

Terms of Reference

African seed systems and financial flows study

Building the economic case for farmer managed seed systems and agroecology

1 Purpose of the assignment

The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) seeks a consultant or consultant team to undertake a study and prepare an evidence based report on African seed systems, the public and private finance that shapes them, and the economic and wider benefits of farmer managed seed systems (FMSS) and agroecology.

AFSA has already carried out several studies on financial flows to African agriculture and a recent scan of financial flows to African seed systems. This assignment will build on that work, bringing together existing findings, filling important gaps and strengthening the evidence for change.

The report must equip AFSA and its Seed Working Group to engage donors, development finance institutions (DFIs) and philanthropic foundations with a compelling, verifiable case for changes in funding priorities, investment criteria and financing practice. Its central demonstration will be economic and financial: yields, production costs, household income and profitability, reported alongside climate resilience, nutrition, biodiversity and livelihoods outcomes.

2 Background and objectives

AFSA's financial flows research strategy identifies two complementary areas of work: documenting performance and mapping finance. This assignment brings them together with an assessment of the current status of African seed systems and a set of practical recommendations for funders. It should build on AFSA's existing research and member knowledge, including its AfDB portfolio tracking, rather than duplicate completed work.

The consultant will deliver four linked objectives:

- Describe the current status, diversity and principal trends of African seed systems, including the role and conditions of FMSS.
- Map where public, private and philanthropic finance currently goes, who benefits, and how much can credibly be identified as supporting FMSS and agroecology.
- Establish the strongest defensible evidence of FMSS and agroecological performance, document new cases, and translate the findings into terms relevant to funding and investment decisions.
- Develop clear conclusions and actionable recommendations to redirect or improve finance, with distinct proposals for donors, DFIs and philanthropy.

3 Scope and coverage

The study will provide a continental overview, supported by a purposive selection of countries and cases spanning African subregions, Francophone and Anglophone contexts, farming systems and institutional models. It is primarily desk research and literature synthesis, supplemented by remote interviews and facilitated case documentation. It does not require a continent-wide survey or new field trials.

At inception, agree the country sample, institutional coverage, definitions and data cut-off with AFSA. Use the latest available evidence for the status assessment and, provisionally, 2020–2025 as the six-year finance window. Earlier performance evidence may be included where still relevant.

4 Assessment of African seed systems

Set out how African seed systems function today and how they are changing. Distinguish farmer managed systems, public breeding and seed provision, commercial systems and their interactions. Define FMSS and agroecology separately and explain their relationship; neither label should be treated as automatic evidence of the other.

- Assess seed sourcing, saving, exchange, local sale, breeding, selection, multiplication and distribution, and the roles of farmers, community seed banks, cooperatives, enterprises, public institutions and women and youth.
- Examine seed access, affordability, availability, quality, crop and varietal diversity, farmer control and responsiveness to local conditions. Identify major differences by crop, geography and farming system.
- Describe market structures, commercial concentration, public research and extension, and the policy and institutional conditions that influence seed systems. Coordinate with AFSA's separate policy and legal work; summarise relevant findings without undertaking a duplicate legal review.
- Assess the reliability of headline estimates of seed-system shares. State their dates, populations, crops and denominators; do not generalise a national or crop-specific estimate to the continent.

5 Mapping public and private finance

Map finance flows for African seed systems and relevant agricultural programmes. Cover direct seed-system investments and wider agriculture investments where a seed component can be identified. Begin DFI tracking and case sourcing in parallel so that case collection does not delay the finance findings.

Sources and channels

- Public finance: selected national budgets and expenditure reports, public research and extension allocations, seed and input subsidy programmes, bilateral and multilateral aid, and DFI projects and financial intermediaries. Prioritise AfDB and agree a feasible selection of other institutions at inception.
- Private finance: commercial seed-company and agribusiness investment, bank lending where disclosed, private equity, venture and impact funds, and relevant acquisitions or corporate transactions. Use fund disclosures, company reports and agribusiness investment reporting; separate ownership transfers from fresh productive investment.
- Philanthropic and blended finance: foundation grants, concessional capital, guarantees and technical assistance. Identify original capital providers, intermediaries and ultimate recipients where traceable.

Required analysis

Map finance by source, recipient, geography, year, instrument, purpose and seed-system model. Examine support for farmer-led seed activities, public systems, commercial seed value chains and input-intensive models, allowing mixed and unclassified categories. Distinguish explicit FMSS support from indirect or potential relevance, using documented eligibility rules and a confidence rating.

Assess impact funds' mandates, actual portfolios, minimum investment sizes, return expectations, eligibility requirements and evidence of FMSS alignment. Identify which organisations and activities can access finance and which are excluded. Explain data coverage and gaps before drawing conclusions about funding imbalances or opportunities.

6 Building the economic and financial evidence

Review peer-reviewed research, credible grey literature, programme evaluations and documented practice to assess whether, where and under what conditions FMSS and agroecology perform. The purpose is to substantiate and sharpen the case for investment and support, while reporting contrary findings, transition costs, trade-offs and uncertainty. Conclusions must follow the evidence.

Lead measures of performance

- Yield and production: crop-specific yields, total farm output, stability across seasons and performance under stress. Explain comparisons between single-crop yields and diversified production systems.
- Costs: purchased seed and inputs, labour including unpaid family labour, equipment, finance costs and transition costs. State whether subsidies and programme support are included.
- Income and profitability: gross margins, net farm income, household income where available, market access and returns per unit of land and labour. Distinguish cash profit from economic profit and value own-consumed production transparently.
- Risk and resilience: variability of income and yields, exposure to input-price and weather shocks, losses avoided, recovery after shocks and time needed to realise benefits.

Wider outcomes and interpretation

Report climate resilience, nutrition and dietary diversity, biodiversity, livelihoods, gender and youth outcomes alongside the financial results. Use measured indicators where available and clearly identified qualitative evidence otherwise. Do not monetise wider benefits without a defensible method or add overlapping benefits together.

Separate evidence attributable to seed-system practices from evidence about broader agroecological packages. Record location, intervention, comparator, sample, duration, methods, funding and limitations. Distinguish causal studies, observational associations, modelling and participant testimony. Assess study quality, comparability and possible publication or selection bias before synthesising results.

New cases and support to AFSA members

Propose 8–10 case studies, subject to inception agreement, including at least four newly documented cases. Source cases proactively through AFSA member organisations and other credible networks. Select for diversity and evidence quality, not only positive outcomes, and explain the limits of representativeness.

Provide a short case template and practical guidance in English and French; conduct remote orientation and follow-up sessions; help members retrieve records, reconstruct transparent farm budgets and explain their results; and return draft cases for factual validation. Where records are incomplete, distinguish estimates and recall from recorded values and avoid invented precision.

Each case should describe context, seed and agroecological practices, who participates and controls decisions, financing, economic results, wider outcomes, comparison or baseline, enabling conditions, challenges and implications for funders. Include a source trail, consent for publication and a statement of evidence strength. Record data gaps and proportionate next steps where financial results cannot yet be verified.

7 Conclusions and recommendations for change

Integrate the seed-system assessment, finance map and performance evidence into a clear account of where current finance is aligned or misaligned with demonstrated needs and outcomes. Identify what can be concluded confidently, what is context-specific and what requires further evidence.

Translate the strongest findings into a decision brief for funding committees and DFI boards. Distinguish farmer profitability, enterprise viability, public value and returns to a financier. Profitable farming or substantial public benefits do not by themselves establish a repayable investment opportunity.

- For donors: identify changes to grant priorities, programme design, procurement, evidence requirements and long-term support for farmer organisations, public services and collective seed functions.
- For DFIs: identify changes to portfolio allocations, appraisal criteria, financial instruments, intermediary requirements, project design and outcome monitoring. Address the scale, transaction costs and risk assumptions that restrict access.
- For philanthropy: identify catalytic grants, flexible and patient support, capacity building, case documentation and evidence gaps that foundations can usefully finance.

Present a prioritised action matrix naming the responsible actor, proposed change, supporting evidence, suitable financing instrument, implementation steps, timeframe, risks and indicators of progress. Include a small set of practical funding propositions, distinguishing activities best supported by grants or public expenditure from those that could responsibly use debt, equity or guarantees. Assess impact investment as an option emerging from the findings, without presuming it is appropriate.

8 Research and data standards

- Agree an inception protocol covering research questions, definitions, search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, country and case selection, sources, extraction tools and quality assessment.
- Create a finance dataset with unique records, original source links and page references, retrieval dates, original currency, amount, time basis, instrument, recipient, classification rationale and confidence level. Supply a data dictionary and reproducible calculations.
- Keep commitments, approvals, disbursements, fund sizes and cumulative investment stocks separate. Avoid double counting donor contributions, intermediary finance, co-financing and downstream projects. Record multi-year allocations and currency conversions consistently.
- Do not count a whole agricultural project as seed or FMSS finance unless justified. Use disclosed component amounts; show any estimated allocation separately with its method. Treat undisclosed amounts as unknown, not zero. State the covered portfolio and denominator for every funding-share estimate.
- Triangulate key claims against primary sources, document disclosure requests and unresolved discrepancies, and distinguish verified data from estimates. Provide ranges or sensitivity analysis when material assumptions affect the conclusions.
- Use informed consent and agreed attribution for interviews and cases. Protect commercially sensitive and personal data, respect member knowledge and publication permissions, and provide accessible feedback to contributors.

The consultant remains responsible for checking every reference and numerical claim. AFSA's review must not substitute for the consultant's own quality assurance.

9 Deliverables and proposed schedule

The proposed duration is 14 weeks from contract signature, subject to agreement on scope, data access and member availability. Bidders should propose the required person-days and allocation of skills. Finance mapping and evidence collection should proceed concurrently.

Deliverable 1 Inception report

A concise workplan and research protocol, agreed coverage and definitions, source inventory, finance classification framework, case selection plan, interview and case templates, risks and mitigation, and schedule for AFSA review. Identify any subscriptions, translation or member-support costs requiring approval.

Deliverable 2 Interim finance mapping

A preliminary DFI tracking brief and working finance dataset, building on existing AfDB research. Include initial public and private coverage, provisional findings, data gaps, classification uncertainties and the plan for completing the map. Clearly label partial coverage and avoid premature continent-wide totals.

Deliverable 3 Evidence dossier

A structured literature evidence matrix, preliminary synthesis led by economic and financial outcomes, and the agreed 8–10 case profiles in draft, identifying at least four newly documented cases. Include the case documentation toolkit, a record of member support, verification status and outstanding evidence gaps.

Deliverable 4 Integrated draft report

A draft report of approximately 35–45 pages excluding annexes, a concise executive summary and a draft funder decision brief. The report must integrate the seed-system baseline, finance map, performance evidence, conclusions and audience-specific recommendations. Annexes should contain methods, cases, sources, data limitations and supporting analysis.

Deliverable 5 Validation

Present findings to AFSA and invited network representatives in a facilitated online validation session. Test factual accuracy, interpretation and feasibility of recommendations. Record feedback and explain how substantive comments will be addressed, preserving the independence of the findings.

Deliverable 6 Final package

Submit the revised report, final cases and evidence matrix, complete finance dataset and data dictionary, a 4–6 page funder decision brief, a prioritised recommendations matrix and a presentation of approximately 12 slides. Provide the report in editable Word and PDF, datasets in editable spreadsheet and open tabular formats, and slides in an editable format. Include a response-to-comments log and a handover of source files that can lawfully be shared.

Core outputs will be in English. Provide the executive summary, funder decision brief and case documentation toolkit in French, with appropriate language review. Budget for bilingual member engagement; price full-report translation separately if proposed.

Acceptance requirements

AFSA will assess deliverables against the agreed scope, traceability of quantitative claims, reproducibility of calculations, evidence quality, completion and validation of cases, clarity of limitations, and usefulness of recommendations to each target audience. The final package must resolve substantive review comments or explain any remaining disagreement. Agree review deadlines at inception and allow one consolidated round of substantive revision.

10 Management and working arrangements

The consultant will report to an AFSA focal point designated at contracting and work with the Seed Working Group. AFSA will facilitate access to relevant existing research, member contacts and related policy work, and coordinate consolidated feedback. The consultant will manage the research, member follow-up, analysis, quality assurance and timely delivery.

Hold an inception meeting and short fortnightly progress meetings. Flag access problems and delays early, with proposed adjustments. Any material change to coverage, case targets, deliverables or schedule requires agreement with AFSA. Field travel is outside the base assignment and should be separately justified and costed if proposed.

AFSA should arrange a technical review of finance classifications and headline quantitative findings before publication. The contract should specify ownership and use rights for deliverables, contributor attribution, confidentiality, data retention and any restrictions on sharing underlying records.

11 Required consultant expertise

The assignment may be delivered by an individual consultant with named specialist support or by a small multidisciplinary team. The proposal must demonstrate capacity across both detailed financial research and farmer-centred evidence documentation.

- Substantial experience researching African agriculture, seed systems, FMSS or agroecology, including familiarity with farmer organisations and diverse regional contexts.
- Demonstrated ability to analyse DFI portfolios, public expenditure, development finance, private investment and fund disclosures, and to construct auditable datasets from incomplete sources.
- Strong agricultural economics or related analytical skills, including farm budgets, income and profitability analysis, and assessment of financial and wider development outcomes.
- Experience in literature synthesis, critical appraisal and case-study research, with an ability to distinguish evidence strength, attribution and uncertainty.
- Ability to support network members in documenting their experience, work respectfully with local knowledge, and produce persuasive reports and briefs for funding decision-makers.
- Excellent written English and a credible plan for French-language engagement and outputs. Disclose any relevant institutional, financial or commercial conflicts of interest.

12 Proposal and budget requirements

Applicants should submit a concise technical proposal explaining their understanding of the assignment, proposed methods and coverage, approach to sourcing and verifying cases, workplan, team responsibilities and quality assurance. Include CVs, two relevant writing or research samples, and references from comparable assignments.

The financial proposal should itemise person-days and daily rates, research assistance, data access, translation, interpretation, member documentation support, validation and applicable taxes. State assumptions, exclusions and any optional costs.

Selection will consider methodological strength, relevant experience, ability to deliver both finance mapping and evidence synthesis, quality of previous outputs, language capacity, feasibility and value for money.

Submit by: 30 October 2026

Send to: afsa@afsafrica.org with the subject line: Proposal for African seed systems and financial flows study

Questions welcome before you submit.