Contracting authority:

Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)

Enhancing value chains and markets of Neglected and Underutilized crop Species to contribute to Agroecological transition in Africa - AgrEcoNUS+

Guidelines for grant applicants

AgrEcoNUS+ – Contract n. 700003630
European Commission – DG INTPA

Reference: AgrEcoNUS+/CFP/2026/01

Title:

AgrEcoNUS+/LEAP — Enhancing Agroecological NUS Value Chains and Markets by Unlocking Local Economic Actors' Potential in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire

Deadline for submission of full application:

16th December 2026 h.15 Accra, Ghana (GMT)

Notice

This is an open call for proposals, where all documents are submitted together (concept note and full application). In the first instance, only the concept notes will be evaluated. Thereafter, for the lead applicants who have been pre-selected, the full applications will be evaluated. After the evaluation of the full applications, an eligibility check will be performed for those which have been provisionally selected (including those placed on the reserve list). Eligibility will be checked on the basis of the supporting documents requested by the contracting authority and the signed 'declaration by the lead applicant' sent together with the full application.

Suspensive clause

This call for proposals may be cancelled by the contracting authority at any stage of evaluation. In any case, the applicants will not have the right to claim any compensation, whatever its nature, for the cancellation of this call for proposals.

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1. ENHANCING VALUE CHAINS AND MARKETS OF NEGLECTED AND UNDERUTILIZED CROP SPECIES TO CONTRIBUTE TO AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSITION IN AFRICA - *AGRECONUS+*

1.1. BACKGROUND

Neglected and Underutilized Species (NUS) include crops that are locally adapted and often culturally and nutritionally significant, but which receive limited attention from research, policy, investment and formal markets. Many NUS are resilient to drought and other climate stresses, can thrive in low-input farming systems and contribute to agricultural biodiversity, diversified diets and local livelihoods. Nevertheless, their potential remains constrained by fragmented value chains, limited processing and storage capacities, insufficient access to finance and business development services, weak market linkages, and low consumer awareness and demand.

AgrEcoNUS+, “Enhancing value chains and markets of Neglected and Underutilized Crop Species to contribute to Agroecological Transition in Africa”, is a 48-month initiative funded by the European Union under DeSIRA+ and by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), and jointly led by AICS and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The initiative is implemented through two closely coordinated components covering West, East and Southern Africa.

AgrEcoNUS+ brings together a broad partnership of African and European organisations. Key partners include CIHEAM Bari, SWISSAID and the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT. Participating African universities include the University of Ghana, Université Peleforo Gon Coulibaly, Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Université Abdou Moumouni and Sokoine University of Agriculture. African research centres and regional scientific organisations include the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF), the Institut Sénégalais de Recherches Agricoles (ISRA), the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique du Niger (INRAN), the Tanzania Agricultural Research Institute (TARI) and the World Vegetable Center. Participating European academic and research institutions include the University of Turin, the Italian National Research Council (CNR), the Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke) and the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL). The partnership also involves international and regional organisations, civil society organisations, farmers’ organisations and networks, and private-sector actors. Together, these partners combine scientific and technical expertise, institutional knowledge, territorial presence and established relationships with farmers, communities, public institutions and value-chain stakeholders.

The initiative builds on the experience, results and partnerships developed through the SUSTLIVES and CROPS4HD programmes and operates across nine countries in West, East and Southern Africa: Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. AgrEcoNUS+ aims to improve food security and nutrition by strengthening resilient and sustainable local agri-food systems through the integration of agroecological principles and the valorisation of NUS. Its intervention combines research and innovation, support to farmer-managed seed systems and enabling policies, and the development of inclusive value chains and markets. Within this framework, the present call for proposals focuses on Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire and contributes to AgrEcoNUS+ Result 3: “Expanded market and increased consumption of agroecological and NUS-based products in local food systems”. It will support an integrated intervention targeting local economic and value-chain actors through business development, capacity building, tailored financial support, marketing initiatives and the establishment of strategic market partnerships.

1.1.1. Previous experience, lessons learned and strategic positioning

The terms “neglected” and “underutilized” describe the limited recognition and support afforded to these crops by prevailing research, policy and market systems rather than an absence of nutritional, environmental, cultural or economic value. For this reason, there is a growing tendency to adopt more positive and forward-looking terms, such as “opportunity crops” or “future crops”, which better emphasise their potential to contribute to resilient food systems, improved nutrition, climate adaptation and inclusive economic development.

The EU-funded DESIRA-SUSTLIVES programme, coordinated by AICS and CIHEAM Bari in Burkina Faso and Niger, placed NUS at the centre of strategies for agroecological transition, improved nutrition and climate resilience. It worked on sweet potato, cassava, roselle or sorrel, moringa, okra, Bambara groundnut, amaranth and Hausa potato or fabirama. Through participatory research, varietal selection, community seed systems, demonstration activities, capacity development, stakeholder forums, support to local economic actors and consumer awareness initiatives, SUSTLIVES generated scientific evidence while testing practical approaches for the conservation, production, processing and promotion of NUS. Among its results, the programme supported seven community seed banks, mobilised 94 species and varieties, reproduced 35 of them and facilitated the production of more than 20 tonnes of seeds and planting materials. CROPS4HD, led by SWISSAID in partnership with FiBL and AFSA and co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), developed a mutually reinforcing “PUSH–PULL–POLICY” approach. It strengthened the production and availability of NUS, stimulated consumer demand and contributed to a more enabling policy and regulatory environment. It also generated experience in farmer-managed seed systems, women-led agroecological entrepreneurship, community-based innovation and the promotion of local varieties. The AICS-funded ORPH-CROP initiative further develops these foundations through a stronger focus on inclusive NUS value chains and the production, processing and marketing of locally adapted crops in Burkina Faso and Niger. With particular attention to women, youth and rural communities, ORPH-CROP seeks to strengthen income-generating opportunities, improve nutrition and create a more favourable environment for the conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity. The experience generated through these initiatives shows that NUS should not be promoted merely as niche commodities or export products. Their commercial development must first contribute to resilient local food systems, food sovereignty, improved nutrition, viable livelihoods and the recognition of local knowledge and cultural identities. Market development should therefore remain rooted in locally identified needs and opportunities. Regional, international and diaspora-linked markets may also be explored where they generate fair and sustainable benefits for producers and other local value-chain actors.

For the purposes of this call, a set of priority NUS has been identified for Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire. These species, which are listed in Annex M.1, provide the principal reference for the design of the proposed action and reflect their environmental suitability, cultural and nutritional relevance, producer interest and potential for inclusive value-chain and market development.

Applicants must base their proposals primarily on these priority NUS and their value chains, while taking into account the needs of local economic actors and the specific opportunities and constraints of the target areas. Applicants are not, however, required to address every NUS included in the list and must justify the species and value chains on which their proposed intervention will focus.

The list reflects the priorities identified by the project partners at the time of publication of the call. The proposed methodology must retain sufficient flexibility to incorporate other relevant NUS that may subsequently be identified or prioritised through AgrEcoNUS+ research, participatory assessment, value-chain and market-analysis processes. Any such adjustment will be discussed and agreed through the programme’s governance and coordination mechanisms and must remain consistent with the objectives, mandatory outputs and approved budget of the action.

The detailed targeting of NUS and value chains will be progressively refined during the inception and early implementation phases, in coordination with the Contracting Authority and relevant AgrEcoNUS+ partners, on the basis of the evidence and priorities emerging from the wider programme, without altering the objectives, expected results or overall scope of the action. The selection of the MSMEs, cooperatives and associations to be supported will subsequently be carried out in accordance with the transparent, competitive and inclusive selection mechanism proposed under the action.

At the same time, the action must build on the knowledge, methodologies, varieties, agroecological practices and institutional relationships developed through AgrEcoNUS+ and its predecessor initiatives. Support to local economic actors will form part of a wider pathway linking agrobiodiversity conservation and agroecological production to processing, product development, market access, consumer demand and inclusive economic opportunities, particularly for women and youth.

1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME AND PRIORITY ISSUES

The **global objective** of AgrEcoNUS+ is to improve food security and nutrition through access to nutritious and diversified diets, while fostering resilient and sustainable local agri-food systems in participating communities in Africa.

The **specific objective** of AgrEcoNUS+ is to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable households and the sustainability of local agri-food systems in the target countries through the valorisation and integration of NUS and agroecological principles.

AgrEcoNUS+ pursues these objectives through three complementary and mutually reinforcing results:

- **Result 1: Increased adoption of NUS and agroecological practices by food producers, especially women and youth, leading to improved local agri-food systems and better adaptation to climate change.**

This result focuses on research and innovation, participatory identification and selection of priority NUS, documentation and dissemination of agroecological practices, capacity development for farmers and researchers, and support to community seed banks and local seed systems.

- **Result 2: Farmer-managed seed systems, NUS and agroecological food systems supported by an enabling policy and institutional environment.**

This result focuses on institutional capacity, civil society participation, knowledge exchange, stakeholder coordination, policy dialogue and advocacy related to NUS, farmer-managed seed systems, agrobiodiversity and agroecology.

- **Result 3: Expanded market and increased consumption of agroecological and NUS-based products in local food systems.**

This result connects research, production and policy with value-chain development, local economic actors, markets and consumption. It seeks to improve consumer access to and trust in diverse, nutritious and climate-resilient foods while strengthening inclusive economic opportunities, particularly for women and youth.

<u>The present call for proposals contributes directly to Result 3 of AgrEcoNUS+ and supports the implementation in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire of the programme-level Activities A3.3, A3.4, A3.5 and A3.6. Within the AgrEcoNUS+ programme framework, these activities concern market development and promotion, support to local economic actors, capacity development and financial support.</u>

For the purposes of this call, the expected contribution to these four programme-level activities has been translated into four mandatory outputs, described in Section 2.1.3. Applicants are not expected to reproduce Activities A3.3, A3.4, A3.5 and A3.6 as the operational structure of their proposed action. They must instead develop their own coherent intervention logic and propose the detailed activities and sub-activities required to achieve the mandatory outputs.

Applicants are invited to consult Annex M – AgrEcoNUS+ Reference Package for further information on the wider programme framework and on the context within which the proposed action must be designed and implemented.

The specific objective of this call for proposals is to expand markets and increase the consumption of agroecological and NUS-based products in local food systems in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire by strengthening local economic actors and improving the visibility, market positioning and commercial demand for NUS-based products. In addition to achieving the four mandatory outputs established for this call, the action is expected to contribute to the relevant indicators of AgrEcoNUS+ Result 3 and of the programme Specific Objective. Such contribution does not imply that the beneficiary of the grant will be solely responsible for achieving the corresponding programme-level targets, which depend on the combined contribution of the different AgrEcoNUS+ components and implementing partners. The relevant contribution indicators and related requirements are set out in Annex M.3.

The priorities of this call for proposals are:

– **Priority 1: Strengthening local economic actors in NUS value chains**

This priority aims to strengthen the viability, resilience and capacity for sustainable growth of local economic actors operating, or having the potential to operate, along NUS value chains in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. It addresses the organizational, technical, managerial, financial and commercial constraints that limit their ability to develop viable activities, add value to NUS-based products and participate effectively in local food systems and markets.

For the purposes of these Guidelines, the term "local economic actors" refers primarily to cooperatives, producer organisations, farmers' organisations and associations, women- and youth-led groups, and micro and small enterprises rooted in agricultural production and NUS value chains. This may include actors engaged in production, aggregation, processing, preservation, storage, local distribution and marketing. Other MSMEs may also be supported where their activities are directly connected to NUS value chains and generate clear and equitable benefits for producers and rural communities. Medium-sized enterprises should not constitute the principal target group of the action.

The action must establish a coherent and continuous support pathway for at least 60 local economic actors, falling within the categories described above, combining capacity development and practical technical accompaniment with tailored financial support. Priority should be given to cooperatives, producer and farmers' organisations, associations, women- and youth-led groups, and micro and small enterprises with the potential to contribute to agroecological transition, agrobiodiversity conservation, climate resilience, improved nutrition and inclusive local economic development.

– **Priority 2: Strengthening markets and commercial demand for NUS-based products**

This priority aims to improve the visibility, consumer acceptability and commercial viability of NUS-based products by addressing the weak market linkages, limited recognition and fragmented demand that currently constrain their development. It seeks to strengthen connections between local economic actors and consumers, buyers, distributors and other relevant market stakeholders, while increasing the capacity of NUS-based products to access and consolidate sustainable market opportunities.

Market development must primarily contribute to stronger local and national food systems and enhance the nutritional, environmental and cultural value of NUS. Regional, international and diaspora-linked opportunities may also be considered where they generate fair and sustainable benefits for producers and other local value-chain actors. Particular attention should be given to equitable commercial relationships, responsible sourcing and the visibility of products and initiatives led by women and youth.

– **Priority 3: Ensuring integrated, agroecological and inclusive value-chain development**

This priority aims to ensure that support to local economic actors and market development are conceived as interconnected parts of a single value-chain development process. Interventions should connect production, processing, product development, distribution, marketing and consumption and should strengthen relationships among the different actors involved.

All interventions must contribute to agroecological transition, agrobiodiversity conservation, climate resilience and stronger local food systems. They must be responsive to the NUS, needs and market opportunities identified in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. During implementation, the grant beneficiary will be required to coordinate regularly with the other AgrEcoNUS+ components and relevant implementing partners, and to take into account, where relevant, the knowledge, evidence, innovations and findings progressively generated under Results 1 and 2 and Activity A3.1. Gender equality, youth participation, social inclusion, local ownership, continuous learning and the sustainability of the supported actors and value chains must be treated as cross-cutting dimensions of the action. Applicants should refer to Annex M – AgrEcoNUS+ Reference Package for further information on the programme context, intervention logic, expected results, relevant activities, indicators, targets and coordination requirements within which the proposed action must be designed and implemented.

1.3. FINANCIAL ALLOCATION PROVIDED BY THE CONTRACTING AUTHORITY

The overall indicative amount made available under this call for proposals is EUR 2 700 000.

Size of grants

Any grant requested under this call for proposals must fall between the following minimum and maximum amounts:

- minimum amount: EUR 2 700 000
- maximum amount: EUR 2 700 000

Any grant requested under this call for proposals must not exceed the below maximum percentage of total eligible costs of the action:

Maximum percentage: 100 % of the total eligible costs of the action (see also Section 2.1.4.). The grant awarded under this call for proposals will cover 100% of the total eligible costs of the action (see also Section 2.1.4).

2. RULES FOR THIS CALL FOR PROPOSALS

These guidelines set out the rules for the submission, selection and implementation of the actions financed under this call, in conformity with the practical guide (PRAG), which is applicable to the present call (available on the internet at this address https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/ePRAG).[1]

2.1. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

There are three sets of eligibility criteria, relating to:

(1) the actors (2.1.1.):

- the '**lead applicant**', i.e. the entity submitting the application form;
- its **co-applicant(s)** (**where it is not specified otherwise the lead applicant and its co-applicant(s) are hereinafter jointly referred as 'applicant(s)'**);
- and, if any, **affiliated entity(ies)** to the lead applicant and/or to a co-applicant(s);

(2) the actions (2.1.3.):

- actions for which a grant may be awarded;

(3) the eligible costs or results/conditions (2.1.4.):

- the eligible costs, the types of cost that may be taken into account in setting the amount of the grant.

2.1.1. Eligibility of applicants (i.e. lead applicant and co-applicant(s))

Lead applicant

In order to be eligible for a grant, the lead applicant must:

a) be a legal person **and**

b) be non-profit-making **and**

c) be a non-governmental organisation, **and**

d) be effectively established in a Member State of the European Union or in an eligible country or territory as defined under Article 28(1) of NDICI-GE[2], **and**

e) be duly registered with the competent authorities and operational in at least one of the two countries of implementation, Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire. Where the lead applicant is not duly registered and operational in both countries, it must act with at least one co-applicant duly registered and operational in the other country. Such co-applicant may be either a local or international, **and**

f) act with at least one local co-applicant established in Ghana and at least one local co-applicant established in Côte d'Ivoire[3] **and**

[1] Note that a lead applicant (i.e. a coordinator) whose pillars have been positively assessed by the European Commission and who is awarded a grant will not sign the standard grant contract published with these guidelines but a contribution agreement based on the contribution agreement template. All references in these guidelines and other documents related to this call to the standard grant contract shall in this case be understood as referring to the relevant provisions of the contribution agreement template.

[2] https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/wikis/download/attachments/2297138105/a2a1_ecprogrammes_eligibility2021_2027_en.docx?api=v2

[3] For the avoidance of doubt, the mandatory local co-applicant established in the country in which the lead applicant is not duly registered and operational may also satisfy the requirement set out under point e).

g) be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the action with the co-applicant(s) and affiliated entity(ies), if any, not acting as an intermediary, **and**

h) not being in any of the situations listed in Section 2.4. of the practical guide, **and**

i) possess a minimum of seven years' experience in supporting agricultural and rural economic actors, including MSMEs, cooperatives, producer and farmers' organisations, and associations (relevant experience in capacity development, access to finance, value-chain or market development, particularly in the fields of agroecology, NUS and/or rural development, will be considered an asset); **and**

j) demonstrate experience in the implementation of similar projects in Africa, **and**

k) demonstrate adequate planning, management, monitoring, evaluation, advocacy and communication capacities applicable to the proposed action, **and**

l) demonstrate the capacity to manage an average annual project portfolio of at least EUR 1 000 000 over the last three financial years, **and**

m) not already be a partner under the AgrEcoNUS+ programme.

The relevant experience and capacities mentioned under points i), j), k) and l) must be clearly reported in the relevant sections of the Concept Note and the Full Application Form. Proof of the reported experience and capacities may be requested by the Evaluation Committee at any stage of the evaluation procedure.

For the purposes of point f), a local co-applicant must be established by an instrument governed by the national law of the country concerned and have its head office in that country. A legal entity whose statutes have been established in another country cannot be considered a local co-applicant, even if it is registered locally or has concluded a memorandum of understanding in the country concerned.

The partnership must in all cases have an operational base in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire[4].

The lead applicant must act with co-applicants as specified above.

If awarded the grant contract, the lead applicant will become the beneficiary identified as the coordinator in Annex G (Special Conditions). The coordinator is the sole interlocutor of the contracting authority. It represents and acts on behalf of any other co-beneficiary and coordinates the design and implementation of the action.

Potential applicants may not participate in calls for proposals or be awarded grants if they are in any of the situations listed in Section 2.6.10.1 of the Practical Guide.

Where applicable, and in accordance with the relevant laws, applicants and affiliated entity(ies) established in Italy might be required to submit the necessary documentation for the request of the anti-mafia certificate to the competent authorities (Italian Legislative Decree No 159/2011).

Co-applicant(s)

Co-applicants participate in designing and implementing the action, and the costs they incur are eligible in the same way as those incurred by the lead applicant.

[4] For the purposes of this call, an "operational base" means an established and demonstrable presence enabling the partnership to implement, coordinate and monitor the action effectively in the country concerned. This includes adequate personnel, organisational arrangements and logistical capacity, as well as compliance with the applicable national registration and authorisation requirements. Subject to the eligibility and registration conditions set out above, the operational base may be provided by the lead applicant, a co-applicant or an affiliated entity, provided that its role and operational capacity are clearly demonstrated in the application.

In order to be eligible, each co-applicant must:

a) be a legal person; **and**

b) be profit-making or non-profit-making; **and**

c) have a mandate, activities and expertise relevant to the objectives and activities of the proposed action; **and**

d) be effectively established in a Member State of the European Union or in an eligible country or territory as defined under Article 28(1) of NDICI-GE; **and**

e) participate directly in the preparation and implementation of the action, not acting as an intermediary; **and**

f) not be in any of the situations listed in Section 2.4 of the Practical Guide; **and**

g) not already be a partner under the AgrEcoNUS+ programme.

Eligible co-applicants may include, but are not limited to, civil society organisations, public sector operators, local authorities, farmers' organisations, cooperatives, producers' organisations, professional and business associations, chambers of commerce, financial and microfinance institutions, business development service providers, training and consultancy service providers, business incubators and accelerators, market-development and value-chain support organisations, and other relevant public or private sector entities.

The mandatory local co-applicant in Ghana must be legally established, duly registered with the competent authorities and operational in Ghana. The mandatory local co-applicant in Côte d'Ivoire must be legally established, duly registered with the competent authorities and operational in Côte d'Ivoire.

For the purposes of this requirement, a local co-applicant must be established by an instrument governed by the national law of the country concerned and have its head office in that country. A legal entity whose statutes have been established in another country cannot be considered a local co-applicant, even if it is registered locally or has concluded a memorandum of understanding in the country concerned.

Co-applicants must sign the mandate in Part B, Section 4 of the grant application form.

Affiliated entities

The lead applicant and its co-applicant(s) may act with affiliated entity(ies).

<u>Only the following entities may be considered as affiliated entities to the lead applicant and to co-applicant(s):</u>

Only entities having a structural link with the applicants (i.e. the lead applicant or a co-applicant), in particular a legal or capital link.

This structural link encompasses mainly two notions:

(i) Control, as defined in Directive 2013/34/EU on the annual financial statements, consolidated financial statements and related reports of certain types of undertakings:

Entities affiliated to an applicant may hence be:

- Entities directly or indirectly controlled by the applicant (daughter companies or first-tier subsidiaries). They may also be entities controlled by an entity controlled by the applicant (granddaughter companies or second-tier subsidiaries) and the same applies to further tiers of control;
- Entities directly or indirectly controlling the applicant (parent companies). Likewise, they may be entities controlling an entity controlling the applicant;

- Entities under the same direct or indirect control as the applicant (sister companies).

(ii) Membership, i.e. the applicant is legally defined as a e.g. network, federation, association in which the proposed affiliated entities also participate or the applicant participates in the same entity (e.g. network, federation, association…) as the proposed affiliated entities.

The structural link shall, as a general rule, be neither limited to the action nor established for the sole purpose of its implementation. This means that the link would exist independently of the award of the grant; it should exist before the call for proposals and remain valid after the end of the action.

By way of exception, an entity may be considered as affiliated to an applicant even if it has a structural link specifically established for the sole purpose of the implementation of the action in the case of so-called 'sole applicants' or 'sole beneficiaries'. A sole applicant or a sole beneficiary is a legal entity formed by several entities (a group of entities) which together comply with the criteria for being awarded the grant. For example, an association is formed by its members.

<u>What is not an affiliated entity?</u>

The following are not considered entities affiliated to an applicant:

- Entities that have entered into a (procurement) contract or subcontract with an applicant, act as concessionaires or delegatees for public services for an applicant,
- Entities that receive financial support from the applicant,
- Entities that cooperate on a regular basis with an applicant on the basis of a memorandum of understanding or share some assets,
- Entities that have signed a consortium agreement under the grant contract (unless this consortium agreement leads to the creation of a 'sole applicant' as described above).

<u>How to verify the existence of the required link with an applicant?</u>

The affiliation resulting from control may in particular be proved on the basis of the consolidated accounts of the group of entities the applicant and its proposed affiliates belong to.

The affiliation resulting from membership may in particular be proved on the basis of the statutes or equivalent act establishing the entity (network, federation, association) which the applicant constitutes or in which the applicant participates.

If the applicants are awarded a grant contract, their affiliated entity(ies) will not become beneficiary(ies) of the action and signatory(ies) of the grant contract. However, they will participate in the design and in the implementation of the action and the costs they incur (including those incurred for implementation contracts and financial support to third parties and subcontractors) may be accepted as eligible costs, provided they comply with all the relevant rules already applicable to the beneficiary(ies) under the grant contract.

Affiliated entity(ies) must satisfy the same eligibility criteria as the lead applicant and the co-applicant(s). They must sign the affiliated entity(ies) statement in Part B Section 5 of the grant application form.

2.1.2. Associates, contractors, recipients of financial support

The following entities are not applicants nor affiliated entities and do not have to sign the 'mandate for co-applicant(s)' or 'affiliated entities' statement:

- **Associates**

  Other organisations or individuals may be involved in the action. Such associates play a real role in the action but may not receive funding from the grant, with the exception of per diem or travel costs. Associates do not have to meet the eligibility criteria referred to in Section 2.1.1. Associates must be mentioned in Part B Section 6 — 'Associates participating in the action' — of the grant application form.

- **Contractors**

  The beneficiaries and their affiliated entities are permitted to award contracts (subcontracting or implementation contracts). Beneficiaries, affiliated entity(ies), recipients of financial support or associates cannot be also contractors in the project. Contractors are subject to the procurement rules set out in Annex IV to the standard grant contract.

- **Recipients of financial support**

  If allowed by the call for proposals, and under the conditions laid herein and in the grant contract, the beneficiaries and their affiliated are permitted to provide financial support to other third parties. These third parties are neither beneficiaries, affiliated entity(ies) nor associates nor contractors.

Each actor should only participate in a single role in an action. This is to avoid any potential conflicts of interest and ensure clear allocation of rights and obligations as well as certainty on cost eligibility.

2.1.3. Eligible actions: actions for which an application may be made

Definition

An action is composed of a set of activities.

Duration

The initial planned duration of an action may not exceed 36 months.

Sectors or themes

The action will contribute to the development of agroecological NUS value chains and markets in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. It will primarily support local economic actors, including MSMEs, cooperatives, producer and farmers' organisations, and associations engaged in the production, aggregation, processing, preservation, storage, distribution or marketing of NUS-based products. The action will strengthen their capacities, support value addition and improve access to sustainable market opportunities.

Sustainable Development Goals

Main SDG:

- SDG 2 – Zero Hunger: Targets 2.1, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5.

Other significant SDGs:

- SDG 1 – No Poverty: Targets 1.4 and 1.5;
- SDG 5 – Gender Equality: Target 5.a;
- SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production: Targets 12.2 and 12.a;
- SDG 13 – Climate Action: Target 13.1;
- SDG 15 – Life on Land: Targets 15.3 and 15.9.

OECD-DAC sectors

- 31120 – Agricultural Development;

- 31182 – Agricultural Research;
- 31166 – Agricultural Extension.

Location

The action must take place in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

The geographical focus of AgrEcoNUS+ includes the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana and the Poro Region in Côte d'Ivoire, including the programme intervention areas identified in Annex M.1. Activities related to market access, commercial partnerships, distribution and consumer demand may also be implemented in Accra and Abidjan, as well as in other relevant urban or market areas.

Activities may also be implemented in other areas of the two countries where this is justified by the priority NUS, the findings of the value-chain and market analyses, the location of relevant economic actors and market opportunities, and the objectives of the proposed action.

Applicants must clearly identify and justify the proposed areas of intervention and demonstrate how the action will ensure adequate and coherent coverage of both countries and appropriate linkages between production areas and relevant markets.

Types of action

This call will finance an integrated action supporting the development of agroecological NUS value chains and markets in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

The action must contribute directly to AgrEcoNUS+ Result 3 and achieve the four mandatory outputs defined below, which derive from the programme-level Activities A3.3, A3.4, A3.5 and A3.6. It must combine support to local economic actors with capacity development, financial support, value addition, market development and the strengthening of commercial demand and partnerships for NUS-based products.

The action must cover both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire and support at least 60 MSMEs, cooperatives and/or associations, including at least 30 in each country.

The group of supported entities must consist predominantly of cooperatives, producer and farmers' organisations, associations, women- and youth-led groups, and MSMEs directly engaged in agricultural production or other functions of the selected NUS value chains.

Applicants must develop their own coherent intervention strategy and propose the detailed activities and sub-activities, methodology, sequencing and delivery arrangements they consider most appropriate to achieve the four mandatory outputs. The proposed action must, as a whole, achieve all four mandatory outputs and comply with the minimum mandatory output and indicator framework set out in Annex M.3. Applicants may propose additional outputs, indicators, targets, activities and sub-activities, provided that these remain consistent with the objectives and overall framework of AgrEcoNUS+.

The following types of action are ineligible:

- actions concerned only or mainly with individual sponsorships for participation in workshops, seminars, conferences and congresses;
- actions concerned only or mainly with individual scholarships for studies or training courses;

- actions and measures that may result in violation of human rights in partner countries or causing significant adverse effects on the environment or the climate[5];
- actions that entail breach of EU values (human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of minorities);
- actions that do not contribute directly to AgrEcoNUS+ Result 3 or do not pursue all four mandatory outputs through a coherent and integrated approach;
- actions that are inconsistent with agroecological principles or with the objectives, target groups and intervention framework of AgrEcoNUS+

Types of activity

Mandatory outputs

The four outputs presented below are mandatory and define the minimum results to be achieved by the action financed under this call. They correspond to the expected contribution of the action to the programme-level Activities A3.3, A3.4, A3.5 and A3.6 of AgrEcoNUS+. Applicants must incorporate into the logical framework of the proposed action both the mandatory output indicators and minimum targets established below and the relevant AgrEcoNUS+ programme-level contribution indicators identified in Annex M.3. Where requested in Annex M.3, applicants must define and justify the expected contribution of their action to the corresponding programme-level indicator.

The descriptions provided under each output define its minimum scope but do not prescribe a predetermined implementation approach. Applicants must propose their own coherent set of detailed activities and sub-activities, together with the corresponding methodology, sequencing and delivery arrangements, to achieve all four mandatory outputs. The proposed action must also comply with the Minimum Mandatory Output and Indicator Framework set out in Annex M.3.

Mandatory Output 1 – Visibility, market positioning and commercial demand for NUS-based products strengthened. ***Corresponding to AgrEcoNUS+ programme-level Activity A3.3***

Under this output, the action must improve the visibility, consumer acceptability, market positioning and commercial viability of NUS-based products and strengthen relationships between supported local economic actors and relevant market stakeholders.

To achieve this output, applicants may propose activities including, but not limited to:

- co-designing simple and context-appropriate marketing and product-promotion strategies with the supported local economic actors, producer organisations, consumers and other relevant stakeholders;
- organising local food fairs, market days, cooking demonstrations, tasting events, nutrition-focused campaigns and other community-based consumer-engagement initiatives;
- improving the presentation, labelling, basic packaging and communication of NUS-based products, taking into account the capacities and characteristics of the supported actors;
- facilitating practical links between supported actors and local markets, traders, aggregators, shops, restaurants, institutional buyers, distributors and other relevant market actors;

5 Article 29 NDICI.

- organising meetings, exchanges and small-scale commercial or promotional initiatives between supported actors and potential buyers;
- supporting participation in relevant local or national fairs, markets and promotional events, where appropriate and proportionate to the needs of the supported actors;
- developing simple promotional materials and storytelling tools highlighting the nutritional, environmental and cultural value of NUS; and
- collecting feedback from consumers and market actors and adapting marketing approaches accordingly.

Activities should be informed by the findings of AgrEcoNUS+ Activity A3.1 on NUS value chains and markets and coordinated with the consumer-awareness initiatives undertaken under Activity A3.2.

Minimum indicators and targets:

- Number of marketing campaigns realised: at least 6, including at least 3 in Ghana and 3 in Côte d'Ivoire;
- Number of strategic partnerships initiated with distribution and retail actors: at least 10, including at least 5 in Ghana and 5 in Côte d'Ivoire;
- Number of participatory marketing strategies co-designed with the supported local economic actors and relevant producer and consumer organisations: at least 60, including at least 30 in Ghana and 30 in Côte d'Ivoire.

Mandatory Output 2 – Local economic actors selected and supported to establish, expand or diversify their activities within NUS value chains. *Corresponding to AgrEcoNUS+ programme-level Activity A3.4*

Under this output, the action must identify, select and support MSMEs, cooperatives and/or associations with the potential to contribute to viable, inclusive and agroecological NUS value chains.

To achieve this output, applicants may propose activities including, but not limited to:

- identifying and mapping cooperatives, producer organisations, farmers' organisations, associations, women- and youth-led groups, and MSME's active or potentially active in NUS value chains;
- carrying out participatory assessments of the selected actors' needs, capacities, constraints, level of organisation and development potential;
- supporting selected actors in identifying realistic opportunities to improve, expand or diversify their existing activities;
- strengthening organisational management, internal governance, record keeping and collective decision-making, particularly for cooperatives, associations and producer organisations;
- providing practical and tailored advice on production, aggregation, processing, preservation, storage, local marketing and other relevant value-chain functions;
- supporting the development or improvement of simple and proportionate business models, activity plans and value propositions;
- facilitating access to locally relevant information, services, inputs, technical expertise and market opportunities;
- encouraging cooperation among supported actors, including the sharing of knowledge, services, equipment, inputs, storage facilities or marketing arrangements, where appropriate; and

- developing tailored support pathways adapted to the nature, needs and capacities of each selected actor.

The beneficiary will be responsible for designing and implementing the selection process for the MSMEs, cooperatives and associations to be supported under the action. The selection mechanism must be transparent, competitive, inclusive and based on clearly defined and verifiable criteria consistent with the objectives and priorities of AgrEcoNUS+.

The selection process should be appropriately coordinated with AICS Ouagadougou and relevant AgrEcoNUS+ partners to ensure consistency with the priority NUS listed in Annex M.1 and with the value chains prioritised under the programme, complementarity with other AgrEcoNUS+ activities and avoidance of duplication. Such coordination shall not affect the beneficiary's responsibility for the management and implementation of the selection process.

The selection and support methodology should recognise the diversity of the targeted actors and may differentiate between newly created or informal initiatives, early-stage entities and more established actors seeking to diversify or expand. Their eligibility to receive financial support under Mandatory Output 4 will, however, be subject to compliance with the applicable legal and administrative requirements set out in the section "Financial support to third parties".

Minimum indicators and targets:

- Number of MSMEs, cooperatives and/or associations selected and supported: at least 60, including at least 30 in Ghana and 30 in Côte d'Ivoire;
- Number of diagnostic assessments and business-model schemes developed: at least 60.

Mandatory Output 3 – Technical, managerial, financial and entrepreneurial capacities of supported local economic actors strengthened. ***Corresponding to AgrEcoNUS+ programme-level Activity A3.5***

Under this output, the action must strengthen the practical technical, organisational, managerial, financial and entrepreneurial capacities of the selected local economic actors, with particular attention to cooperatives, producer and farmers' organisations, associations, women- and youth-led groups, and MSMEs. Support must be proportionate and adapted to their activities, needs, operational contexts, literacy levels and stages of development.

To achieve this output, applicants may propose activities including, but not limited to:

- assessing individual and collective capacity-development needs through participatory and practical approaches;
- designing and delivering modular and accessible training programmes adapted to the profiles of the supported actors;
- strengthening knowledge and practices related to the handling, primary processing, preservation and storage of NUS-based products;
- improving basic quality control, hygiene and food-safety practices and awareness of applicable requirements;
- strengthening internal organisation, cooperative governance, record keeping and collective decision-making;
- developing basic management and financial skills, including costing, pricing, budgeting and simple cost-benefit analysis;
- strengthening practical capacities in product presentation, promotion, customer relations and access to local markets;
- supporting the use of simple digital tools where relevant and appropriate to the needs and capacities of the supported actors;

- supporting formalisation where useful or required by the applicable legal framework;
- integrating gender equality, women's economic empowerment and youth participation into capacity-development activities;
- providing practical demonstrations, peer-learning opportunities and exchanges with other relevant agricultural and value-chain actors;
- delivering on-site technical assistance adapted to the specific activities of the supported actors;
- establishing tailored mentoring or coaching pathways linked to their development and investment plans; and
- assessing capacity gains and adapting the support provided on the basis of progress and emerging needs.

Training and capacity-development approaches may combine classroom-based sessions, practical demonstrations, peer learning, experiential visits, on-site assistance and other appropriate methods. Applicants should adapt the content and delivery methods to local contexts, including through the use of local languages and formats suitable for participants with different literacy levels.

Training content should incorporate, where relevant, the knowledge, innovations, varieties and agroecological practices generated under AgrEcoNUS+ Results 1 and 2 and should be coordinated with related training and extension activities implemented by other initiative partners. Applicants are invited to consult Annex M – AgrEcoNUS+ Reference Package for further information on the wider programme framework and on the context within which the proposed action must be designed and implemented.

Minimum indicators and targets:

- Number of MSMEs, cooperatives and/or associations strengthened through tailored managerial, technical and entrepreneurial capacity development: at least 60;
- Number of training cycles[6] delivered: at least 2, including at least 1 in Ghana and 1 in Côte d'Ivoire;
- Number of practical mentoring or coaching pathways activated: at least 60.

Mandatory Output 4 – Investment plans developed and operationalised through tailored financial support for local economic actors in NUS value chains. *Corresponding to AgrEcoNUS+ programme-level Activity A3.6*

Under this output, the action must provide tailored financial support to the selected local economic actors, enabling them to implement realistic and proportionate investments consistent with their development pathways and with the objectives of AgrEcoNUS+.

For the purposes of these Guidelines, an investment plan may be a simple and practical document proportionate to the nature, size and capacity of the supported actor. It should identify the proposed investment, its purpose, estimated costs, implementation arrangements and expected results. It is not required to take the form of a complex business plan.

To achieve this output, applicants may propose activities including, but not limited to:

[6] For the purposes of this indicator, a training cycle may comprise several interconnected training modules and sessions tailored to the needs of the supported entities.

- supporting selected actors in identifying their investment needs and preparing simple, realistic and viable investment plans;
- defining financial-support packages proportionate to the needs, characteristics and capacities of the selected actors;
- financing investments related to agricultural production, aggregation, primary processing, preservation, storage, packaging, local distribution and marketing of NUS-based products;
- supporting the acquisition or improvement of tools, equipment and facilities;
- supporting collective investments and shared equipment, storage, processing or marketing arrangements managed by cooperatives, producer organisations, farmers' organisations or associations;
- financing basic measures to improve product quality, hygiene, food safety, presentation and access to local markets;
- financing inputs and technical services strictly necessary to launch or operationalise an approved investment;
- providing practical assistance during the procurement, installation and initial use of financed equipment and tools;
- accompanying supported actors during the implementation and monitoring of their investment plans; and
- documenting the practical, productive, organisational and economic changes resulting from the financed investments.

Applicants must propose a transparent, proportionate and accountable mechanism for providing financial support to third parties. They should define and justify the selection process, eligible uses, financial-support packages, disbursement arrangements, monitoring measures and any proposed beneficiary contribution. The detailed mandatory requirements governing financial support to third parties are set out in the relevant section of these guidelines. **Given the central role of this output, applicants must ensure that the proposed financial allocation is adequate and proportionate to the number, needs and investment plans of the supported entities.**

Minimum indicators and targets:

- Number of MSMEs, cooperatives and/or associations receiving tailored financial support: at least 60;
- Number of investment plans developed and operationalised by the supported entities: at least 60.

The indicators and targets above constitute minimum requirements and may be exceeded. Applicants may also propose additional indicators and targets appropriate to their intervention strategy. The same group of at least 60 supported entities must benefit from the integrated support pathway under Mandatory Outputs 2, 3 and 4. Any duly justified replacement of a selected entity during implementation shall be managed in accordance with the procedures agreed with AICS Ouagadougou.

Implementation methodology

The applicant must present a comprehensive, practical and context-specific implementation methodology describing how the proposed action will be organised and delivered in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. The methodology must explain the proposed implementation arrangements, geographical organisation, sequencing of activities, allocation of responsibilities, stakeholder-engagement mechanisms and measures to ensure the continuity of support provided to the selected MSMEs, cooperatives and associations. It must also clearly demonstrate how the applicant-defined activities and sub-activities contribute to the achievement of each of the four mandatory outputs and how these outputs will be pursued through a coherent and integrated implementation pathway. The methodology must also explain the causal link between the proposed activities, the mandatory outputs and the relevant programme-level indicators identified in Annex M.3, including how the action will contribute to changes affecting supported organisations, farmers, other direct beneficiaries, NUS value chains and local markets.

The action will form an integral part of AgrEcoNUS+ and must not be implemented as a stand-alone intervention. Its implementation methodology must demonstrate how the action will coordinate with AICS Ouagadougou and the AgrEcoNUS+ governance and coordination structures and, during implementation, with relevant programme partners and actors responsible for complementary activities.

During implementation, the AgrEcoNUS+ programme will facilitate, where relevant and feasible, coordination between the beneficiary and other programme partners and relevant actors at country level, with a view to promoting coherence, complementarity, exchange of information and synergies across activities. Applicants are therefore not expected, at application stage, to establish prior arrangements with AgrEcoNUS+ implementing partners or to define in detail the modalities of such coordination.

This coordination will seek to ensure coherence and complementarity with the identification of priority NUS, participatory value-chain and market analyses, consumer-awareness activities, research findings, agroecological innovations, capacity-development initiatives and policy and institutional processes undertaken within the wider AgrEcoNUS+ framework. The beneficiary will be expected to make appropriate use of relevant information, evidence and outputs made available through the programme and, in turn, contribute the experience and results of the action to AgrEcoNUS+ monitoring, learning and knowledge sharing.

The implementation methodology should address, where relevant, the following core elements:

- engagement of the competent national and decentralised authorities in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire;
- involvement of relevant public institutions, research and academic organisations, private-sector actors, financial institutions, producer organisations, consumer associations, civil-society organisations and other value-chain stakeholders;
- participation of the selected MSMEs, cooperatives and associations in the design, implementation and monitoring of their respective support pathways;
- coordination between the activities implemented in the two countries, while allowing for adaptation to their different institutional, territorial and market contexts;
- integration of gender equality, youth participation, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, climate resilience and the conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity;
- mechanisms for identifying and avoiding duplication with other AgrEcoNUS+ activities or initiatives financed by the European Union, national authorities or other development partners;
- arrangements for monitoring progress, collecting and disaggregating the data required for the mandatory action-level indicators and the relevant programme-level contribution indicators, sharing information, managing implementation risks and addressing operational bottlenecks.

The applicant must ensure that the action is implemented in accordance with the applicable legal, regulatory and administrative frameworks in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. The applicant must identify and comply with the legal, regulatory and administrative requirements applicable to the proposed activities, including those governing the provision of financial support to third parties.

The applicant will be responsible for establishing and maintaining effective working relationships with the competent authorities and for obtaining all approvals, authorisations and permits required for implementation. AICS Ouagadougou may facilitate institutional dialogue where appropriate, but such facilitation will not replace the applicant's legal and administrative responsibilities.

Coordination with AICS Ouagadougou and AgrEcoNUS+ governance structures

The proposal must briefly describe the coordination structure envisaged by the applicant for the implementation of the action. Following the award of the grant, the selected consortium will be integrated into the overall AgrEcoNUS+ coordination framework alongside the other programme partners. During the inception phase, its proposed coordination arrangements will be aligned with the existing programme mechanisms and agreed with AICS Ouagadougou, and may subsequently be adjusted according to operational needs.

It is to be noted that activities must comply with EU policy interests and priorities (such as human rights based approach, gender equality, environment, etc). Activities – especially those involving capacity building, policy support, awareness raising, communication and dissemination – must also respect EU values and European Commission policy regarding reputational matters[7].

Financial support to third parties[8]

Applicants shall propose financial support to third parties.

Applicants shall propose financial support to third parties in order to contribute to the objectives and expected results of the action and, in particular, to enable selected local economic actors to implement viable investments supporting the development of agroecological NUS value chains and markets.

The maximum amount of financial support per third party is EUR 60 000 except where achieving the objectives of the actions would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult, in which case this threshold can be exceeded. A threshold below EUR 60 000 can be set if appropriate. This ceiling does not constitute a standard or automatic allocation. The amount awarded to each recipient must be proportionate to its demonstrated needs, operational and financial capacity, proposed investment plan, expected results and ability to manage the support effectively.

Financial support to third parties constitutes a central and substantial component of the action. Although no predetermined minimum amount or fixed share of the action budget is established, applicants are expected to allocate an adequate and proportionate financial envelope to this component.

The proposed allocation must be sufficient to enable the meaningful implementation of at least 60 viable investment plans and must not be merely nominal or ancillary to the action. Applicants shall determine and justify the overall amount on the basis of their intervention strategy, the characteristics and needs of the targeted economic actors, their absorption capacity, the proposed investment plans and the expected results.

The application and budget must clearly identify the total amount intended to be awarded directly to third parties, separately from the costs of managing the financial-support mechanism

[7] See Article 4 of the General Conditions as well as the [Guidance on funding for activities related to the development, implementation, monitoring and enforcement of Union legislation and policy](#).

[8] These third parties are neither affiliated entity(ies) nor associates nor contractors.

and from technical assistance, capacity development, monitoring and other accompanying measures. The proposed allocation must ensure an appropriate balance between direct financial support and the accompanying measures necessary to achieve the expected results of the action.In compliance with the present guidelines and notably of any conditions or restrictions in this Section, the lead applicant should define mandatorily in Section 2.1.1 of the grant application form:

(i) the overall objectives, the specific objective(s) and the outputs[9] (i.e. the results) to be achieved with the financial support

(ii) the types of activities and expenditure eligible for financial support, based on the fixed list established below;

(iii) the types of persons or categories of persons which may receive financial support

(iv) the criteria and procedures for selecting the recipients and awarding the financial support;

(v) the criteria for determining the exact amount of financial support awarded to each recipient;

(vi) the maximum amount of financial support that may be awarded to each recipient, which may not exceed the ceiling established above.

These conditions must be clearly and strictly defined in the grant contract and in the procedures governing the award of financial support, so as to ensure transparency, equal treatment, proportionality and the absence of arbitrary discretion.

Recipients of financial support cannot be designated in the lists of EU restrictive measures.

Eligible recipients

Financial support may be awarded to eligible local economic actors operating in Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire, with priority given to cooperatives, producer and farmers' organisations, associations, women- and youth-led groups, and MSMEs that:

- are active, or demonstrate clear potential to become active, in the selected agroecological NUS value chains;
- have been selected through the transparent and competitive procedure established under the action;
- have completed the required diagnostic, capacity-development and simplified investment-planning process;
- demonstrate the technical, organisational and financial capacity, or the potential capacity with appropriate assistance, to implement the proposed investment;
- comply with any legal, regulatory and administrative requirements applicable to the recipient and to the proposed investment in the country of implementation, taking into account the nature and legal status of the economic actor concerned; and
- commit to participating in the technical assistance, capacity-development, mentoring, monitoring and reporting arrangements established by the action.

Newly created or informal economic initiatives may participate in the broader support pathway and may receive financial support where permitted under the applicable national legal and

[9] As per OECD DAC definition, the term 'results' includes 'impact' (overall objective), 'outcome(s)' (specific objective(s) and 'output(s)'.

regulatory framework. Formalisation should not be considered an automatic prerequisite for receiving support, unless required by applicable law or by the nature of the proposed investment.

At least 60 MSMEs, cooperatives and/or associations must receive tailored financial support, including at least 30 in Ghana and at least 30 in Côte d'Ivoire.

Activities and expenditure eligible for financial support

Financial support may finance the following types of activities and expenditure, provided that they are included in an approved investment plan, are proportionate to the needs and capacities of the recipient and contribute directly to the development of agroecological NUS value chains:

- acquisition, installation, repair or improvement of small-scale agricultural, processing, preservation, storage, packaging or distribution equipment and tools;
- improvement or adaptation of small-scale productive, storage, processing or commercial facilities necessary for the approved investment;
- acquisition or improvement of shared equipment and facilities managed by cooperatives, producer organisations, farmers' organisations or associations;
- development or improvement of NUS-based products and simple value-added activities;
- basic measures to improve product quality, hygiene, food safety and compliance with applicable requirements;
- development or improvement of simple packaging, labelling, product presentation and promotional materials;
- adoption of basic and accessible digital tools, where relevant to the needs and capacities of the recipient;
- implementation of practical local distribution, commercialisation and market-access solutions;
- acquisition of inputs and technical services strictly necessary to launch or operationalise the approved investment;
- testing or initial implementation of small-scale environmentally sustainable or agroecological solutions; and
- other directly related investments necessary to implement the approved investment plan and achieve its expected results.

Financial support may not finance expenditure unrelated to the approved investment plan, recurrent operating costs that are not necessary for its initial implementation, debt repayment, interest, fines, penalties, recoverable taxes, purchase of land or buildings, or expenditure already financed by another source.

Selection and award principles

Recipients must be selected through a transparent, competitive, inclusive and adequately documented process. The selection criteria must include, as appropriate:

- relevance to the objectives of AgrEcoNUS+ and to the priority NUS value chains;
- clear connection with agricultural producers, rural communities and local food systems;
- relevance of the proposed investment to the needs and activities of the prospective recipient;
- technical and economic feasibility of the proposed investment, assessed in proportion to its nature and scale;

- consistency with agroecological principles, agrobiodiversity conservation and environmental sustainability;
- expected contribution to improved production, processing, storage, value addition, income generation or access to local markets;
- expected benefits for small-scale producers and other local value-chain actors, including through collective or shared investments;
- organisational and financial capacity to implement the investment, or demonstrated potential to develop such capacity through the support provided by the action;
- inclusion and meaningful participation of women, young people and vulnerable groups;
- feasibility, cost-effectiveness and sustainability of the proposed investment;
- absence of duplication with other public or donor financing; and
- commitment to participate in the accompanying capacity-development, mentoring, monitoring and reporting arrangements.

The exact amount awarded to each recipient must be determined on the basis of the approved investment plan, the needs and capacity of the recipient and, where applicable, any beneficiary contribution. The applicant must propose proportionate arrangements for award, contracting, disbursement, verification, monitoring, recovery and closure of the financial support.

Visibility

The applicants must take all necessary steps to ensure the visibility of the European Union and Italian Agency for Development Cooperation – AICS, as the funder or co-funder of the action, through the correct and prominent display of the EU and AICS emblem and relevant funding statement. Unless the European Commission agrees otherwise, actions that are wholly or partially funded by the European Union must ensure the visibility of EU financing by displaying the EU emblem in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Operational guidelines for recipients of EU funding, published by the European Commission.

In addition to ensuring the visibility of EU and AICS financing, applicants must integrate proportionate communication and dissemination measures into the activities proposed to achieve the mandatory outputs and minimum targets established in these Guidelines and Annex M.3. Communication must not be designed as a separate or stand-alone component of the action.

These measures should contribute to documenting and disseminating the implementation, results and impact of the action, including beneficiary experiences, good practices, lessons learned and evidence of change. They must be directly related to the objectives, expected results, mandatory outputs and target groups of the action.

Communication and dissemination measures should target, as appropriate, supported MSMEs, cooperatives, producer and farmers' organisations, associations, consumer organisations, public authorities, research and academic institutions, private-sector and financial actors, development partners and the wider public in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

Integrated communication and dissemination measures may include:

- production and dissemination of materials directly related to the implementation and results of the proposed activities;
- documentation and dissemination of beneficiary experiences, good practices, lessons learned and evidence of change;

- dissemination through appropriate digital platforms, traditional media, public events, exhibitions and stakeholder forums;
- communication associated with relevant AgrEcoNUS+ events and knowledge-sharing processes; and
- appropriate visibility of the European Union, AICS and AgrEcoNUS+ on equipment, materials, publications, events and other outputs supported through the action.

Applicants should avoid proposing generic institutional communication campaigns, stand-alone promotional activities or communication measures that are not directly linked to the implementation and expected results of the action.

All measures and activities relating to visibility and, if applicable, communication, must comply with the latest Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU-funded external action, laid down and published by the European Commission (Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU External Actions | International Partnerships (europa.eu)), and with the latest AICS Communication and Visual Identity Guidelines and must be coordinated with the Contracting Authority and, where relevant, with the AgrEcoNUS+ governance and coordination structures. Following the award of the grant, the selected applicant's communication arrangements will be aligned with the wider AgrEcoNUS+ communication framework, visual identity and key messages in order to ensure consistency and avoid duplication with communication activities implemented by other AgrEcoNUS+ partners.

Communication materials and public-facing products must be submitted to the Contracting Authority for prior validation when required by the applicable guidelines or by the arrangements agreed during implementation.

Communication and visibility activities under this section must be clearly distinguished from the marketing campaigns and commercial promotion of NUS-based products contributing to Mandatory Output 1.

Derogation from contractual visibility obligations is permitted in exceptional situations, which may be required in the framework of this action due to security issues for the staff and beneficiaries, local political sensitivities, when this is in the interest of the beneficiary or the contracting authority. In such cases, visibility tools, products, and channels to be used in promoting a given action will be determined on a case-by-case basis, in consultation and agreement with the EU prior to limiting EU visibility. Requests for derogation from contractual visibility obligations should be included in Annex A.2 – Full application form and negotiated as part of the Special Conditions of the contract.

Number of applications and grants per applicants / affiliated entities

- The lead applicant may not submit more than one application under this call for proposals.
- The lead applicant may not be awarded more than one grant under this call for proposals.
- The lead applicant may not be a co-applicant or an affiliated entity in another application under this call for proposals at the same time.
- A co-applicant/affiliated entity may be the co-applicant or affiliated entity in more than one application under this call for proposals.
- A co-applicant/affiliated entity may not be awarded more than one grant under this call for proposals.

Form of the grant

The grants awarded under this call for proposals will take form of:

- Reimbursement of eligible costs that may be based on any or a combination of the following forms as per Section 2.1.4:

(i) actual costs incurred by the beneficiary(ies) and affiliated entity(ies);

2.1.4. Eligibility of costs and eligibility of results/conditions

Reimbursement of costs

Where the grant takes the form of reimbursement of costs (entirely or partially), only 'eligible costs' can be covered by a grant. The categories of costs that are eligible and non-eligible are indicated below. The budget is both a cost estimate and an overall ceiling for 'eligible costs'.

Eligible costs can be reimbursed either as actual costs[10]

Eligible direct costs

To be eligible under this call for proposals, costs must comply with the provisions of Article 14 of the general conditions to the standard grant contract (see Annex G of the guidelines).

The applicants (and where applicable their affiliated entities) agree that the expenditure verification(s) referred to in Article 2.8 of the general conditions to the standard grant contract (see Annex G of the guidelines) will be carried out by an independent external auditor appointed or authorised by AICS Ouagadougou.

The beneficiary(ies) and affiliated entity(ies) must provide the appointed auditor with timely access to all accounting records, supporting documents, contracts, procurement files, bank records and other information necessary to verify the eligibility, accuracy and proper use of the funds.

The beneficiary(ies) must also ensure that the conditions governing financial support to third parties provide the appointed auditor and the Contracting Authority with equivalent access to the relevant records and supporting documents held by recipients of such support.

The detailed scope, timing and arrangements of the expenditure verifications will be determined by the Contracting Authority in accordance with the applicable contractual provisions. Applicants must not include in their proposed budget the costs of expenditure verifications performed under the arrangements established and financed directly by the Contracting Authority.

Recommendations to award a grant are always subject to the condition that the checks preceding the signing of the grant contract do not reveal problems requiring changes to the budget (such as arithmetical errors, inaccuracies, and in case of reimbursement of costs, unrealistic costs and ineligible costs). The checks may give rise to requests for clarification and may lead the contracting authority to impose modifications or reductions to address such mistakes or inaccuracies. It is not possible to increase the grant or the percentage of EU co-financing as a result of these corrections.

It is therefore in the applicants' interest to provide a **realistic and cost-effective budget**.

For programme management and reporting purposes, the budget of the selected action will, prior to the signature of the grant contract, be aligned with the structure of the AgrEcoNUS+ programme budget and its relevant budget lines for Activities A3.3, A3.4, A3.5 and A3.6. The successful applicant may therefore be requested to clarify the allocation of the proposed costs among these activities and, where necessary, to make adjustments that

[10] Please note that where volunteer costs are accepted as co-financing, it shall be determined on the basis of the unit cost per volunteer per day as defined and authorised by the European Commission at the following address: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/unit-cost-decision.

do not affect the total amount of the grant, the mandatory outputs and minimum targets, or the essential elements of the action as evaluated.

Contingency reserve

The budget may include a contingency reserve not exceeding 5 % of the estimated direct eligible. It can only be used with the **prior written authorisation** of the contracting authority.

Eligible indirect costs

The indirect costs incurred in carrying out the action may be eligible for flat rate funding, but the total must not exceed 7% of the estimated total eligible direct costs (except volunteer costs and project office costs) (in case of actions comprising also financing not linked to costs, to be calculated on the cost-based component). Indirect costs are eligible provided that they do not include costs assigned to another budget heading in the standard grant contract. The lead applicant may be asked to justify the percentage requested before the grant contract is signed. However, once the flat rate has been fixed in the special conditions of the grant contract, no supporting documents need to be provided.

If any of the applicants or affiliated entity(ies) is in receipt of an operating grant financed by the EU, it may not claim indirect costs on its incurred costs within the proposed budget for the action.

Contributions in kind

Contributions in kind mean the provision of goods or services to beneficiaries or affiliated entities free of charge by a third party. As contributions in kind do not involve any expenditure for beneficiaries or affiliated entities, they are not eligible costs (except for personnel costs for the work carried out by volunteers under an action or an operating grant if so authorised).

Contributions in kind may not be treated as co-financing. However, if the description of the action as proposed includes contributions in kind, the contributions have to be made.

Other co-financing shall be based on estimates provided by the applicant.

Ineligible costs

Costs that do not comply with the conditions laid down in the contract are not eligible. The following costs are not eligible:

- debts and debt service charges (interest);
- provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- costs declared by the beneficiary(ies) and financed by another action or work programme receiving a European Union (including through EDF) grant;
- purchases of land or buildings, except where necessary for the direct implementation of the action, in which case ownership must be transferred in accordance with Article 7.5 of the general conditions of the standard grant contract, at the latest at the end of the action;
- currency exchange losses;
- in kind contributions (except for volunteers' work);
- bonuses included in costs of staff;
- negative interest charged by banks or other financial institutions;

2.1.5. Ethics and values

Absence of conflict of interest

The applicant must not be affected by any conflict of interest and must have no equivalent relation in that respect with other applicants or parties involved in the actions. Any attempt by an applicant to obtain confidential information, enter into unlawful agreements with competitors or influence the evaluation committee or the contracting authority during the process of examining, clarifying, evaluating and comparing applications will lead to the rejection of its application and may result in exclusion decisions for other award procedures and/or financial penalties according to the Financial Regulation in force.

Respect of environmental legislation and core labour standards

Applicants who are awarded a grant must comply with the environmental legislation including multilateral environmental agreements, and with the core labour standards as applicable and as defined in the relevant International Labour Organisation conventions (such as the conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining; elimination of forced and compulsory labour; abolition of child labour).

Respect of EU values

Applicants who are awarded a grant must commit to and ensure the respect of fundamental values of the EU, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of minorities. They must also respect the European Commission policy regarding reputational matters, especially when implementing activities involving capacity building, policy support, awareness raising, communication and dissemination[11].

Zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

The European Commission applies a policy of 'zero tolerance' in relation to all wrongful conduct which has an impact on the professional credibility of the applicant.

Physical abuse or punishment, or threats of physical abuse, sexual abuse or exploitation, harassment and verbal abuse, as well as other forms of intimidation shall be prohibited.

Successful applicants (and affiliated entities) other than (i) natural persons, (ii) pillar-assessed entities and (iii) governments and other public bodies shall assess their internal policy against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEA-H) through a self-evaluation questionnaire (Annex L). For grants of EUR 60 000 or less no self-evaluation is required. Such self-evaluation questionnaire is not part of the evaluation of the full application by the contracting authority, but is an administrative requirement. See Section 6.2.10. of the practical guide.

Anti-corruption and anti-bribery

The applicant shall comply with all applicable laws, regulations and codes relating to anti-bribery and anti-corruption. The contracting authority reserves the right to suspend or cancel project financing if corrupt practices of any kind are discovered at any stage of the award process or during the execution of a contract and if the contracting authority fails to take all appropriate measures to remedy the situation. For the purposes of this provision, ‘corrupt practices’ are the offer of a bribe, gift, gratuity or commission to any person as an inducement or reward for performing or refraining from any act relating to the award of a contract or execution of a contract already concluded with the contracting authority.

Unusual commercial expenses

Applications will be rejected or contracts terminated if it emerges that the award or execution of a contract has given rise to unusual commercial expenses. Such unusual commercial expenses are

[11] See footnote n.7.

commissions not mentioned in the main contract or not stemming from a properly concluded contract referring to the main contract, commissions not paid in return for any actual and legitimate service, commissions remitted to a tax haven, commissions paid to a payee who is not clearly identified or commissions paid to a company which has every appearance of being a front company.

Grant beneficiaries found to have paid unusual commercial expenses on projects funded by the European Union are liable, depending on the seriousness of the facts observed, to have their contracts terminated or to be excluded from receiving EU/EDF funds.

Breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud

The contracting authority reserves the right to suspend or cancel the procedure, where the award procedure proves to have been subject to breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud. If breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud are discovered after the award of the contract, the contracting authority may refrain from concluding the contract.

2.2. HOW TO APPLY AND THE PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW

Open call for proposals

2.2.1. Application forms

Applications must be submitted in accordance with the instructions on the concept note and the full applications in the grant application form annexed to these guidelines (Annex A). Lead applicants should then keep strictly to the format of the grant application form and fill in the paragraphs and pages in order.

Applicants must apply in English

Please complete the full application form carefully and as clearly as possible so that it can be assessed properly.

WARNING
Applicants must use the following title for the proposed action: **AgrEcoNUS+ / LEAP — Enhancing Agroecological NUS Value Chains and Markets by Unlocking Local Economic Actors' Potential in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire**. Any error or major discrepancy related to the points listed in the instructions on the concept note or any major inconsistency in the application (e.g. if the amounts in the budget worksheets are inconsistent) may lead to the rejection of the application.

Clarifications will only be requested when the information provided is unclear and thus prevents the contracting authority from conducting an objective assessment.

Please note that only the grant application form and the published annexes which have to be filled in (budget, logical framework) will be evaluated. It is therefore of utmost importance that these documents contain ALL the relevant information concerning the action.

Please note that incomplete applications may be rejected. Lead applicants are advised to verify that their application is complete using the checklist (Section 7 of Part B of the grant application form).

In addition, the following documents should be submitted together with the application form:

1. The statutes or articles of association of the lead applicant, of each co-applicant and (if any) of each affiliated entity. Where the contracting authority has recognised the lead applicant's, or the co-applicant(s)'s, or their affiliated entity(ies)'s eligibility for another call for proposals under the same budget line within 2 years before the deadline for receipt of applications, it shall submit instead, a copy of the document proving their eligibility in a former call (e.g. a copy of the special conditions of a grant contract received during the reference period), unless a change in legal status has occurred in the meantime. This obligation does not apply to international organisations which have been subject of a pillar assessment.
2. A completed identification form (see Annex D)
3. The declaration on honour (Annex H to these guidelines) signed by the lead applicant as well as all co-applicants and affiliated entities certifying that they are not in one of the exclusion situations (see Section 2.4.2 of the practical guide) where the amount of the grant exceeds EUR 15 000.

4. In addition, for the purpose of the evaluation of the financial capacity, the following documents should be submitted[12]:
   a. For action grants exceeding EUR 750 000 and for operating grants above EUR 100 000, the lead applicant must provide an audit report produced by an approved external auditor where it is available, and always in cases where a statutory audit is required by EU or national law. That report shall certify the lead applicant accounts for up to the last three available financial years.

      In all other cases, the applicant shall provide a self-declaration signed by its authorised representative certifying the validity of its accounts for up to the last three available financial years. This requirement shall apply only to the first application made by a beneficiary the same contracting authority in any one financial year.

      The external audit report is not required from the co-applicant(s) or affiliated entities (if any).
   b. A copy of the lead applicant's profit and loss account and the balance sheet for up to the three last financial years for which the accounts were closed. A copy of the latest account is neither required from the co-applicant(s) nor from affiliated entity(ies) (if any).
5. A signed declaration, in free format, whereby the lead applicant undertakes, if awarded the grant, to provide the financial guarantee referred to in Section 2.2.1.a.

   These documents must be supplied in the form of originals, photocopies or scanned versions (i.e. showing legible stamps, signatures and dates) of the said originals. The declaration on honour on exclusion criteria must be duly signed and submitted as a scanned copy within the PDF document containing Part B. The original must be retained by the applicant and made available to the Contracting Authority upon request. For the other documents, originals shall be kept on file for controls in accordance with the record keeping obligations laid down in Section 2.5.5. of the practical guide.

   Where such documents are not in one of the official languages of the European Union or Italian, a translation into English of the relevant parts of these documents proving the lead applicant's and, where applicable, co-applicants' and affiliated entity(ies)' eligibility, must be attached for the purpose of analysing the application.

   Where these documents are in an official language of the European Union other than English, French or Italian it is strongly recommended, in order to facilitate the evaluation, to provide a translation of the relevant parts of the documents, proving the lead applicant's and, where applicable, co-applicants' and affiliated entity(ies)' eligibility, into English

   If the abovementioned supporting documents are not provided by the deadline for the submission of the application form, the application may be rejected.

2.2.1.a Financial guarantee

[12]No supporting documents will be requested for applications for a grant not exceeding EUR 60 000 , or the following categories of lead applicants: (i) natural persons in receipt of education support (ii) natural persons most in need, such as unemployed and refugees, and in receipt of direct support (iii) public bodies, including Member State organisations (iv) international organisations.

Together with the application, the lead applicant must submit a signed declaration, in free format, undertaking, if awarded the grant, to provide a financial guarantee equivalent to 30% of the first pre-financing instalment.

The financial guarantee must be issued by a bank or an authorised insurance company that meets the solvency requirements established by the legislation governing its activities. The detailed conditions, validity period and arrangements for the release of the guarantee will be specified in the grant contract.

The Contracting Authority may call the guarantee in accordance with the provisions of the grant contract, including in the event of serious irregularities in the implementation of the action or persistent and unjustified delays in the submission of the required narrative or financial reports.

No additional annexes should be sent.

2.2.2. Where and how to send applications

The application must be submitted exclusively by electronic mail (email).

The application must be provided in two separate PDF documents:

- one PDF document containing Part A: Concept Note;
- one PDF document containing Part B: Full Application Form, together with the declaration on honour, the supporting documents, the budget and the logical framework, duly signed where required.

In addition, the budget (Annex B) and the logical framework (Annex C) must also be submitted as separate editable Excel files, using the formats provided with these Guidelines. The information contained in the Excel files must be identical to the corresponding information included in the signed PDF documents.

The application must therefore be submitted in one email containing:

- Part A: Concept Note in PDF format;
- Part B: Full Application Form and related supporting documents in PDF format;
    - Annex B in editable Excel format; and
    - Annex C in editable Excel format.

The combined size of all attachments must not exceed 35 MB. Applicants are responsible for appropriately compressing the files while ensuring that all documents remain complete and legible.

Applications and supporting documents must be attached directly to the email. Documents shared through WeTransfer, OneDrive, Google Drive or similar file-sharing platforms will not be accepted.

Applicants will receive an email acknowledging receipt of their application. The acknowledgement of receipt does not constitute confirmation that the application is complete, admissible or eligible.

Applicants are strongly advised not to wait until the last minute to submit their application, due to possible technical problems, transmission delays or restrictions imposed by their email service provider.

Hand-written applications will not be accepted.

Subject line of the email:

"Applicant's name / Grant / AgrEcoNUS+_CFP_2026_01/ AgrEcoNUS+_LEAP"

Submission procedure:

- The complete application must be sent only and exclusively by email to the following address: **aics.accra@aics.gov.it**

Applications must be received before the deadline specified in Section 2.2.3. The date and time of receipt by the Contracting Authority will determine whether the application was submitted within the deadline.

Applications received after the deadline, sent to another address or submitted by any means other than those specified above will be rejected.

2.2.3. Deadline for submission of applications

The deadline for the submission of applications is:

16th December 2026 at 15:00 h. (Accra, Ghana local time - GMT).

Applications must be received at the email address indicated in Section 2.2.2 before the deadline specified above. The date and time of receipt of the email by the Contracting Authority will be considered as proof of timely submission.

Any application received after the deadline will automatically be rejected.

2.2.4. Further information about applications

Questions may be sent by e-mail no later than 21 days before the deadline for the submission of applications to the below address(es), indicating clearly the reference of the call for proposals:

E-mail address: **aics.accra@aics.gov.it**

AICS Ouagadougou has no obligation to provide clarifications to questions received after this date.

Replies will be given no later than 11 days before the deadline for the submission of applications.

To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the contracting authority cannot give a prior opinion on the eligibility of lead applicants, co-applicants, affiliated entity(ies), an action or specific activities.

Questions that may be relevant to other applicants, together with the answers, will be published on the website where the call was published, as the need arises. It is therefore advisable to consult the abovementioned website regularly in order to be informed of the questions and answers published.

Please note that the contracting authority may decide to cancel the call for proposals procedure at any stage according to the conditions set out in Section 6.5.9 of the practical guide.

2.3. EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF APPLICATIONS

Applications will be examined and evaluated by AICS Ouagadougou with the possible assistance of external assessors. All applications will be assessed according to the following steps and criteria.

If the examination of the application reveals that the proposed action does not meet the eligibility criteria stated in Section 2.1, the application will be rejected on this sole basis.

2.3.1. STEP 1: OPENING & ADMINISTRATIVE CHECKS AND CONCEPT NOTE EVALUATION

During the opening and administrative check the following will be assessed:

- If the deadline has been met. Otherwise, the application will be automatically rejected.
- If the application satisfies all the criteria specified in the checklist in Section 7 of Part B of the grant application form. This includes also an assessment of the eligibility of the action. If any of the requested information is missing or is incorrect, the application may be rejected on that **sole** basis, and the application will not be evaluated further.

The concept notes that pass this check will be evaluated on the relevance and design of the proposed action.

The concept notes will receive an overall score out of 50 using the breakdown in the evaluation grid below. The evaluation will also check on compliance with the instructions on how to complete the concept note, which can be found in Part A of the grant application form.

The evaluation criteria are divided into headings and subheadings. Each subheading will be given a score between 1 and 5 as follows: 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = adequate; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

	Scores*	
1. Relevance of the action	Sub-score	**20**
1.1 **Consistency with the objectives of the call**: How relevant and coherent is the proposal in relation to the objectives and priorities of the call, the four mandatory outputs and the applicable minimum indicators and targets? Does the proposal demonstrate a clear understanding of the action's role within the wider AgrEcoNUS+ programme and of its expected contribution to the relevant programme-level indicators?	5	
1.2 **Relevance to the country/region/sector needs**: How relevant is the proposal to the needs and constraints of the priority NUS value chains, local economic actors and target areas in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire? Does it take appropriate account of existing initiatives, relevant stakeholders, market opportunities and the need to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication?	5	
1.3 **Target groups and final beneficiaries**: How clearly and appropriately are the target groups and final beneficiaries identified? Does the proposal demonstrate an adequate understanding of the different needs, constraints and capacities of MSMEs, cooperatives, producer organisations, farmers' organisations and associations, including women- and youth-led actors? Is the proposed approach appropriate for reaching and supporting them?	5	
1.4 **Added value elements**: Does the proposal include relevant added-value elements, such as locally adapted or innovative approaches, strong local ownership, practical cooperation among supported actors, inclusive market linkages, collective or shared solutions, knowledge exchange or other elements likely to improve the quality, sustainability and potential impact of the action?	5	
2. Design of the action	Sub-score	**30**
2.1 **Intervention logic**. Does the proposal present a clear, coherent and credible intervention logic and related budget allocation, showing how the applicant-defined activities and sub-activities will achieve the four mandatory outputs and contribute to the relevant programme-level indicators? Does it explain the sequencing and interaction between selection and diagnostics, capacity development, financial	5x2**	

support, marketing and partnership building within an integrated support pathway?		
2.2 **Context analysis**. Does the proposal provide an adequate analysis of the priority NUS value chains, target areas, relevant market opportunities, supported actors and other stakeholders in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire? Does the analysis identify the principal needs, capacities, constraints and differences between the two country contexts and adequately inform the proposed intervention logic?	5	
2.3 **Risks and assumptions**. Are the principal assumptions and external conditions required for the intervention logic clearly identified? Does the proposal adequately identify the operational, institutional, market, environmental, social and financial risks that may affect implementation and propose credible mitigation measures?	5	
2.4 **Indicative Activities**. Are the applicant-defined activities and sub-activities relevant, coherent and feasible in relation to the four mandatory outputs and minimum targets? Are they sufficiently detailed to demonstrate the proposed methodology while retaining appropriate flexibility for adaptation during implementation?	5	
2.5 **Cross-cutting issues**: To what extent does the proposal integrate gender equality, women's economic participation, youth participation and employment, social inclusion, agroecological transition, climate resilience, environmental sustainability, agrobiodiversity conservation, local ownership and recognition of local knowledge?	5	
TOTAL SCORE		**50**

**this score is multiplied by 2 because of its importance

Once all concept notes have been assessed, a list will be drawn up with the proposed actions ranked according to their total score.

Firstly, only the concept notes with a score of at least 30 will be considered for pre-selection.

Secondly, the number of concept notes will be reduced, taking account of the ranking, to the number of concept notes whose total aggregate amount of requested contributions is equal to 200% of the available budget for this call for proposals. The amount of requested contributions of each concept note will be based on the indicative financial envelopes for each lot, where relevant.

After the evaluation of concept notes, AICS Ouagadougou will send letters to all lead applicants, indicating whether their application was submitted by the deadline, informing them of the reference number they have been allocated, whether the concept note was evaluated and the results of that evaluation. The evaluation committee will then proceed with the lead applicants whose proposals have been pre-selected.

2.3.2. EVALUATION OF THE FULL APPLICATION

The selection criteria help to evaluate the applicant(s)'s and affiliated entity(ies)'s operational capacity and the lead applicant's financial capacity and are used to verify that they:

- have stable and sufficient sources of finance to maintain their activity throughout the proposed action and, where appropriate, to participate in its funding (this only applies to lead applicants);
- have the management capacity, professional competencies and qualifications required to successfully complete the proposed action. This applies to applicants and any affiliated entity(ies).

The award criteria help to evaluate the quality of the applications in relation to the objectives and priorities set forth in the guidelines, and to award grants to projects which maximise the overall effectiveness of the call for proposals. They help to select applications which the contracting authority can be confident will comply with its objectives and priorities. They cover the relevance of the action, its consistency with the objectives of the call for proposals, quality, expected impact, sustainability and cost-effectiveness.

Scoring:

The evaluation grid is divided into Sections and subsections. Each subsection will be given a score between 1 and 5 as follows: 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = adequate; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

Evaluation grid

Section	**Maximum Score**
1. Financial and operational capacity	**20**
1.1 Do the applicants and, if applicable, their affiliated entity(ies) have sufficient in-house experience of project management?	5
1.2 Do the applicants and, if applicable, their affiliated entity(ies) have sufficient in-house technical expertise relevant to NUS and agroecological value chains, capacity development of local economic actors, market development and financial support to third parties?	5
1.3 Do the applicants and, if applicable, their affiliated entity(ies) have sufficient management capacity, including appropriate staff, organisational systems, country-level presence and the capacity to manage the proposed budget and financial-support mechanism in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire?	5
1.4 Does the lead applicant have stable and sufficient sources of finance?	5
2. Relevance	**20**
Score transferred from the Concept Note evaluation	
3. Design of the action	**15**
3.1 **Intervention logic**: Does the proposal present a clear and credible intervention logic showing how the proposed activities and sub-activities will achieve the four mandatory outputs and contribute to the applicable programme-level indicators? Does it demonstrate a coherent sequence and interaction between selection and diagnostics, capacity development, financial support, marketing and partnership building?	5
3.2 **Logical Framework Matrix**: Is the logical framework provided in Annex C complete and consistent with the proposed intervention logic? Does it incorporate all mandatory indicators and minimum targets established in Annex M.3? Are the proposed additional indicators, baselines, targets, sources of verification, assumptions and disaggregation arrangements appropriate, credible and sufficient to measure the results of the action?	5
3.3 **Context analysis**. Does the proposal provide a robust analysis of the priority NUS value chains, target areas, market opportunities, supported actors and relevant stakeholders in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire? Does the analysis adequately inform the proposed methodology and intervention logic?	5
4. Implementation approach	**15**
4.1 **Action plan**: Is the action plan clear, coherent and feasible? Are the proposed	5

activities and sub-activities appropriately mapped to the mandatory outputs? Are their sequencing, responsibilities and implementation arrangements clearly defined? Is the timeline realistic and does it ensure an integrated support pathway and adequate coverage of both countries?	
4.2 **Monitoring, reporting and evaluation**: Does the proposal include an effective and proportionate monitoring, reporting and evaluation system? Are responsibilities, data-collection methods, sources of verification, reporting frequency, quality assurance and disaggregation arrangements adequately defined for both the mandatory output indicators and the programme-level contribution indicators?	5
4.3 **Project management (technical)**: Are the roles and responsibilities of the lead applicant, co-applicants and affiliated entities clear and appropriate? Does the proposed management structure provide adequate technical oversight, coordination between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, management of financial support to third parties and alignment with the wider AgrEcoNUS+ coordination framework?	5
5. Sustainability of the action	**15**
5.1 **Long-lasting benefits**: s the action likely to generate lasting and transformative benefits for supported local economic actors, producers, NUS value chains and relevant markets?	5
5.2 **Multiplier effects**: Is the action likely to generate multiplier effects through replication, scaling, cooperation among supported actors, knowledge sharing and the wider adoption or commercialisation of NUS-based products?	5
5.3 **Sustainability**: Does the proposal provide a credible strategy for sustaining the organisational, productive, economic, institutional and environmental benefits of the action? Does it promote local ownership and the continued viability of the supported activities and investments after the end of the grant? Are the principal sustainability risks adequately identified and addressed?	5
6. Budget and efficiency of the action	**15**
6.1 **Budget:** Are the proposed activities and implementation arrangements appropriately and transparently reflected in the budget? Is the allocation of resources among the four mandatory outputs, management functions and financial support to third parties adequately justified? **Does the budget allocate an adequate and proportionate financial envelope to third parties, reflecting the central role of Mandatory Output 4? Does it clearly distinguish the amounts to be awarded directly to third parties from management costs and accompanying measures?**	/ 5
6.2 **Efficiency**: Is the relationship between the estimated costs, proposed activities, number and profile of supported entities, financial support to third parties and expected results appropriate? Is the proposed financial-support envelope sufficient to enable the meaningful implementation of at least 60 viable investment plans? Does the proposed allocation of resources demonstrate value for money and a reasonable balance among capacity development, financial support, marketing, coordination and other implementation needs?	/ 10
Maximum total score	**100**

If the total score for Section 1 (financial and operational capacity) is less than 12 points, the application will be rejected. If the score for at least one of the subsections under Section 1 is 1, the application will also be rejected.

If the lead applicant applies without co-applicants or affiliated entities the score for point 4.3 shall be 5 unless the involvement of co-applicants or affiliated entities is mandatory according to these guidelines for applicants.

Provisional selection

After the evaluation, a table will be drawn up listing the applications ranked according to their score. The highest scoring applications will be provisionally selected until the available budget for this call for proposals is reached. In addition, a reserve list will be drawn up following the same criteria. This list will be used if more funds become available during the validity period of the reserve list. The contracting authority informs those lead applicants provisionally selected and those placed on the reserve list, that they will be subject to the final eligibility check.

2.3.3. STEP 3: VERIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY OF THE APPLICANTS AND AFFILIATED ENTITY(IES) AND OTHER SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

The eligibility verification will be performed on the basis of the supporting documents requested by the contracting authority see Section 2.2. It will by default only be performed for the applications that have been provisionally selected (including those placed on the reserve list) according to their score and within the available budget for this call for proposals. In this case:

- The declaration by the lead applicant (Section 8 of Part B of the grant application form) and declaration of honour on selection and exclusion criteria will be cross-checked with the supporting documents provided by the lead applicant. Any missing supporting document or any incoherence between the declaration by the lead applicant and the supporting documents may lead to the rejection of the application on that sole basis.
- The eligibility of applicants and the affiliated entity(ies) will be verified according to the criteria set out in Section 2.1.1, including exclusion criteria.

Any rejected application will be replaced by the next best placed application on the reserve list that falls within the available budget for this call for proposals.

In the eventuality that the evaluation committee is not satisfied with the strength, solidity, and guarantee offered by the structural link between one of the applicants and its affiliated entity, it can require the submission of the missing documents allowing for its conversion into co-applicant. If all the missing documents for co-applicants are submitted, and provided all necessary eligibility criteria are fulfilled, the above-mentioned entity becomes a co-applicant for all purposes. The lead applicant has to submit the application form revised accordingly.

2.4. AWARD DECISION

After verifying the supporting documents (step 3), the evaluation committee will make a final recommendation to the contracting authority, which will decide on the award of grants.

The contracting authority may decide not to award any grants and cancel the call for proposals without having the applicants any right to compensation.

The award decision shall indicate the successful applicants, the names of the applicants rejected, and a reserve list (if any).

2.5. NOTIFICATION OF THE CONTRACTING AUTHORITY'S DECISION

The lead applicants will be informed in writing of the contracting authority's decision concerning their application. Please note that the lead applicant is the intermediary for all communications between applicants and the contracting authority during the procedure.

In case of rejection, they will be informed about the reasons for the negative decision. For the avoidance of doubt, please note that for applications rejected for reasons such as non-compliance with the admissibility requirements (for example, if the application was sent after the deadline), with the eligibility (the entity or person is not part of the predefined eligible population of entities or persons), the selection (the entity does not have financial capacity or professional or operational capacity) and the award criteria (the proposal does not comply with the predefined requirements such as quality, cost/efficiency), no prior adversarial procedure is required.

Applicants placed on the reserve list will also be informed. The applicable terms to the reserve list are laid down in Section 6.5. of the practical guide.

The successful applicants shall also be informed, and will be requested to provide some information and documents, including (for grants exceeding EUR 60 000) the self evaluation questionnaire on SEA-H. The lead applicant as well as all co-applicants and affiliated entities other than (i) natural persons (ii) pillar-assessed entities and (iii) governments and other public bodies shall fill in the self-evaluation questionnaire assessing the organisation's internal policy and procedures against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEA-H) (Annex L) (see Section 6.2.10 of the practical guide).

Successful applicants will be informed of the detailed arrangements and deadline for the submission and validation of the financial guarantee required under Section 2.2.1.a. Payment of the first pre-financing instalment will be subject to the Contracting Authority's validation of the guarantee.

An applicant believing that it has been harmed by an error or irregularity during the award process may lodge a complaint. See Section 2.12 of the practical guide.

2.6. SIGNATURE OF THE GRANT CONTRACT

Following the decision to award a grant, the beneficiary(ies) will be offered a contract based on the standard grant contract (see Annex G of these guidelines). By signing the application form (Annex A of these guidelines), the applicants agree, if awarded a grant, to accept the contractual conditions of the standard grant contract. Where the coordinator is an organisation whose pillars have been positively assessed, it will sign a contribution agreement based on the contribution agreement template. In this case, references to provisions of the standard grant contract and its annexes shall not apply. References in these guidelines to the grant contract shall be understood as references to the relevant provisions of the contribution agreement.

The budget proposed for the action by the successful applicants at the call for proposals stage must be corrected to remove any obvious arithmetical errors or ineligible costs prior to signing the contract. The description of the action is corrected accordingly if need be.

The contracting authority may decide that other clarifications or minor corrections may be made to the description of the action or to the budget in so far as they do not call into question the grant award decision, do not conflict with equal treatment of applicants, and:

- relate to matters clearly identified by the evaluation committee; or
- aim at taking into consideration changes that have occurred since the date of receipt of the proposal.

These amendments cannot lead to an increase in either the amount of the grant or the percentage of the European Union contribution as set in the guidelines of the call for proposals. In this respect, records of the contacts with the applicants must be kept on the file.

In no case the conditions announced in the guidelines can be altered at this stage. Apart from the above-mentioned clarifications and/or corrections, any other alteration of the initial proposal or deviation from the award conditions laid down in the guidelines is strictly prohibited.

Any other alteration to the successful applicant's proposal, or negotiation of it, is prohibited.

2.7. INDICATIVE TIMETABLE

	DATE	TIME
1. Publication of the call for proposals	18 September 2026	
2. Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the contracting authority	25 November 2026	15:00
3. Last date on which clarifications are issued by the contracting authority	4 December 2026	17:00
4. Deadline for submission of applications	16 December 2026	15:00
5. Notification of the contracting authority decision	January 2027	
6. Contract signature and start date	1 February 2027	

All times are indicated in Accra local time (GMT). This indicative timetable refers to provisional dates (except for dates 2, 3, and 4) and may be updated by the contracting authority during the procedure. In such cases, the updated timetable will be published on the web site where the call was published.

Early detection and exclusion system

Applicants and, if they are legal entities, persons who have powers of representation, decision-making or control over them, natural or legal person that assumes unlimited liability for the debts, natural or legal person who is essential for the award or for the implementation of the legal commitment, beneficial owner or any affiliate of the applicant, are informed that, should they be in one of the situations of early detection or exclusion, their personal details (name, given name if natural person, address, legal form) may be registered in the early detection and exclusion system, and communicated to the persons and entities concerned in relation to the award or the execution of a grant contract.

For more information, you may consult the privacy statement available on
http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect_en.cfm

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AGENZIA ITALIANA PER LA COOPERAZIONE ALLO SVILUPPO

AgrEcoNUS+

3. LIST OF ANNEXES

DOCUMENTS TO BE COMPLETED

Annex A	Grant application form (Word format)
A.1	Concept note
A.2	Full application form
Annex B	Budget (Excel format)
Annex C	Logical framework (Excel format)
Annex D	Identification form
Annex H	Declaration on Honour on exclusion criteria
Annex L	Self-evaluation questionnaire on SEA-H

DOCUMENTS FOR INFORMATION

Annex G	Standard grant contract
Annex II	General conditions
Annex IV	Contract award rules
Annex V	Standard request for payment
Annex VI	Model narrative and financial report
Annex VIII	Model financial guarantee
Annex IX	Standard template for transfer of ownership of assets
Annex I	Daily allowance rates (per diem), available at the following address: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/funding/guidelines/managing-project/diem-rates_en
Annex J	Information on the tax regime applicable to grant contracts signed under the call.
Annex M[13]	AgrEcoNUS+ Reference Package

- Annex M.1 – AgrEcoNUS+ Programme Overview

  Summary of the overall AgrEcoNUS+ initiative, including its objectives, geographical scope, intervention logic, results, main

[13] The documents included in Annex M are provided to enable applicants to understand the wider AgrEcoNUS+ framework, the programme-level Activities A3.3, A3.4, A3.5 and A3.6 and their relationship with the four mandatory outputs of the action financed under this call. Applicants must ensure consistency between their proposed intervention logic, activities, sub-activities, indicators and targets and the mandatory outputs and relevant AgrEcoNUS+ framework. The mandatory outputs, indicators and minimum targets identified in these Guidelines and in the Minimum Mandatory Output and Indicator Framework set out in Annex M.3 must be incorporated into the proposed action. Beyond these minimum requirements, Annex M does not prescribe a predetermined activity structure or implementation methodology and does not limit the applicants' responsibility to propose and justify their own approach.

components, implementation arrangements, governance structure and implementing partners.

- Annex M.2 – AgrEcoNUS+ Result 3 and Activities A3.3–A3.6

  Detailed description of AgrEcoNUS+ Result 3 and of the programme-level Activities A3.3, A3.4, A3.5 and A3.6 from which the four mandatory outputs of the action financed under this call are derived, including their scope, implementation linkages and coordination requirements.

- Annex M.3 – Minimum Mandatory Output and Indicator Framework for the Call

  Mandatory output indicators and minimum targets to be incorporated into the logical framework of the proposed action, together with the relevant AgrEcoNUS+ Specific Objective and Result 3 contribution indicators.

USEFUL LINKS

PRAG	https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/ePRAG
Project Cycle Management Guidelines	https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/funding/managing-project_en
The implementation of grant contracts, A Users' Guide	https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=48169235
Financial Toolkit[14]	https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/financial-management-toolkit_en
Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES)	https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/how-it-works/annual-lifecycle/implementation/anti-fraud-measures/edes_en#data-protection

[14] Please note that the toolkit is not part of the grant contract and has no legal value. It merely provides general guidance and may in some details differ from the signed grant contract. In order to ensure compliance with their contractual obligations, beneficiaries should not exclusively rely on the toolkit but always consult their individual contract documents.