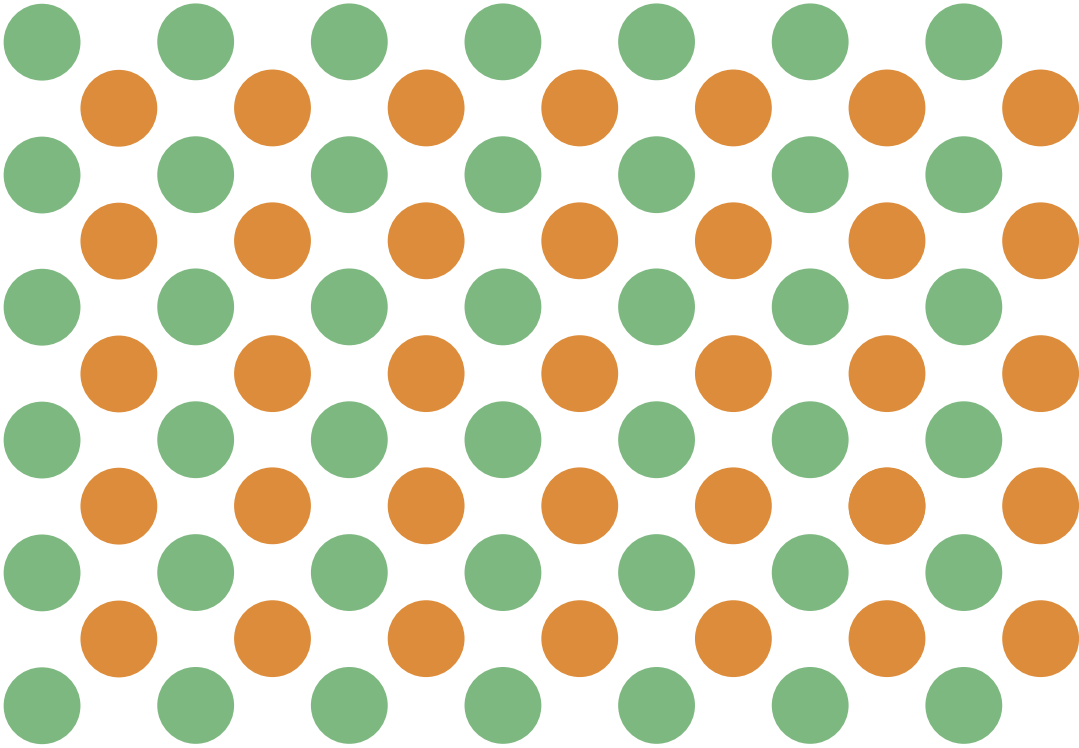
AIRTEA

Strengthening Agricultural Knowledge & Innovation Ecosystem for Inclusive Rural Transformation & Livelihoods in Eastern Africa

Report of the Third-Party Selection Process of the AIRTEA Project

Inclusive Rural Transformation & Livelihoods in Eastern Africa



November 2021

Strengthening Agricultural Knowledge & Innovation Ecosystem for Inclusive Rural Transformation & Livelihoods in Eastern Africa (AIRTEA)

Report of the Third-Party Selection Process of the AIRTEA Project

'Support the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships that promote demand-driven agricultural research and innovation in Eastern Africa'

(Kenya, Rwanda & Uganda)

November 5, 2021

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List of Acronyms

ABLA	Agricultural Business Learning Alliance
AIRTEA	Strengthening Agricultural Knowledge & Innovation Ecosystem for Inclusive Rural Transformation & Livelihoods in Eastern Africa
ARD	Agricultural Research for Development
ASARECA	Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa
EAFF	East Africa Farmers Federation
EDF	European Development Fund
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
IEC	Independent Evaluation Committee
MSP	Multi-stakeholder Partnership
NARI	National Agricultural Research Institute
OACPS	Organization of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States
PAEPARD	Platform for Africa-Europe Partnership on Agricultural Research for Development
PARI	Programme for Accompanying Research for Agricultural Innovation
PCT	Project Coordination Team
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PTT	Project Technical Team
R&I	Research and Innovation

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

The Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA), and the East Africa Farmers Federation (EAFF)[1] formed a consortium to implement the project ***Strengthening Agricultural Knowledge & Innovation Ecosystem for Inclusive Rural Transformation and Livelihoods in Eastern Africa*** **(AIRTEA).** The project is supported by the Organization of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS) through ACP-Innovation Fund, a component of the OACPS Research and Innovation Programme which is funded by the European Union (EU) through the 11th European Development Fund (EDF). The project spans four years (2021-2025).

The consortium, through the AIRTEA Project, is technically and financially supporting multi-stakeholder partnerships from Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda to develop proposals and implement projects that promote demand-driven agricultural research and innovation.

1.2. Goal and Outcomes of the AIRTEA Project

The overall goal of AIRTEA is to *contribute to Sustainable agrarian livelihood and rural transformation in East Africa by applying inclusive research and innovation.* The three specific outcomes of the Project are:

i. Increased involvement of women and youth in East Africa in linking multi-stakeholder innovation platforms (IPs) to practical solutions within national, regional, and global food systems,

ii. Technologies, knowledge, and innovations taken up by the stakeholders involved in the national and regional Agricultural Business Learning Alliance (ABLA) platforms,

iii. Improved profitability and employment opportunities along agricultural commodity value chains.

Part of the funding to AIRTEA is earmarked for financing third-party projects. To achieve these outcomes, the consortium will provide technical and financial support to third parties to create and implement multi-stakeholder partnership (MSP) projects in agricultural research for development (ARD) that address challenges and/or opportunities at the local, national, or regional level from Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda.

[1] www.faraafrica.org; www.asareca.org; www.eaffu.org

This report provides an outline of the evaluation process for the third-party proposals received from institutions based in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda.

1.3. The Call for Proposals

The AIRTEA Project Coordination Team (PCT) developed a call for proposals, including guidelines and a mechanism to award and manage financial support to third parties, an application form for applicants and a budget template. The guidelines provided a detailed definition of some concepts in relation to the overall AIRTEA Project. These concepts include, innovation, research and innovation (R&I) uptake, inclusive innovation, local and indigenous knowledge, frugal innovation, knowledge transfer, agribusiness learning alliance, co-creation, and innovation platforms.

An illustration of the research priorities, eligible activities and scope of the call was given in addition to the detailed objectives of the call, the expected impact, duration of the project, and eligible applicants / target group.

Ultimately, applicants were to submit proposals with budget amounts ranging from EUR 150,000 to 400,000. As a condition to meet the requirement of the ACP Innovation Fund, a total amount of EUR 2,652,000 was set aside by AIRTEA for funding third parties. The selected third parties were required to be suitable partnerships with proposals demonstrating potential for impact. The call for proposals was launched on 10th June, 2021 on the various online platforms of the consortium members. Interested applicants were given two months to submit their proposals. The deadline for proposal submission was 9th August, 2021. The full details for the call and guidelines are appended in annex 1.

1.4. Third-Party Proposals Development

Following the dissemination of the call for proposals, the following steps were adopted

1.4.1. An information-sharing meeting

On 8th July, 2021, the PCT organized a virtual information-sharing meeting via zoom platform for stakeholders from the three project countries. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the development and submission of innovative demand-driven MSP project proposals that address challenges and opportunities along commodity value chains in these countries or in the region.

A detailed presentation on the objectives of the AIRTEA Project and the objectives of the call was made, as well as of the AIRTEA work packages, followed by a detailed presentation on the budget and fiduciary elements of the proposal development process. Additionally, several frequently asked questions already raised through email, as well as the online platforms of AIRTEA consortium partners were addressed during the information meeting.

Participants were encouraged to discuss and seek clarification on the technical and administrative components of the proposal development process. This stimulated further discussions on the composition of third-party project teams and improved understanding of the various budget elements.

Further technical support was provided to potential third parties by providing access to some relevant knowledge products which provided guidance on the development of the proposals. Some of these knowledge products include a working paper on the Agribusiness Learning Alliances (ABLA) as well as PAEPARD and PARI publications.

The Project Technical Team (PTT) provided technical support to the third-party applicants to ensure they developed quality proposals with potential impact.

By the close of the proposal submission date a total of 112 applications were received by the PCT. All applications were submitted by email.

2. Evaluation and Selection Process of Third-Party Projects

2.1. Eligibility Screening and Administrative Checks

The AIRTEA PCT carried out the eligibility screening and administrative check of all submitted proposals to ensure eligibility. The administrative checks were aimed at ensuring that the applications conformed to the guidelines published on who qualified to apply. The critical focus was on the following,

- The legal status of the main applicant in either Kenya, Rwanda, or Uganda.
- The main applicants should have been established before 2017.
- The main applicants should have managed at least two Research and Innovation (R&I) grants of at least EUR 75,000 over the years 2018 to 2020.
- The main applicant should be directly responsible for the preparation of the proposal and will be the manager of the activities being funded.
- The partnership should have at least three partners within its core group including a researcher and non-researcher.
- The requested financial support should be between EUR 150,000 and EUR 400,000.
- The proposed duration of the project should not exceed 36 months.

Only eligible proposals were considered in the next stage, i.e., technical evaluation. Out of 112 submitted proposals received, 75 were approved for technical evaluation while 37 were found to be ineligible.

2.2. Technical Review by Independent Evaluation Committee

2.2.1. Engagement of Independent Evaluation Committee

The call for proposal highlighted that an Independent Evaluation Committee (IEC) composed of researchers and experts from corporate, development, and policy sectors would be recruited to review the proposals. The specific objectives of the assignment of the IEC were:

a. To assess, using the scorecard criteria, all eligible proposals submitted in response to the call, which fulfilled the administration criteria after a check done by the AIRTEA PCT.

b. To recommend for funding, the best proposals to the Project Steering Committee (PSC).

c. To produce a report of the evaluation process and its outcome.

Members of the IEC were selected through a competitive evaluation procedure. The Terms of Reference of the IEC were to,

i. Provide the peer review evaluation of proposals based on the evaluation criteria published in the call advertised and in the Mechanism to award and manage financial support to third parties.

ii. Provide a written summary of each proposal to help the PSC take the award decision.

iii. Recommend proposals for funding

The IEC composed of seven (7) members was recruited transparently using FARA's procurement procedures. An expression of interest was published for a period of two weeks, an evaluation team was set up to screen all CVs submitted, and the final selection was approved by the PSC.

The seven members IEC were recruited based on their individual competencies and the complementarities of their expertise: biophysical science, social sciences, institutional and human capacity development, and development including gender integration, agribusiness development, planning and policymaking in agriculture. The members of the IEC were nationals of Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana, Nigeria, United Kingdom and Denmark.

In implementing their Terms of Reference, the IEC members carried out the following:

a. Nominated the chairman and the vice-chairman of the IEC and developed timelines for the assignment.

b. Each reviewer was randomly assigned a set of 32 proposals to read, score and provide review comments. Each proposal was assessed by three (3) evaluators.

c. Deliberated/decided on the proposals that were recommended for award of grants.

d. Produced a synthesized report for each proposal. The report highlighted the strengths, weaknesses, observations and the basis for recommendation.

The proposals were evaluated using a scorecard methodology based on five (5) key criteria:

- Problem definition, objectives & methodology (30 points)
- Potential impact (20 points)
- Partnership suitability (20 points)
- Profile of the applicant and other partners (20 points)
- Proposed budget and capacity to manage external funds (10 points)

For ease of clarity and scoring each of the criteria was split into sub-criteria.

The IEC meetings were convened by the AIRTEA PCT which provided clarification of the AIRTEA Project where it was required. Following a smooth evaluation process, the individual scores were submitted to the chair who collated them.

A review meeting to discuss the scores was done and where there were wide differences between individual reviewers, the team discussed to achieve consensus and narrow the differences in scores. The final scores were then averaged, and a mean score calculated for each proposal. The entire set of evaluated proposals was then ranked from the highest to the lowest score.

Generally, the quality of the proposals was high, with fifteen (15) of the 75 reviewed proposals scoring above 80%. There were many good and relevant project ideas, however, in several cases proposals failed to package these ideas in a form that clearly addresses the specifics of the call.

The assignment was expected to be completed by **16th August 2021 but ended on 1st October 2021**. This delay was caused by the need for frequent meetings to discuss the evaluation progress.

3. Results and Recommendations after IEC Review

The Chair of the IEC submitted the final report to the PCT. A meeting was held between the IEC Chair and the PCT, virtually via zoom on 6th October, 2021 to discuss the IEC report.

The meeting noted the need to ensure country balance in the third parties, to build capacity in the region and to promote MSPs, women and youth projects that addresses the AIRTEA specific

objectives. In response to these observations the following additional criteria were used to select the proposals that were submitted to the PSC for approval of grant award.

1. Proposal from country-based institutions, more specifically, the highest-ranked proposals from the National Agricultural Research Institutions (NARI).
2. Best ranked regional proposals by National Agricultural Research Systems that cut across the three countries.

Since the budget for most proposals was close to the maximum of EUR 400,000, staying within the EUR 2,652,000 allocation to third parties meant that only six (6) proposals could be funded.

3.1. Review and Approval by the Project Steering Committee

3.1.1. The Steering Committee Meeting

The AIRTEA Project Steering Committee meeting was held on 18th October, 2021 to review and approve the proposals that were recommended by the PCT for third-party funding. The funding is conditional on a no-objection by the OACPS and the European Commission (EC), the main funder of the AIRTEA Project.

3.1.2. Guidance from the Steering Committee

The PSC comprehensively discussed the methodology and outcome of the process for evaluation and selection of third-party projects. Consequently, the PSC recommended the following before final approval,

- Affirmative action should be applied to proposals focusing on youth and women, and to projects led by private sector organizations. The purpose is to improve the capacities of these actors and ultimately the impact of their work.
- Increase the number of third-party projects from six (6) up to not more than 15, to accommodate the affirmative action and projects that may not qualify after the due diligence.
- Carry out a clarification process for the selected projects to:
    - Ensure the budgets are within the guidelines provided in the AIRTEA call for proposals.
    - Double check the legal status of the lead applicant, in terms of their establishment within Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda.
    - Establish the evidence that the lead applicant has managed grants of at least EUR75,000 in the last two years.

- Confirm that the lead applicant has been in existence since 2017.

- Communicate to all 75 third-party applicants on the progress of the review process.

3.1.3. Final Steering Committee Selection

After implementing the guidance provided by the Steering Committee, the 12 projects listed in Table 1 were approved by the PSC on 8th November 2021 as the recommended third-party projects for AIRTEA. Accordingly, the PSC endorsed them for submission to OACPS and EC. The distribution of the 12 proposals by geographical coverage and type of lead institution is summarized in Table 2.

Table 1. Projects Selected for Third-Party Funding

No	Name of Projects	Lead Institution	Project country(ies)
1	Digital Connectors for farming communities	Africa Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS)	Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda
2	Strengthening cassava innovation ecosystem and knowledge transfer for inclusive rural livelihoods development in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda	University of Nairobi (UoN)	Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda
3	Technology Transfer through Innovation Systems: Enhancing Smallholder farmers' capacity for profitable and sustainable potato production	Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB)	Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda
4	Leveraging The Benefits of Multi Stakeholders Partnership to Support Rural Women and Youth in Dairy Sector in Kenya	Cooperatives Alliance of Kenya	Kenya
5	Unlocking productivity within small holder farming systems through use of geospatial technology (GIS), artificial intelligence and biological technologies in the face of climate change	Koppert Biological Systems (K)	Kenya
6	Upgrading of silver cyprinid (Rastrineobola argentea) value chain through multi-stakeholder partnerships and novel climate-	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT)	Kenya

No	Name of Projects	Lead Institution	Project country(ies)
	smart postharvest processing technologies and practices for improved rural livelihoods		
7	Promoting technologies and innovations for improving access to quality potato seeds by small holder farmer through strengthening potato seed systems and multi-stakeholder collaboration in Rwanda	Seed Potato Fund Joint Ventures Ltd (SPF)	Rwanda
8	Satellite crop monitoring for Innovative National Agriculture Insurance Scheme in Rwanda	Meteo Rwanda	Rwanda
9	Youth Leading Changes in Resilient Private Extension and Advisory Services for Job and Wealth Creation	Youth Engagement in Agriculture Network (YEAN)	Rwanda
10	Enhancing inclusive market access for African Indigenous Vegetable seed and value-added products by Smallholder farmers in Uganda	Uganda Christian University (UCU)	Uganda
11	Harnessing multi-stakeholder innovation platforms for knowledge transfer and aquaculture value chain development in Uganda	Abi Zonal Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Abi ZARDI)	Uganda
12	Retaining next generation farmers in agribusiness through enhanced knowledge sharing platforms along with the dairy and selected grain value chains in Uganda	AGRENES (Agriculture, Environment, and Ecosystems) Limited	Uganda

NARI/University

International ARD organization

Private Sector

Women and/or Youth Focused

Table 2. Distribution of the 12 selected proposals by the lead organization and geographical coverage

Type of lead institution	Geographical Coverage				Total
	All 3 countries	Kenya only	Rwanda only	Uganda only	
NARI / University	2	1	0	2	**5**
International AR&D organization	1	0	0	0	**1**
Private Sector	0	1	2	0	**3**
Women and / or Youth-focused	0	1	1	1	**3**
Total	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**12**

4. General Observations

The PCT and IEC made the following observations about the proposals, which may be useful for future calls and for use during the implementation of the project.

a. The Problem, Objectives and Methodology were generally well expressed although there was a tendency for some applicants to describe objectives as activities.

b. Not all applicants understood the concept of multi-stakeholder platforms. Often the description and configuration of the partnerships were skewed along "multi-sector partnerships".

c. Not all applicants understood that women and youth were central to this call and the way they were included and targeted should have been well described.

d. There was a good understanding about impact resulting from project interventions.

e. Generally, there were some excellent proposals touching highly marginalized commodities such as insects, pigs and seed value chains as well as all relevant value chain segments with emphasis on marketing. Good initiatives in use of insects to feed other animals, (make feeds) were among proposals that demonstrated creativity in addressing environmental issues.

f. A few good proposals did not include the detailed budget. A detailed budget should be made mandatory.

g. Profile of applicant and other partners. A sub-criterion should be found to better assess the suitability of a partner to fulfil its role in the project. It would be more relevant to assess the division of roles and responsibilities between partners (= complementarity of partners) rather than the division of roles and responsibilities between researchers and non-researchers. Some had limited international experience BUT had done good work locally, such must also be given chance to grow.

h. The use of ICT with the engagement of youth and women is well captured in some of the proposals.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Given that the AIRTEA Project depends mainly on third-party projects and their implementing partnerships to achieve its objectives, the process of selecting these projects is crucial to the success of the overall project. The twelve projects selected and approved for funding following the criteria provided by the call for proposals as well as the recommendations from the IEC, PCT and PSC constitute a sound portfolio intervention with promise to achieve the AIRTEA project objectives. These projects are evenly distributed across the project countries (Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda), with considerations of promoting MSPs, women and youth, as well as ensuring the private sector is well represented.

Crucially, regarding the duration of the third-party projects, the PCT has noted that a three-year timeline is no longer realistic due to the following reasons:

- Delays in the selection and approval process leading to delay in signing contracts with third-party lead institutions.
    - The selection process delayed by more than 1.5 months. It was expected to be completed by 16th August 2021 but ended on 1st October 2021.
    - The first steering committee review held on 18th October 2021 mandated the PCT to reconvene and carry out a clarification process on the recommended projects.
    - The contracting processes (i.e., due diligence, among others) with third parties will take a minimum of four (4) weeks hence the contracts cannot be signed before 1st December 2021.
- It is necessary for third parties to complete their projects at least two months before the entire project ends to allow for collation of their results and for close-out reporting. The current timeline shows that a three-year duration for third-party projects would place their end date in January 2025. This timing is not workable because the final AIRTEA report which will be largely derived from the third party-project reports will be due on 31 January 2025.

In view of the above, the PCT recommended that the duration of third-party projects should be reduced to two and half years. This will enable the AIRTEA consortium partners to close all third-party projects before the closing of the project implementation period.

The PSC considered this recommendation and approved it.

Thus, the main decisions of the PSC regarding AIRTEA third-party projects are:

- Approval of the twelve third-party projects indicated in Table 1 to be engaged for the next stage, subject to a no objection by the OACPS and EC.
- Approval that the duration of third-party projects shall be two and a half years.

Annexes:

Annex 1: Call for Proposals Documentation



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