

Request for Application Research Consultancy Firm

Promoting Sustainable Partnerships for Economic Transformation (PROSPECTS 3) in Montserrado, Bong and Nimba Counties, Liberia.

Issuance date: 16 May 2019

Closing date: 30 May 2019 (5 p.m.)

Duration: 6 months (7th June 2019 – November 2020)

Cost Contribution: Not Required

Mercy Corps reserves the right to award one, several, or no grants from applications received.

Proposal Submission: Send electronic copies to our email at: lr-tenders@mercy Corps.org.

General Eligibility Criteria:

- Must have valid registration as a firm or company
- Lead consultant should have a minimum of a master's degree (Ph.D. preferred) in the social sciences, humanities, economics, agriculture or related field.
- Consulting firm with track record of successfully delivering a minimum of 2 published research papers on social economic development.
- Must have a minimum of 5 years' experience in research surveys with International Non-Governmental Organizations. List of research projects including: Title of project, dates of implementation, total budget, locations, partners (if applicable), donor(s), contact information of donors (references) and impact of projects
- The consultancy firm having team members with advanced knowledge of research methods, analysis and electronic application building is preferred. Examples could include advanced MS Excel, and use of SPSS/STATA

BACKGROUND

PROSPECTS (Promoting Sustainable Partnerships for Economic Transformation), currently in its third phase, is a three-year youth livelihood and empowerment program created to respond to the employment and livelihoods challenges young people face in Liberia. Since 2012, Mercy Corps has been implementing PROSPECTS, a portfolio of programs and interventions, largely funded by the Swedish Government through its embassy in Liberia. PROSPECTS works with a broad demographic of Liberian youth in Montserrado, Bong and Nimba Counties through direct program delivery. The program also partners with the private sector, government, educational institutions and other service providers to equip and reach about 20,000 young Liberians with the skills, information, and opportunities to find meaningful and sustainable employment or self-employment.

Prospects is an urban youth livelihood program with a goal of empowering young Liberians to find meaningful, market-driven employment or self-employment through increased skills, self-confidence, and economic opportunity. The program seeks to address constraints to both labour demand and labour supply. It accomplishes this by building the self-confidence of youth and training them to succeed as employees

or entrepreneurs. Mercy Corps then connects youth to market opportunities, either by placing them in the workforce or supporting them as they develop micro-ventures. Mercy Corps also supports the private-

sector through competitive provision of financing and business advisory support to firms poised to create youth employment opportunities or resolve labour market failures.

SCOPE OF WORK

The overall objective of the consultancy firm is to generate learning based on youth employment initiatives in Liberia, provide insights into PROSPECTS interventions and the likely contributions to the Liberia's labour market. The specific research outputs will be focused on the following:

1) Liberia youth labour market assessment: A study of the current labour market structure with a focus on full employment, part-time employment or self-employment trends. This provides detailed descriptions of activities on potential opportunities within the different sectors and explains skills demanded by employers, etc. Related sub- questions are:

- A) Which sectors employ the most youths or have high potential to employ most youths in Liberia?
- B) Which sectors pay the highest income on an average and relationship with access to formal or vocational education across rural versus urban dwellers?
- C) What level of education, skills and training is required to access employment within this sectors? Precisely how this applies for rural dwellers versus urban dwellers
- D) Where do youths get information about jobs (availability, rates of pay, skill types in demand, and access to trainings in demand)?¹
- E) The effect of currency depreciation and increased tax requirements on youth entrepreneurs.
- F) Generally the key influencers of earnings and drivers of education attainment for rural versus urban dwellers.

2) Youth vocations in agriculture: A study about the potential of the agricultural sector to absorb youth labour in Liberia through a better understanding of value chains in agriculture and actors within each sector. The study as an advocacy tool will highlight where in the agricultural value chain there are opportunities, requirements needed to engage in this value chains, providers of this requirements (actors) for youths to access employment in the agricultural sector. High level research questions are as follows:

- A) Which sectors employ the most youths or have high potential to employ youths involved in agriculture?
- B) Which value-chains in agriculture pay the highest wage rates or income on an average and relationship with access to formal or vocational education?
- C) What level of education, skills and training is required to access employment within the various agricultural value-chains?
- D) Where do youths get information about technical knowledge on agriculture methods across the counties (availability of land, rates of pay, skill types in demand, and access to trainings in demand)?²
- E) The effect of currency depreciation and increased tax requirements on youths involved in agriculture.

3) Soft Skills Education and Youth Employment Outcomes: The objective of the study is to test PROSPECTS employment and self-employment theory of change by applying a mix of methods to profile

¹ Apart from lack of education, skills, trainings, information, finance, are there other constraints that prevent youths from employment and self-employment.

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participant youths and businesses over a five years' period. Research investigates how participant youths find meaningful market driven employment, or self-employment, through increased skills, self-confidence and opportunities supported by PROSPECTS. This research will disaggregate the theory of change into three constituent parts (*individuals, businesses & enabling environment*) and provide a set of proposed research methodologies for testing the contribution of the PROSPECTS program. High level research questions are as follows:

- A) What is the profile of a youth's success or failure regards access to employment and well-being? And what can be done to; a) overcome these constraints and provide a route to success; or; b) provide safety nets to lessen the damage of exclusion? By extension, is the enabling environment fair and equitable?
- B) What is the profile of successful or failed entrepreneur regards self-employment and well-being? And what can be done to; a) overcome these constraints and provide a route to success; or; b) provide safety nets to lessen the damage of exclusion? By extension, is the enabling environment fair and equitable?
- C) Does this profile meet the theory of change requirements, providing individuals with resilient and secure livelihoods and a productive equitable and vibrant economy? What are the individual binding constraints?
- D) Are the program assumptions about unemployment constraints faced by youths accurate?
- E) If these unemployment constraints are accurate, are they binding or not in relation to programme intervention and enabling environment?
- F) Are we able to overcome the problem of attribution using contributions analysis and triangulations method to test PROSPECTS theory of change?

SPECIFIC TASKS

The three successful firms will undertake studies that will capture data on socio economic characteristics of youths placed by PROSPECTS as apprentices, youths supported with business start-up grants and businesses that accepted or employed apprentices. The research studies will capture two categories of respondents which are youths (employed or unemployed) and business owners within the programme locations (Bong, Montserrado, Grand Bassa and Nimba).

The study will generate comprehensive information on the key drivers of access to employment in formal and informal sectors, the effects of PROSPECTS soft skills training on youth's access to employment opportunities. How formal education, socio demographic contexts play a role for those self-employed or employed in the identified sectors. Provide sufficient data to carry out regressions that captures the networks in rural economies that provide jobs, the relationships for successful entrepreneurs and employed youths that can be scaled up for a market-based programme intervention.

The consultant will be expected to carry out the following specific tasks within the scope of work:

Phase I: Submit completed proposal documents and inception report (Subject to review and approval)

- A) Technical Research Proposal including Methodology
- B) Financial proposal

- C) Detailed work plan
- D) A list of at least three referees and completed researches conducted
- E) CV of Lead Researchers and key research team.
- F) Analysis plan and reporting structure

Phase II: Launch of the research activities and data collection- This should follow a weekly Check-ins and update on research activities

- A) Questionnaires coded into tablets
- B) Pre-test/pilot report of questionnaires after training of enumerators
- C) Summary report from fieldwork
- D) Report detailing list of respondents for each survey, report on completed and not completed interviews.
- E) Raw integrated datasets linked to a server
- F) Cleaned datasets on excel

Phase 111: Final report submission

- A) Quality research reports adequately peer reviewed
- B) Validation exercises of research findings with respondents.
- C) Presentation of draft report to PROSPECTS team
- D) Develop final report based on feedback from PROSPECTS team

Detailed Cross-cutting Research Activities:

The Consultancy Firm shall provide a list of the following (among others) on completion of each assigned survey:

- A) Quality assured forms on tablets (Questions).
- B) Quality assured data sheets on excel.
- C) Completed spot checks of interviews carried out by enumerators
- D) Reviewed questionnaires prior to actual enumerator trainings
- E) Summary report from fieldwork
- F) Account for list of respondents for each survey, report on completed and not completed interviews.
- G) Quality research proposals
- H) Quality research reports
- I) Validation exercises of research findings.

All reports (drafts and final) and data collected are to be submitted in electronic format (MS Word and Excel). Draft reports should be submitted and presented to PROSPECTS and youth stakeholders for

review and validation. Only completed final survey reports will be shared with PROSPECTS in both soft and hard copies.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

Considering the scope of the studies, the Firm's Lead Researcher would adopt a mix of approaches – desk review, qualitative and quantitative. Both a qualitative approach (e.g. focus group, key informant interviews) and a quantitative approach using standardized survey methods (i.e. use of questionnaires) should be deployed during the studies. The study should include the use of mobile devices and an integrated dashboard that shows real-time data as it is collected in the field. It is important the firm deploys experienced enumerators with local knowledge, qualified qualitative and quantitative research coordinators to support the research.

QUALIFICATION AND EXPERIENCE

- A) Lead consultant should have a minimum of a master's degree (Ph.D. preferred) in the social sciences, humanities, economics, agriculture or related field.
- B) The consulting firm should have 3 to 5 years' research experience in employment, labour markets, education, socio-economic or related fields.
- C) Consulting firm with track record of successfully delivering a minimum of 5 published research papers on social economic development.
- D) Excellent analytical and writing skills demonstrated in the research papers.
- E) Experience in both private/public sector engagement and working with non-governmental donor organizations.
- F) Experience in designing and managing large scale primary and secondary research data.

DELIVERABLES

The outputs for the assignment will be as follows:

- A) Submission of an inception report consisting (includes work plan, desk review, and data collection tools) to be submitted to PROSPECTS for review and approval before the start of the fieldwork.
- B) A draft document for final approval with inputs, comments and queries addressed (to be submitted within four weeks of commencement of the assignment)
- D) A final document (to be submitted within five weeks of commencement of the assignment)

Please note each survey assignment will last for a maximum period of twenty working days.