



<b>Project/Consultancy Title:</b>	SPARC qualitative research expert consultants
<b>Project Location(s):</b>	Wau, WBG State, South Sudan

**Background:**

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.

Supporting Pastoralism & Agriculture in Recurrent & Protracted Crises (SPARC) is a six-year (2020-2026) initiative funded by FCDO. The goal is to generate and promote the application of evidence on what works to strengthen the resilience of agricultural and pastoral livelihoods in fragile, drylands contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. The program aims to advance research on livelihoods, agriculture and pastoralism that can be used by FCDO and other agencies to guide decisions on programs and policies to support livelihoods resilience in the drylands. Through research and evidence, SPARC will develop knowledge to enhance the ability of FCDO, the donor community, NGOs, local and national governments and other stakeholders to assist pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and farmers in the context of conflict, climate change, and other shocks and stressors. Mercy Corps is a member of the SPARC consortium with the ODI and the International Livestock Research Institute. Cowater International is the lead firm.

**Purpose / Project Description:**

Mercy Corps seeks to hire two individual qualitative researchers, **one male and one female**, on a temporary consulting basis. The successful candidates will have extensive experience conducting qualitative research, strong demonstrated knowledge of the Western Bahr el Ghazl context and the ability to lead self-directed field research (interviews and FGDs) with minimal supervision. Applicants with no previous experience conducting qualitative field research will unfortunately, not be considered for this position. Additionally, previous experience conducting research on issues related to rural livelihoods is highly desirable (though not required).

Under SPARC, Mercy Corps is planning the continuation of a multi-year study in South Sudan and Kenya, to learn more about the strategies pastoralists are using to respond to volatility and uncertainty in the drylands, particularly as a function of climate and conflict-induced shocks. Specifically, the study will 1) identify and categorize the mechanisms, systems and processes pastoralists are employing in response to shifting hazards and shocks in distinct drylands contexts; 2) identify the factors that influence *which* approaches pastoralists prioritize when responding to shocks, and 3) from the perspectives of local communities and actors, investigate which approaches appear to be the most effective in building resilience. Answering these questions will shed light on the pathways of evolution of pastoral systems amidst continuing and potentially growing volatility in the drylands and should generate clear guidance on opportunities for the design and implementation of livelihood support programming. The study will entail a combination of desk review, expert consultation, and qualitative fieldwork in South Sudan.

Key research questions include:

- 1) **How are the livelihood systems of pastoralist populations shifting or adapting in the face of climate change, conflict, and economic volatility? Sub Questions:**
  - a) How are livelihood hazards (and their underlying drivers) changing in the drylands? Which hazards do pastoralists see as most acute, and why? How do these perceptions differ based on gender, age, wealth, or other socioeconomic factors?
  - b) What livelihood shifts and adaptations are pastoralists using to cope with and adapt to increasing uncertainty?
- 2) **What household- and community-level factors influence the approaches and mechanisms that different pastoralists employ or prioritize in the face of shocks and stresses? Sub-questions:**
  - a) How do demographic factors such as gender, age, wealth, and status influence the use of certain approaches or mechanisms to mitigate risk and reduce hazards?
  - b) What role do markets (including market accessibility, quality and aspects of functionality) play in determining the approaches that pastoralists employ in response to or anticipation of shocks?
  - c) To what extent do individuals' long-term livelihood aspirations influence the short-term strategies they employ in response to or anticipation of shocks, and how do these aspirations differ based on socioeconomic factors such as age and gender?
  - d) Recognizing that certain approaches and mechanisms may promote the wellbeing of some at the expense of others, what trade-offs do pastoralists make when determining which approaches or mechanisms to prioritize? Do these prioritizations differ based on shock? Between households? Why and how?
  - e) What are the different (positive and negative) effects by age, gender, wealth and status of different approaches and mechanisms employed?
- 3) **Which approaches and mechanisms appear to be most and least effective in terms of building resilience to shocks and stresses?**
  - a) Under which circumstances does diversification to non-farm livelihood activities appear to help build resilience to existing and emerging shocks? To what shocks? In what form (e.g., temporary diversification vs. permanent diversification? Diversification by the entire household, or only some members?)? And to what end (i.e., what resilience-related outcomes does diversification support), and with benefits for whom (i.e., are there observable differences in outcomes associated with different strategies based on gender, and/or other HH and intra-HH characteristics)?
  - b) Under which circumstances does consolidation/intensification of pastoralist livelihood portfolios help build resilience? To which shocks? In what form? To what end?
  - c) What are the characteristics that make such moves possible or successful?

### **Summary of Activities**

To implement this research activity in South Sudan, the consultants will conduct two rounds of interviews before the end of November 2023 (with a target to conduct interviews in April/May and September). The consultants will be expected to conduct rigorous, semi-structured interviews with a sample size of approximately forty (40) pastoral households in each round, divided between the consultants. That means, assuming two consultants are hired for this role, each will be expected to deliver 20 interviews per round. The consultants will be responsible for identifying and recruiting respondents, based on sampling criteria that Mercy Corps will provide. In addition, the consultants will jointly lead at least six (6) Focus Group Discussions with pastoralist households. FGDs will likely entail the use of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methodologies.



## Scope of Work

In summary, the Consultant's primary roles will include leading data collection including respondent identification and recruitment, participating in analysis activities, supporting the identification of program-relevant learning and recommendations, and collaborating on research instrument design.

### **Specific Activities:**

The Consultants will:

- Participate in the design of research instruments, including by reviewing tools designed by lead researchers and providing technical feedback particularly to ensure relevance and sensitivity of proposed interview topics.
- Mobilize at least 40 pastoral households for participation in research interviews, based on sampling criteria to be provided by Mercy Corps.
- Conduct semi-structured key informant interviews with these respondents, requiring careful and sensitive probing and taking detailed interview notes.
- Mobilize and lead at least 6 Focus Group Discussions with pastoral households, based on sampling criteria to be provided by Mercy Corps.
- Comprehensively type interview and Focus Group Discussion notes to share with the study team and participate in regular analytical debriefs with members of the broader SPARC research team.
- Review report drafts and provide technical and contextual contributions to the resulting analysis.
- Engage in post-data collection analysis sessions with a focus on bringing contextual and subject matter expertise to bear, and ensuring relevance, accuracy, and sensitivity of written products
- Liaise with local stakeholders to ensure necessary permissions are obtained to conduct research in the prioritized regions of WBG (Wau and surrounds).

### **Deliverables**

- Thorough review of qualitative research instruments prior to each round of interviews, resulting in written feedback on documents and participation in calls with study team to ensure relevance and contextual sensitivity of tools;
- Two rounds of qualitative interview transcripts (approximately 30 interviews per consultant per round), carefully labeled and uploaded on a shared Google Drive.
- Participation in at least four analytical discussions with the full research team, over the course of each round of field work, to share preliminary findings and discuss priorities for further probing and follow-up in subsequent interviews.
- Review research report drafts, to provide feedback and areas for improvement based on contextual knowledge.

### **Essential qualifications**

- Significant previous experience leading qualitative field research and data collection activities, including semi-structured interviewing and focus group discussions, preferably with an international NGO or other aid actor.
- Strong communication skills, including both writing and speaking in both local languages and English.
- Strong knowledge of the Western Bahr el Ghazal context, with the ability to work independently with minimal support to conduct field work on the ground.
- Ability to efficiently and comprehensively transcribe interview notes using Microsoft Word, for sharing with the broader study team.
- Experience using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods is highly preferable, though not required.
- Experience conducting research on rural livelihoods and issues related to pastoralism is highly preferable, though not required.

### **Timeframe / Schedule:**



This consulting opportunity will entail approximately **45 days** of work between April 1 , 2023 and November 1, 2023.

**Interested entities should submit their financial proposal, workplan, CVs, profiles and references from previous similar works by or before March 30<sup>th</sup> 2023 to <[ss-pr@mercy Corps.org](mailto:ss-pr@mercy Corps.org)>**