the application will be automatically rejected.
- If the application satisfies all the criteria specified in this guidelines for applicants. This includes also an assessment of the eligibility of the project. If any of the requested information is missing or is incorrect, the application may be rejected on that sole basis and the application will not be evaluated further.
- If the application and all the relevant supporting documents have been submitted and if they are in required format. Any missing supporting document or any incoherence between the declaration and the supporting documents may lead to the rejection of the application on that sole basis.

Following the administrative and eligibility check, assessment of financial and operational capacity of the applicants would be performed. During assessment it would be verified whether applicants

- have stable and sufficient sources of finance to maintain their activity throughout the proposed project;
- have the management capacity, professional competencies and qualifications required to successfully complete the proposed project. After the above-mentioned checks have been performed, the applications will be examined and evaluated by the evaluators appointed by the contracting authority (BSOs Evaluation Committee).

The projects will be selected through a “points system” on the basis of award criteria.

The award criteria help to evaluate the quality of the applications in relation to the objectives and priorities set forth in these guidelines, and to award grants to projects which maximise the overall effectiveness of the call for proposals. They help to select applications which the contracting authority can be confident will comply with its objectives and priorities. They cover the relevance of the project, its consistency with the objectives of the call for proposals, quality, expected impact, sustainability and cost-effectiveness.

Scoring:

The evaluation grid is divided into Sections and subsections. Each subsection will be given a score between 1 and 5 as follows:

1 = very insufficient; 2 = insufficient; 3 = adequate; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

Section	Maximum Score
1. Relevance	15
1.1 How relevant is the proposal to the objectives of the Call for Proposals and to the specific domains/areas or any other specific requirement stated in this guidelines? Are the expected results of the project aligned with the objectives and scope defined in these guidelines?	5
1.2 How relevant is the proposal to the particular needs and constraints of the target beneficiaries, the cassava sector, Liberia's South East and/or the relevant domains?	5
1.3 Does the proposal contain particular added-value elements (e.g., innovation, best practices, new approaches, new operational approaches, new solutions for the environment, new solutions for vulnerable beneficiaries, etc.)?	5
2. Design of the project	15
2.1 How coherent is the design of the project? Does the proposal indicate the expected results to be achieved by the project? Does the intervention logic explain the rationale to achieve the expected results? Are the activities proposed appropriate, practical, and consistent with the envisaged outputs and outcome(s)?	5
2.2 Does the design reflect a robust analysis of the problems involved, and the capacities of the relevant stakeholders?	5
2.3 Does the project address crosscutting issues such as gender equality and social inclusion, COVID-19 pandemic, responsible business management, etc.?	5
3. Implementation approach	30
3.1 Is the Work Plan for implementing the project clear and feasible? Is the timeline realistic?	5
3.2 Does the proposal include an effective and efficient monitoring system? Is there an evaluation planned (previous, during or/and at the end of the implementation)?	5
3.3 Is the adequacy of the approach to implement the project demonstrated/evident?	5
3.4 Is the applicant's adequacy to implement the action using the proposed approach demonstrated/evident?	5

3.4 Can the proposed service activities be easily integrated into the operating activities of the businesses [to reduce opportunity cost]?	5
3.5 Does the approach ensure the active involvement of stakeholders including beneficiary businesses/enterprises?	5
4. Sustainability of the project	10
4.1 Is the project likely to have a tangible impact on its target groups?	5
4.2 Is the project likely to have multiplier effects, including scope for replication, extension, dissemination, capitalisation on experience and knowledge sharing?	5
5. Budget and cost-effectiveness of the project	15
5.1 Are the activities appropriately reflected in the budget?	5
5.2 Is the ratio between the estimated costs and the results satisfactory?	10
Maximum total score	85

If the total score of the evaluation is less than **55**, the application will be rejected.

After the evaluation, a table will be drawn up listing the applications ranked according to their score. The highest scoring applications will be provisionally selected until the available budget for this call for proposals is reached. In addition, a reserve list will be drawn up following the same criteria. This list will be used if more funds become available during the validity period of the reserve list.

The CASTRAP Consortium will inform the selected organisations of the decision and/or recommendations of the BSOs Evaluation Committee to revise and fine tune the proposals (budget, M&E framework, other sections of the Application Form, etc.), where applicable.

Upon implementation of the BSOs Evaluation Committee's recommendation, the proposal should be resubmitted to CDO.

Following the decision to award a grant, the beneficiary(ies) will be offered a contract. By signing the application form the applicants agree, if awarded a grant, to accept the contractual conditions of the grant contract.

VII. INDICATIVE TIMELINE

1. Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the Contracting Authority	20/12/2021
2. Last date on which clarifications are issued by the Contracting Authority	27/12/2021
3. Deadline for submission of applications	04/01/2022 18:00h (CEST); corresponding to 17:00h (Liberia local time)
4. Administrative and eligibility check	10/01/2022
5. BSOs Evaluation Committee meetings	21/01/2022
6. Signature of Grant Contract	31/01/2022
7. Information session for selected Applicants	04/02/2022
8. Indicative starting date of Projects	February 2022 (*)

(*) Specific date to be confirmed to selected Applicants.

This indicative timetable refers to provisional dates (except for 1, 2 and 3) and may be updated by the contracting authority during the procedure.

VIII. ANNEXES

DOCUMENTS TO BE COMPLETED

Annex A: Application Form

Annex B: Budget