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Approved by
Director ARPP
02 AUG 2024
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**CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FROM CONSULTANCY FIRMS TO CONDUCT
MIDTERM EVALUATION OF THE
RURAL UPGRADE OF RESILIENCE OF AGRIBUSINESSES AND LIVELIHODS IN
SOUTH SUDAN (RURALSS) PROJECT**



1.0 Introduction

AVSI Foundation (AVSI), an international NGO founded in 1972, with headquarters in Italy, implementing cooperation projects in emergency and development contexts across 39 countries. The mission of AVSI is to work towards development that is sustainable and capable of responding to the real needs of people. To this end, it works on projects focused on the challenge of education, in which the individual is accompanied and becomes the central character of their own development and invests a lot of energy in promoting organizations within civil society.

AVSI has been active in South Sudan since 2005 and currently implements post-conflict recovery and resilience building projects in the States of Central Equatoria, Eastern Equatoria and Lakes in the thematic areas of Education, Nutrition, Agriculture and Food Security, Livelihoods and Peacebuilding with climate change action and gender mainstreaming as crosscutting themes.

1.1 Background of RURALSS project

AVSI Foundation is currently implementing a resilience building project titled Rural Upgrade of Resilience of Agribusinesses and Livelihoods in South Sudan (RURALSS), with funding from Embassy of Kingdom of Netherlands (EKN) under activity identifier SS-RRC-140-RURALSS and portal link XM-DAC-7-PPR-4000005160 running from 01st December 2021 to 30th November 2026. The project aims to transition smallholder farmers (SHFs) from subsistence agriculture to farming as a business in order to increase availability of nutrient-rich foods that will directly contribute to improved nutritional outcomes at household level, and increased income earned from empowered participation in lucrative markets resulting in enhanced socio-economic growth and quality of life.

The RURALSS project is implemented in the counties of Torit, Magwi, and Ikotos in Eastern Equatoria State, and Wulu and Cueibet in Lakes State.

The project targets participants of the following categories; SHFs (4,800), household food consumers (28,800), agribusiness/cooperatives (30), and value chain actors (1,200).

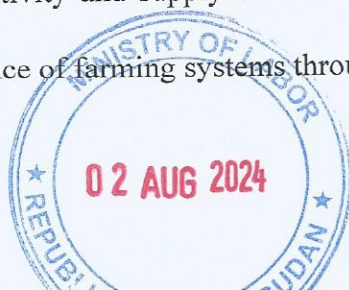
The project primarily contributes to the Government of the Netherlands' Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) Agenda for South Sudan that aims to deliver inclusive, sustainable development through nutrition-sensitive farming and commercialization through strengthening and facilitation of a climate smart, resilient food system that supports small-scale producers and the consumers; increasing income, nutrition, hygiene and resilience.

The project is anchored to the triple-nexus approach the interconnects humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actions. It aims to contribute to the intermediate outcomes:

- a. People's nutrition improved,
- b. Economic performance and resilience of farming systems increased, and
- c. Increased household income.

Specifically, it intends to influence local food systems through:

- increased smallholder farmers' knowledge and skills in climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive agriculture
- increased productivity and supply of nutrient-rich food sources (for the selected agri-food value chains);
- increased resilience of farming systems through climate smart practices;



- increased employment/jobs created from the agri-food value chains through upgrades and facilitation of smallholders and agribusinesses to engage in product creation and value addition;
- Improved access to agribusiness services;
- Increased involvement of women and youth in the agriculture sector through capacity building.

1.2 Intervention Logic of RURALSS project

The RURALSS project's change theory (see appendix 1) is that if, smallholder farmers' households are empowered to engage in nutrition-sensitive climate-smart interventions in agri-food value chains, then they will build resilience mechanisms within their farming systems which will allow them to sustainably produce sufficient nutrient-dense foods that adequately meet their dietary intake requirements and have surpluses to sell to earn income and strengthen the local agri-food system. And that if, households and communities are influenced through social and behaviour change communication to adopt mindsets that appreciate and adapt to appropriate nutritional practices with role model mothers and male nutrition champions spearheading the change effort, then nutritional statuses of community members will improve, resulting in lower expenditure on medicare and enables increased individual adult productivity and reduced absenteeism of children from schools. That if on the other hand, the participation and representation of smallholder farmers, especially the female SHFs by inclusion in market systems and governance/leadership structures that enable them to freely air their views and be heard, contribute to decision-making and make decisions that influence their take home package from value chain engagements, then with increased earnings/income, every targeted SHF household will be able to afford and meet their basic needs and services leading to socio-economic growth and improved quality of their lives.

In order to achieve the desired change, AVSI with support from the Dutch Government has lined up sequenced programming pathways through which inputs and resources required for the delivery of planned packages are availed on time to execute planned interventions that then produce outputs that meet the quality standards and volume required to trigger the change process that will lead to achievement of the high-level outcomes (the 3 specific objectives of the project) listed below:

- Specific Objective (SO)1: Nutrient-rich food availability in communities in South Sudan enhanced by end of 2026.
- Specific Objective 2: Nutritional status of households' members in South Sudan improved by end of 2026.
- Specific Objective 3: Income of South Sudanese farmers increased by end of 2026.

The above objectives will be achieved if assumptions and preconditions hold, anticipated risks are well-managed, inputs and resources required for the project, and implementation of planned interventions go on as planned without significant disruptions.

2.0 Description of the assignment

As the implementation of the RURALSS project approaches its halfway point (30 months), AVSI Foundation is obligated to conduct a midterm evaluation that will provide a comprehensive all-round picture of the project in accordance to evaluation OECD-DAC criteria for projects. This assignment requires the engagement of a consultant

AVSI is seeking a competent consultant or firm to undertake a midterm evaluation for the RURALSS project.



2.1 The Objective of assignment

The purpose for this evaluation is to assess the performance of the project and capture project achievements/results, challenges, and best practices based on the OECD-DAC criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Coherence, Impact and Sustainability). On the other hand, it offers a learning aspect for all stakeholders. The evaluation will also identify key lessons learned, challenges, unintended effects and the flexibility of the programme to adapt and respond to the changes and sustainability of the project interventions.

2.2 Specific Objectives of assignment

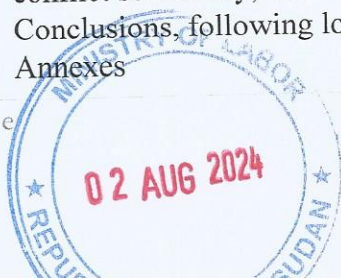
The objectives of the midterm evaluation are to:

1. Assess the performance of the project towards achieving the intended project objectives, results, and outcomes as agreed upon in the project theory of change.
2. Identify and assess critical lessons learned, challenges, unintended effects of the project and draw recommendations for future resilience building programs anchored to the agri-food sector.
3. Assess whether the risks identified in the project were the most important and appropriate ones. Were the risk management strategies/responses that were adopted by the project adequate?

2.3 Expected Deliverables

It is anticipated that the midterm review will produce the following deliverables:

- a) An Inception report (to be submitted and accepted prior to commencement of field work including the following items:
 - A detailed methodological approach including, key research questions, defined indicators, sampling framework, review matrix and data collection tools.
 - The methodology should combine a wide range of methods (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, and participatory), tools and information sources to allow triangulation of information and ensure impartiality, validity and reliability.
 - The Inception plan should retain a degree of flexibility to allow the incorporation of any changes recommended from the inception workshop.
 - Inception meeting with the evaluation Steering Committee and key AVSI staff
- b) A one-day stakeholder validation workshop to review the early findings from the draft midterm report. This will be conducted at the end of the data collection process.
- c) A final report not exceeding 25 pages is expected and 5 hard copies be hand-delivered to AVSI and softcopy in CD with data sheets and detailed analysis profiles should be submitted as annexes to the main report. The report should have the following elements:
 - Executive summary.
 - Introduction including description of the context:
 - Description of the intervention assessed
 - Objective of the evaluation, evaluation criteria and questions
 - Methodology used for the evaluation
 - Results/Analysis of information compiled.
 - Discussion, that should include clear lessons learnt and recommendations, and the impact of the impact of the project on the key cross cutting issues including gender, climate, conflict sensitivity, etc
 - Conclusions, following logically from results, answering the evaluation questions
 - Annexes



2.4 Evaluation questions

The evaluation shall provide information especially in the following key aspects according to the project thematic areas including cross cutting issues:

Relevance

- To what extent are the objectives of the project valid to the needs of the beneficiaries?
- To what extent are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with the overall goal and its objectives?
- To what extent are the objectives of the project aligned to the South Sudan agenda for socio-economic transformation of communities through agri-food system resilience?

Effectiveness

- To what extent were the project goal and objectives achieved?
- To what extent have the outputs contributed to the achievement of the immediate objectives of the project?
- How useful are the outputs to the needs of the direct beneficiaries? Is there general acceptance of the outputs by these beneficiaries?

Efficiency

- Were budget estimates sufficient to deliver planned activities and realized expected outputs on time while keeping overhead costs to a minimum?
- Were the implementation strategies appropriate to the contexts and delivering of targeted outputs within the available resources?
- Is there a significant gender differentiation in the usefulness of the outputs to direct beneficiaries?

Impact

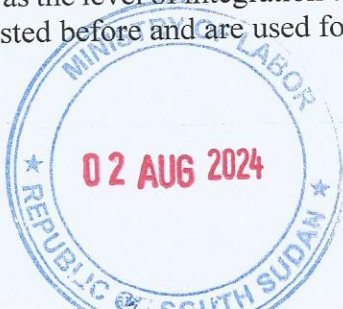
- Are there any indications that the Programme is on track to achieve long term change? What range of outcomes (intended and unintended) has the project contributed to – taking account of each of social, economic, environmental, and cultural considerations?
- How did the action of the project meet the food, nutritional and income needs of the target beneficiaries particularly most in need populations namely pregnant and lactating women, children under 5 years, youths, internally displaced persons, returnees and people with disability?
- What were the added value of this project to the quality of the lives of the target communities, both regarding its design and implementation?

Sustainability

- Is there evidence that the project results are likely to grow – scaling up and out – beyond the project life?
- What were the major factors that are likely to influence the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the project results?
- To what extent will the benefits of the project continue after donor funding ceased?

Coherence

- What was the relationship between this project and other Dutch/non-Dutch funded projects in the same areas? If so, how could this relationship be utilized for strengthening sustainability?
- What was the level of integration of the community structures created by the project with those that existed before and are used for government activities?



Cross cutting themes

- To what extent has the project been conflict sensitive in its planning, implementation and monitoring?
- How has the project incorporated gender transformative actions into its planning, implementation and monitoring of activities?
- To what extent has the project ensured that its activities are climate smart and environmentally sensitive?
- What actions have been taken to ensure active participation of (a) youth and (b) private sector

2.8 Assignment coverage (Geographical location, target beneficiaries)

Given the extensive area of operations as shown below, we recommend that selection of the field visits sites to be according to the evaluation objectives and described evaluation questions. The evaluation should cover the project operational areas of Lakes and Eastern Equatoria States with extensions to the capital, Juba.

The respondent scope which includes the categories shown below should include those not supported by the project to provide a control sample frame.

Respondent category	Location	Numbers
Smallholder farmers	Magwi, Ikotos, Torit, Wulu Cueibet	3,126 enrolled (1,176M, 1950F)
Secondary schools	Magwi, Ikotos, Torit, Wulu Cueibet	18 engaged
Agribusinesses and Cooperatives	Magwi, Ikotos, Torit, Wulu Cueibet, Rumbek and Juba	12 engaged
Community structures' members (Community Development Committees, Community Nutrition Action Groups)	Magwi, Ikotos, Torit, Wulu Cueibet, Rumbek	46 engaged
Government bodies (RRC, Ministries, County authorities and line departments, payam-level structures)	Magwi, Ikotos, Torit, Wulu Cueibet, Rumbek and Juba	4 Engaged
Dutch-funded INGOs/UN agencies (FAO, IFDC, Cordaid, Caritas Luxemburg)	Eastern Equatoria, Lakes	4 engaged

2.9 Evaluation Steering Committee (SC)

The process will be guided by a steering committee (SC) composed of 3 relevant staff from EKN, AVSI/RURALSS and an external person.

The role of EKN, AVSI and SC in management of the evaluation process will include selection of the consultant or firm to undertake the exercise, participate in progress meetings in regards to the MTR, quality checks and endorsement of final report.

The EKN, AVSI and SC will play the following specific/separate roles in management of the evaluation process:



Task	Entity responsible	Output
Signing of the consultancy contract	AVSI	Signed contract
Pre-evaluation inception meeting	SC	Consensus on the major components/expectations of the evaluation
Submission of work plan (methodological approach including indicators, research questions, sampling process and tools, detailed work plan, budget, and Table of content for the final report	SC	Approved work plan
Progress meeting	SC or AVSI only	Feedback to consultant on issues that have come up during the implementation
Validation workshop	SC plus RURALSS/EKN staff and stakeholders drawn from all counties	Feedback on the preliminary findings of the MT evaluation
Submission of evaluation report	AVSI	Report submitted
Quality check of end report	SC	Approval of report
Discharge consultant	AVSI	Contractual obligations met by both parties

3.0 Methodology

Methodological thoroughness in the evaluation design will be valued, in order to ensure that the evaluation meets international standards.

The SC expects to receive feedback from the consulting team at following times: for validating and approval of the final work plan, methodology before fieldwork phase; briefing by consultant on the preliminary results; for providing comments to the evaluation draft report and recommendations before its final approval.

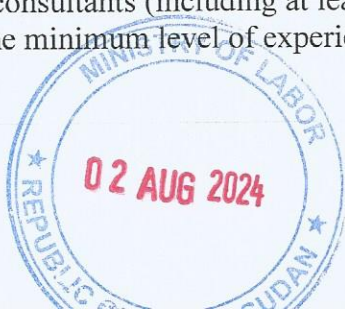
The consultant is expected to come up with an appropriate study design for the evaluation. AVSI/RURALSS will be on hand to provide any reference documents that the consulting firm may need and other logistics during the course of the evaluation.

4.0 Timing and Reporting

The evaluation will start not later than 15/09/ 2024. The final report has to be submitted by 31/10/2024. It is foreseen that the evaluation can take 45 person-days from the time of signing the contract and this is inclusive of inception, data collection and analysis, validation and report finalization. At least 65% of the required persons-days will be allocated for field work. The consultant will be expected to submit proposal outlining the approach and methodology, cost (broken down into as much detail as possible), work plans and timeframe in response to this Terms of Reference.

5.0 Review Team Composition and Qualification of the Consultant

A team of three consultants (including at least 2 local consultants) must cover the relevant expertise areas and have the minimum level of experience for this evaluation:



- The team leader should hold minimum a Master's degree in Agricultural development, Entrepreneurship, Education Planning Management and Administration, Sustainable Development Studies, Business Administration, Socio-economics, natural resources management, project management or related field. To be eligible to conduct this midterm review the consultant(s) on the review team should have no vested interest in the RURALSS project.
- Team leader with at least 7 years demonstrated experience with implementing/reviewing agricultural development intervention in South Sudan and have clear understanding of local context.
- Broad and proven experience with implementing/reviewing resilience building and rural development programmes in Africa.
- The team must have a strong knowledge of all the components of the project (climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive agriculture, social and behavioral communication for nutrition and WASH, value chain development, gender mainstreaming and peacebuilding among others);
- Strong knowledge in social research techniques, both quantitative and qualitative with a participatory approach;
- Extensive experience and proven track record in undertaking donor project evaluation focusing on NGO/government partnerships (CVs of person/s who will carry out the evaluation survey and report writing)
- Ability/commitment to meet agreed deadlines.
- Excellent English writing skills
- Fluent in English and preference will be given to teams with knowledge of South Sudanese languages spoken in the project areas.
- Respect towards cultural and religious diversity.

6.0 Evaluation criteria

The bids submitted will be scored with a possible total of 100 points, broken down as follows:

Demonstration of clear understanding of the assignment (10 Marks)

Comprehensive outline of how to carry the assignment (20 Marks)

Experience and expertise in similar assignments (20 Marks)

Clear technical proposal (30 Marks)

Evaluation Costing (20 Marks)

7.0 Contract

The consultant will be contracted by AVSI Foundation. A contract document will be signed by the both parties before the start of the exercise. Payment of the initial, 30 % installment is subject to successful approval of the methodology and work plan by the SC and submission of a full inception report. 40% upon submission of the inception report and 30% upon approval of the final report. The corresponding contract will be signed within 15 days following receipt of the final-award notice.

The successful bidder undertakes to execute the contract in its own right, as any third-party assignment or subcontracting is prohibited. Furthermore, the contractor shall be liable for any consequences derived from any inaccuracies in statements made in respect of compliance with the obligations under this TOR and the subsequent contract entered into.



8.0 Budget Indication for the Midterm Review

The maximum budget is 35,000 euro (including VAT if applicable). The budget should mention daily fees of consultants as well as specify other costs, as transport, visa (where applicable), etc. AVSI Foundation will meet the cost of the validation workshop.

9.0 Logistical support

This evaluation is commissioned by AVSI Foundation headed by the RURALSS MEAL Coordinator and the RURALSS Chief of Party, who will be responsible for ensuring the compliance with the Terms of Reference of the evaluation contract, disbursement of funds and other logistics.

10.0 Mode of Submission of bid document

Interested firms should submit their proposals; including technical and financial proposals, relevant CVs and motivation letter by 17.00hours (Juba Time) 22nd August 2024. Applications sent via email to Francis.Obita@avsi.org CC Aziz.musema@avsi.org and addressed to the attention of the **Chief of Party RURALSS and MEAL Coordinator, AVSI Foundation**: in a zipped folder or deposit hard copies at the National Office located at: Jerusalem House, opposite All Saints Church along Unity Avenue, Juba City, Republic of South Sudan.



Appendix: 1

The RURALSS Theory of Change

