

Call for Proposals for Implementing Partner to promote inclusive trade for women and youth – capacity building, policy advocacy and institutional strengthening for cross-border traders, cooperatives and associations



**CALL FOR PROPOSALS (CFP) FOR GRANT**

**TENDER TITLE: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE TRADE FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH – CAPACITY BUILDING, POLICY ADVOCACY AND INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING FOR CROSS-BORDER TRADERS, COOPERATIVES AND ASSOCIATIONS**

**TENDER NUMBER: (GRFO20250055/ GRFO20250056)**

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## **INVITATION TO TENDER INSTRUCTIONS**

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## **General**

1. This Call for Proposals (CFP) and the instructions for compiling and submitting Your Tender are designed to help you produce a tender that is acceptable to TMA as well as ensuring that tenders are given equal consideration. TMA will select the most economically advantageous tender. It is essential, therefore, that you provide the information requested in the specific format and no other.
2. TradeMark Africa (TMA) is not bound to accept the lowest bidder, or any, tender. We also reserve the right to request any, or all, grantees to clarify the proposals submitted.

## **Instructions to Grantees.**

### **1. Costs and Charges**

The grantee shall bear all costs associated with the preparation and submission of its proposal, and TMA shall not be responsible or liable for those costs, regardless of the conduct or outcome of the selection process. TMA is not bound to accept any proposal and reserves the right to annul the selection process at any time prior to award, without thereby incurring any liability to the Grantee.

### **2. Language of Proposal**

The proposal, as well as all correspondence and documents relating to the proposal exchanged between the Grantee and TMA shall be written in **ENGLISH** language. Any other language shall lead to the disqualification of the proposal. In cases where there is a translation, it must be endorsed by an authorized translator.

### **3. Only One Proposal**

A grantee shall submit only one proposal, either in its own name or as part of a Joint Venture (JV) in another proposal. If a grantee, including any JV member, submits or participates in more than one proposal, all such proposals shall be disqualified and rejected. This does not, however, preclude the Grantee's staff from participating as key experts and non-key experts in more than one proposal. However, the same sub-Grantee may participate in several submissions.

If the Grantee is a consortia/JV, the CFP shall include:

a copy of the JV agreement entered by all members,

or

a letter of intent to execute a JV agreement, signed by all members together with a copy of the agreement proposal.

In the absence of this document, the other members will be considered as sub-Grantees. Experiences and qualifications of sub-Grantees shall not be considered in the evaluation of the proposals.

#### 4. Validity

The proposals must remain valid for not less than **120 days** from the date of submission. TMA shall endeavour to complete the evaluation and communicate within this period. The proposals shall be prepared in indelible ink, and it shall contain no interlineations or overwriting, except as necessary to correct errors made by the Grantee. Any such corrections must be initialled by the person(s) who sign(s) the proposals.

#### 5. Clarifications and Amendments

Enquiries must only be for the purposes of clarifying the content of this CFP. All enquiries must clearly specify the tender title, number, section being queried and should be emailed to [\*\*grants@trademarkafrica.com\*\*](mailto:grants@trademarkafrica.com)

Interested Grantees may request for clarifications on this CFP up to **Seven (7)** days before the submission date. TMA will endeavour to reply as soon as is possible. It will be at TMA's discretion to provide additional information where necessary.

Final clarifications with TMA's responses will be shared with all potential Grantees.

Should TMA deem it necessary to amend the CFP, because of clarifications, it shall do so by issuing an amendment in writing or by standard electronic means. The amendment shall be sent to all Grantees and will be binding on them. TMA may offer limited extension to the proposal submission deadline to give the Grantees reasonable time to take an amendment into account in their proposals.

#### 6. Eligibility

Applications are open to organisations, associations, and NGOs with operational capacity in Uganda. The following minimum requirements apply:

- The organisation must have been in formal existence for at least 7 years with a proven track record of good working relations with state agencies involved in trade, NGOs, the private sector, or donor-funded programmes
- The firm must have completed at least two comparable assignments in the last seven years demonstrating experience in designing and delivering SME capacity building for cross-border traders inclusive of women and youth, women's economic empowerment, or cross-border trade development. Each referenced assignment must include: a reference letter from the client confirming satisfactory completion; the contract value and duration; and a concise description of scope and results achieved
- Demonstrated experience implementing inclusive trade interventions — specifically around trader mobilisation, cooperative development, advocacy, STR implementation, market access, digital and financial literacy, and business sustainability — backed by evidence of measurable results from the last seven years (for example: improved financial access, digital adoption, or enhanced trade compliance)
- Demonstrated experience facilitating access to finance and market linkages, including working with financial institutions such as MFIs and SACCOs, and engaging private sector buyers
- Demonstrated experience in stakeholder engagement and coordination with government agencies, local authorities, and private sector actors at border or community level
- Strong operational presence and capacity in Uganda, including the ability to mobilise and manage field-based teams at the target border points

- Sound organisational capacity, including financial management systems, governance structures, and experience managing donor-funded programmes
- Ability to collect, manage, and report programme data, including experience in monitoring and reporting on results
- Prior implementation experience in Uganda at Northern Corridor cross-border locations is a significant advantage and will be scored in the evaluation criteria.

Furthermore, it is the Grantee's responsibility to ensure that its experts meet the eligibility requirements as established by TMA.

- a) **Sanctions:** A grantee or an individual sanctioned by TMA shall be ineligible to be awarded or benefit from a TMA-financed contract, financially or otherwise, during such period as TMA shall determine.

Grantees debarred by the World Bank, the Public Procurement and Disposal Act (PPDA) of the **Government of all countries of TMA operation** TMA donors and/or any other international donor agency are barred from bidding.

- b) **Restrictions for Government-owned Enterprises:** Government-owned enterprises or institutions in Uganda shall be eligible only if they can establish that they (i) are legally and financially autonomous, (ii) operate under commercial law, and (iii) that they are not dependent agencies of TMA.

To establish eligibility, the government-owned enterprise or institution should provide all relevant documents (including its charter) sufficient to demonstrate that it is a legal entity separate from the government; it does not currently receive any substantial subsidies or budget support; it is not obligated to pass on its surplus to the government; it can acquire rights and liabilities, borrow funds, and can be liable for repayment of debts and be declared bankrupt; and it is not competing for a contract to be awarded by the government department or agency which, under the applicable laws or regulations, is its reporting or supervisory authority or has the ability to exercise influence or control over it.

- c) **Restrictions for public employees:** Government officials and civil servants are not eligible to be included as experts in the Grantee's proposal unless such engagement does not conflict with any employment or other laws, regulations, or policies of the country, and they

- are on leave of absence without pay, have resigned, or retired.
- are not being hired by the same agency they were working for before going on leave of absence without pay, resigning, or retiring.

(In case of resignation or retirement, for a period of at least six (6) months, or the period established by statutory provisions applying to civil servants or government employees whichever is longer. Experts who are employed by the government-owned universities, educational or research institutions are not eligible unless they have been full time employees of their institutions for a year or more prior to being included in Grantee's proposal); and

- Their hiring would not create a conflict of interest.

## 7. Format of Your Tender

Your tender should be set out in four (4) main parts:

- Part A – Preliminary Requirements.
- Part B – Executive Summary.
- Part C – General and Technical proposal; and
- Part D – Financial proposal.

## 8. Part A Preliminary Requirements

Grantees are required to submit scanned copies of the below documents:

- Signed consortia/JV agreements or letters of intent (applicable to consortia/JV) between your selected partners must be submitted; and

Failure to submit the above requirements may lead to disqualification.

Parts A, B & C may be contained in one PDF document. However, the Financial Proposal (Part D) must be submitted as a **separate excel** to enable the Technical and Financial proposals to be evaluated independently.

Please do not include any financial/ price information in Parts A, B or C. Inclusion of any price information in Parts A, B or C **shall lead to bid rejection.**

## 9. Part B Executive Summary

This should be a brief overview of your tender covering how you intend to achieve the outputs, and your assessment of the resources required.

## 10. Part C General and Technical Proposal

Your technical submission should contain the following:

- a) Signed and stamped Technical Bid Submission Form (**Annex 2**).
- b) The grantee's previous relevant experience should include the client's contact details, description of the assignment undertaken, start and end dates of Each assignment. Refer to **Annex 4** in this FP.
- c) Technical response (including method of implementation and your proposed quality assurance mechanisms).
- d) A list of the names and designations of all proposed experts/key personnel who will work on this project. Please clearly indicate the positions/roles to be played by the personnel to match those requested for in the Terms of Reference (ToRs) Refer to **Annex 5** in this CFP.
- e) The Curriculum Vitae (CVs) of proposed experts with information relevant to this project to support the proposed expert for this assignment. The CV template is **Annex 3** in this CFP.

- f) **Only one (1) CV** shall be submitted for Each of the proposed key expert position. If more than one CV is submitted for the same position, only the first CV will be evaluated; and
- g) Grantees Must confirm that their proposed key expert will be available to provide the required services for the duration of the agreement.

**The technical proposal shall not include any financial information. The Inclusion of any financial information shall lead to the proposal being declared non-responsive.**

Grantees are advised to respond in line with or in reference to the scoring criteria as indicated in the **Technical Evaluation** section of this CFP document.

#### **11. Part D Financial Proposal**

- a) **Contents:** The financial proposal should contain the following information:
  - Signed and stamped Financial Bid Submission Form (**Annex 6**); and
  - Budget details with a clear breakdown of the available
  - The financial proposal should not be combined with the technical proposal but should be submitted as a separate document.
  - The financial proposal **MUST be in excel and password-protected.**
- b) **Currency of Proposal:** The financial proposal shall be stated in ***United States Dollars (\$)***.
- c) **Taxes:**
  - The financial proposal should clearly estimate, as a separate amount, the different applicable taxes, duties, fees, levies, and other charges imposed in **the TMA countries where the assignments will be implemented** under the Applicable law, on the Grantees, the sub-Grantees, and their experts (other than nationals or permanent residents of the country).
  - The Grantee, its sub-Grantees and experts are responsible for meeting all tax liabilities arising out of the contract unless stated otherwise in this CFP. The Grantee is required to obtain information on taxes in the country where the contract is to be implemented.
  - TMA funds shall not be used to meet the cost of any recoverable Value Added Tax (VAT).

#### **12. Confirmation of grantee Experience Letters / References**

References of potential Grantees which have been given by a current TMA employee shall not be accepted in support of a submission of a proposal as part of a procurement process. For the avoidance of doubt, only TMA's confirmation of grantee experience letter / references signed by the Head of Procurement are acceptable in support of applications, bids, proposals, or submissions.

#### **13. Sustainability Considerations**

TMA has adopted the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework (ESF). Grantees are required to demonstrate how the implementation of their proposed solution shall address/enhance sustainability.

#### 14. Evaluation Criteria and Process

In assessing the proposals submitted, the evaluation panel will use the Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS) as specified in this CFP.

#### 15. Technical Evaluation

The technical submissions will be evaluated in two main stages as follows:

##### Section A: Preliminary requirements

To implement the project the implementing organization /consortium would need a robust combination of expertise and experience as below.

- The organisation must have been in formal existence for at least 7 years with a proven track record of good working relations with state agencies involved in trade, NGOs, the private sector, or donor-funded programmes
- The firm must have completed at least two comparable assignments in the last seven years demonstrating experience in designing and delivering SME capacity building for cross-border traders inclusive of women and youth, women's economic empowerment, or cross-border trade development. Each referenced assignment must include: a reference letter from the client confirming satisfactory completion; the contract value and duration; and a concise description of scope and results achieved
- Demonstrated experience implementing inclusive trade interventions — specifically around trader mobilisation, cooperative development, advocacy, STR implementation, market access, digital and financial literacy, and business sustainability — backed by evidence of measurable results from the last seven years (for example: improved financial access, digital adoption, or enhanced trade compliance)
- Demonstrated experience facilitating access to finance and market linkages, including working with financial institutions such as MFIs and SACCOs, and engaging private sector buyers
- Demonstrated experience in stakeholder engagement and coordination with government agencies, local authorities, and private sector actors at border or community level
- Strong operational presence and capacity in Uganda, including the ability to mobilise and manage field-based teams at the target border points
- Sound organisational capacity, including financial management systems, governance structures, and experience managing donor-funded programmes
- Ability to collect, manage, and report programme data, including experience in monitoring and reporting on results
- Prior implementation experience in Uganda at Northern Corridor cross-border locations is a significant advantage and will be scored in the evaluation criteria

***NB: To proceed to Section B, a grantee MUST be compliant in the stated criteria under Section A.***

#### iv. Section B: Technical Proposal

Evaluation for **Section B** will be based on a scoring system marked out of a maximum score of **100 Marks**. Only proposals that score a minimum of **70 marks out of possible 100 marks** will be deemed to be “technically responsive”.

### Evaluation Criteria

No.	Designation and Criteria	Max. Point
<b>A</b>	<b>TECHNICAL PROPOSAL</b>	
1	Demonstrates a clear and specific understanding of the assignment — including the cross-border trade context, the structural barriers facing women and youth traders,	5
2	Robust and practical methodology/approach/model for sensitisation and trader mobilisation, including clear approach to reaching traders, organising sessions, and ensuring participation at border level participation of women, youth and PWDs	10
3	Structured and practical approach to capacity building, including training design, delivery methods, and applicability to small-scale traders and cooperatives	8
4	Clear and realistic approach for facilitating financial and market linkages, including engagement with MFIs, SACCOs, and buyers, and sustainability of these linkages	5
5	Practical approach for promoting adoption of STR and digital platforms (e.g. iSOKO), including awareness, onboarding, and sustained usage	5
6	Realistic and well-structured workplan demonstrating logical sequencing of activities from mobilisation to delivery and follow-up	4
7	Clear approach to inclusion of women, youth, and vulnerable groups, and consideration of sustainability of interventions beyond the assignment	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>FIRM EXPERIENCE</b>	
1	Demonstrated experience in implementing similar assignments in trade, livelihoods, or private sector development, with relevant examples provided	6
2	Proven experience working directly with small-scale traders, informal sector actors, and cooperatives — including trader mobilisation, group formation, cooperative strengthening, and delivery of structured support to women and youth trader groups at border or community level.	6
3	Experience designing and delivering structured training and capacity building programmes for small-scale traders or SMEs — with evidence of measurable outcomes including improved knowledge, skills adoption, or behavioural changes.	5
4	Demonstrated experience facilitating access to finance and market linkages, with practical examples of partnerships or results.	5
5	Strong experience in stakeholder engagement and coordination — including working with national government agencies, border authorities, EAC institutions, local authorities, and private sector actors in trade or development programmes.	4
6	Demonstrated operational capacity to deliver in Uganda at the target border locations — including existing presence, established partnerships, logistical readiness, and the ability to mobilise and manage field-based teams across the select borders	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>PERSONNEL</b>	
	Team Leader (10 Marks)	
1	The proposed Team Leader demonstrates relevant academic qualifications (degree in economics, development studies, business, or related field) and experience leading similar assignments	2

2	At least 10 years' experience in implementing trade, livelihoods, or private sector development programmes	3
3	Demonstrated experience managing multi-component or field-based programmes, including coordination of teams and stakeholders	2
4	Participation in at least 3 similar assignments in the last 5 years involving trader support, capacity building, or economic empowerment programmes	2
5	Strong stakeholder engagement experience, including working with government and private sector actors	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>Inclusive Trade / Livelihoods Specialist (8 Marks)</b>	
1	Relevant academic qualifications in development studies, social sciences, or related field	2
2	At least 7 years' experience working with women, youth, and vulnerable groups in economic empowerment or trade-related programmes	2
3	Demonstrated experience in trader mobilisation, cooperative formation, and group strengthening	2
4	Participation in at least 2–3 assignments involving inclusive trade, livelihoods, or community-based interventions	1
5	Demonstrated understanding of gender and inclusion considerations in programme implementation	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>
	<b>Financial and Market Linkages Specialist (6 Marks)</b>	
1	Relevant academic qualifications in business, finance, economics, or related field	1
2	At least 7 years' experience in financial inclusion, enterprise development, or market systems development	2
3	Demonstrated experience working with financial institutions (MFIs, SACCOs) and facilitating access to finance	1
4	Demonstrated experience linking beneficiaries to markets, buyers, or value chains	1
5	Participation in at least 2 similar assignments in the last 5 years	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>Training and Capacity Building Specialist (6 Marks)</b>	
1	Relevant academic qualifications in education, development, or related field	1
2	At least 5 years' experience in designing and delivering training programmes	2
3	Demonstrated experience in developing training materials and facilitating group-based training	1
4	Experience working with small-scale traders, SMEs, or informal sector groups	1
5	Participation in at least 2 similar assignments in the last 5 years	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>Total C</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>Grand Total (A+B+C)</b>	<b>100</b>

*NB: Bidders who achieve the minimum technical score of 70 marks out of 100 marks will qualify for the financial evaluation.*

Bidders with the highest scores (Technical & Financial) may be invited to make oral presentation of their proposals to the evaluation committee.

The weight given to the technical proposal shall be **70%** and the weight given to the financial proposal shall be **30%**.

#### 16. Financial Evaluation

All substantially responsive proposals that score **70 marks or more** from the technical evaluation shall have their financial proposals evaluated.

The formula for determining the financial score (SF) shall be as follows:

Criteria	Description	Max Score
<b>1. Budget Accuracy &amp; Completeness</b>	Budget covers all planned activities, detailed breakdown of costs, clear justifications provided.	<b>10</b>
<b>2. Cost Reasonableness</b>	Costs align with market rates, overhead within donor thresholds, unit costs realistic.	<b>10</b>
<b>3. Cost-Effectiveness &amp; Value for Money</b>	Budget prioritizes direct activity costs, shows cost-sharing/leverage where applicable	<b>10</b>
<b>Total score (P)</b>		<b>30</b>

T is the weight given to the technical proposal (in this case **70%**) and

P is the weight given to the financial proposal (in this case **30%**)

Note P + T will be equal to **100%**.

The bidder who has achieved the highest combined technical and financial score shall be declared successful and subsequently invited for clarifications.

#### 17. Packaging, Submission, and Delivery of Tenders

**18.1** All submissions must be submitted via TMA’s Grants mailbox using the email address [grants@trademarkafrica.com](mailto:grants@trademarkafrica.com), on or before **23<sup>th</sup> June 2026 12.00 pm (East Africa Time)**.

Please note that the maximum size of the email with attachments must not exceed **10MB**. The Technical and Financial proposal **MUST** be submitted **as two separate documents in PDF and Excel, respectively**, in the same email or separate mails. **Both Technical and Financial proposals MUST be password-protected.**

**18.2 Late tenders will not be accepted.** No special pleadings will be accepted. Faxed or hard-copy proposals/samples shall be rejected.

## 18. Complaints

Any questions, queries, or concerns about the call for proposal process should be raised directly with the Grants Manager in the first instance via [grants@trademarkafrica.com](mailto:grants@trademarkafrica.com), who will address the matters raised.

If the matter is not satisfactorily resolved, the complainant is encouraged to write to [complaints@trademarkafrica.com](mailto:complaints@trademarkafrica.com).

## 19. Deviations, Reservations, and Omissions

During the evaluation of bids, the following definitions apply:

- “Deviation” is a departure from the requirements specified in the Bidding Document.
- “Reservation” is the setting of limiting conditions or withholding from complete acceptance of the requirements specified in the Bidding Document; and
- “Omission” is the failure to submit part, or all the information or documentation required in the Bidding Document.

## 20. Determination of Responsiveness

TMA’s determination of a bid’s responsiveness is to be based on the contents of the bid itself. A substantially responsive bid is one that meets the requirements of the Bidding Document without material deviation, reservation, or omission. A material deviation, reservation, or omission is one that,

- if accepted, would: -
  - Affect in any substantial way the scope, quality, or performance of the Works specified in the Contract; or
  - Limit in any substantial way, inconsistent with the Bidding Document, the Employer’s rights, or the Bidder’s obligations under the proposed Contract; or
- If rectified, would unfairly affect the competitive position of other Bidders presenting substantially responsive bids:
- The Employer shall examine the technical aspects of the bid submitted in accordance with evaluation criteria cited under (16), Technical Proposal in particular, to confirm that all requirements have been met without any material deviation, reservation, or omission; and
- If a bid is not substantially responsive to the requirements of the Bidding Document, it shall be rejected by the Employer and may not subsequently be made responsive by correction of the material deviation, reservation, or omission.

## 21. Nonconformities, Errors, and Omissions

- Provided that a bid is substantially responsive, the Employer may waive any non-conformity in the bid.
- Provided that a bid is substantially responsive, the Employer may request that the Bidder submit the necessary information or documentation, within a reasonable period, to rectify nonmaterial

nonconformities in the bid related to documentation requirements. Requesting information or documentation on such nonconformities shall not be related to any aspect of the price of the bid. Failure of the Bidder to comply with the request may result in the rejection of its bid.

- Provided that a bid is substantially responsive, the Employer shall rectify quantifiable nonmaterial nonconformities related to the Bid Price. To this effect, the Bid Price may be adjusted, for comparison purposes only, to reflect the price of a missing or non-conforming item or component.

## 22. TERMS OF REFERENCE

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE TRADE FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH – CAPACITY BUILDING, POLICY ADVOCACY AND INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING FOR CROSS-BORDER TRADERS, COOPERATIVES AND ASSOCIATIONS**

#### **1.0 About TMA**

TradeMark Africa (TMA) is a leading African Aid-for-Trade organisation founded in 2010, with the mission to grow intra-African trade and increase Africa's share in global trade, while helping make trade more pro-poor and environmentally sustainable. TMA operates on a not-for-profit basis and is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Ireland, the Mastercard Foundation, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. TMA works closely with regional and continental organisations, national Governments, the private sector, and civil society. Since its inception, TMA has delivered substantial gains for trade and regional economic integration in East Africa and the Horn of Africa, including a reduction of 16.5% in cargo transit times on the Northern Corridor from Mombasa to Bujumbura, and a reduction of an average of 70% in the time taken to cross selected one stop border posts. TMA works in 14 countries across East and West Africa, Southern Africa, and the Horn.

In 2022, TMA set up a catalytic finance company Trade Catalyst Africa (TCA) that will pilot commercially viable projects for creating trade infrastructure (both physical and digital) as well as increasing access to Trade Finance for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Both TCA's and TMA's headquarters are in Nairobi, Kenya. Offices are in: EAC (East Africa Community) Secretariat - Arusha, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Rwanda, Somaliland, Tanzania, and Uganda, with operations in Mozambique, South Sudan, and Zambia. For more information, please visit [www.trademarkafrika.com](http://www.trademarkafrika.com)

#### **2.0 Background and Context**

Africa is the world's second fastest-growing continent, with East Africa leading, yet its share of global trade remains low and poverty especially in Sub-Saharan Africa remains disproportionately high. While trade and regional integration can drive growth, job creation, and poverty reduction, the benefits are uneven and tend to favor larger, formal firms. Small-scale, informal, and women- and youth-led businesses often face barriers such as limited access to finance, high compliance costs, and weak market linkages, risking deeper inequalities and weakening support for integration if not addressed.

In this context, TradeMark Africa (TMA) is supporting the East African Community (EAC) to advance regional integration through trade facilitation and institutional collaboration. Despite progress through frameworks such as the Customs Union, Common Market, and initiatives like the Single Customs Territory, challenges including regulatory gaps, inconsistent implementation, and political constraints persist. Sustaining momentum requires pragmatic reforms that combine infrastructure investment, improved trade systems, and targeted inclusion measures particularly along key corridors like the Northern Corridor.

Women and youth, who dominate informal cross-border trade, are central to this agenda but remain largely excluded from formal systems, limiting both equity and economic potential. Expanding their participation could significantly boost growth, including major gains in global GDP and job creation. To address these gaps, TMA is implementing Inclusive Cross-Border Trade (CBT) interventions at key border points such as Busia and Malaba. These efforts focus on improving access to trade information, strengthening trader organizations, building business and financial capacity, and expanding access to finance and markets, while promoting simplified and digital trade systems like the Simplified Trade Regime (STR). By supporting traders to organize, build skills, and formalize their activities, the programme aims to enable a transition to more structured, resilient, and inclusive trade, ensuring that the benefits of regional integration are broadly shared

### **3.0 Programme Context**

This Terms of Reference is issued under two complementary TMA programmes, both targeting Uganda borders. While each programme has its own donor mandate and geographic scope, their Uganda-facing workstreams are closely aligned and are consolidated under this single assignment to enable coherent, coordinated delivery across the target borders.

#### **3.1 SITA — Sustainable Inclusive Trade in Africa**

Funded by Denmark, SITA aims to improve livelihoods and economic opportunities through more inclusive trade in Africa. SITA supports ongoing efforts to implement the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and addresses trade barriers at a regional level in East Africa, including efforts to transition to greener trade practices and expand the participation of women and youth in economic progress.

In Uganda, SITA's results area is directly focused on ensuring women and youth are positioned to benefit from increased trade by improving their access to trade systems and formal markets. This is pursued through four interconnected approaches:

- i. Raising awareness of trading procedures and trader rights
- ii. Strengthening cooperatives and trader associations
- iii. Supporting traders to scale and formalise their businesses
- iv. Onboarding traders onto digital trade platforms

SITA recognises that as border infrastructure and digital systems improve, parallel investment in trader capacity is essential to prevent smart border upgrades from displacing the informal traders who currently depend on border inefficiencies for their livelihoods. Without deliberate inclusion measures, improved trade systems risk benefiting larger formal enterprises while leaving women and youth traders further behind.

### **3.2 SWIFT — Swedish Initiative for Facilitating Trade in Africa**

Funded by Sweden, SWIFT targets underserved groups — particularly women, youth, and persons with disabilities — through two mutually reinforcing goals: facilitating formalisation and business development among informal traders to ensure long-term sustainability; and promoting a safer, more efficient cross-border trading environment through improved collaboration with border agencies, advocacy, capacity building, and digital innovation.

SWIFT recognises that interventions must be customised to each border community's specific social, economic, and regulatory environment rather than applied uniformly. In Uganda, SWIFT's formalisation efforts focus on trader group associations, improved access to finance, bookkeeping, and digital onboarding through platforms such as iSOKO.

A particular focus of SWIFT is the Simplified Trade Regime — specifically the disconnect that exists between how Simplified Certificates of Origin are issued by trader associations and how they are reviewed and verified by customs officers. Variations in understanding and inconsistent application of STR procedures create inefficiencies, increase processing times, and can discourage traders from using formal channels altogether. SWIFT therefore includes targeted capacity building on both sides of this process: training trader associations on correct issuance and training customs officers on consistent verification, to improve the overall coordination and credibility of the STR system.

## **4.0 Objective of the Assignment**

To economically empower women and youth cross-border traders at Busia, Malaba, Lwakhakha and Saum border points in Uganda by improving access to trade information, finance, digital platforms, and markets; strengthening business skills, compliance, and cooperative structures; and supporting the transition of informal traders into more formal, competitive, and resilient enterprises through the adoption of simplified trade procedures, including the Simplified Trade Regime (STR).

### **4.1 Specific Objectives**

- i. Strengthen awareness of trade procedures, trader rights, gender-responsive trade practices, and mechanisms for reporting and addressing harassment and gender-based violence among women and youth cross-border traders.
- ii. Strengthen the organisation of women and youth cross-border traders by supporting the formation, registration, and active participation of trader groups, cooperatives, and associations to enhance collective action, representation, and access to trade-related services.

- iii. Improve the business and financial capacity of women and youth traders — including business management, record keeping, financial literacy, and production practices — to enhance productivity, competitiveness, and readiness for formal trade.
- iv. Enhance the institutional capacity of trader associations, cooperatives, Trade Information Desks, and border stakeholders to deliver effective, gender-responsive support services to small-scale cross-border traders.
- v. Increase access to finance, markets, and business development opportunities for traders and cooperatives through direct linkages with financial institutions, regional buyers, and market support platforms.
- vi. Promote the adoption and correct utilisation of the EAC Simplified Trade Regime (STR) — including simplified procedures, certificates of origin, and duty provisions — to reduce barriers and increase the volume of trade conducted through formal channels.
- vii. Expand access to digital trade tools by onboarding traders onto the iSOKO platform and building digital literacy skills, enabling women and youth to access market prices, connect with buyers, and manage trade compliance documentation.
- viii. Support the transition of informal women and youth traders into formal, resilient, and growth-oriented enterprises, building on the preceding objectives to achieve measurable improvements in business registration, market participation, and sustained income generation.

## **5.0 Scope of Work and Deliverables**

The assignment will support the economic empowerment and formalisation of women and youth cross-border traders at the target border points in Uganda. It is organised across eight intervention areas — seven thematic intervention areas and one cross-cutting gender inclusion intervention area that runs through all others.

### **Intervention Area 1 — Situational Analysis and Needs Assessment**

The partner will conduct a baseline situational analysis across all borders before finalising the implementation plan, training curricula, or targeting decisions. This intervention area generates the evidence base that all subsequent intervention areas depend on. The assessment will cover:

- Identifying and profiling cross-border traders, disaggregated by gender and age, and mapping existing trader groups, associations, and informal networks
- Mapping small-scale cross-border trader flows, priority commodities, and STR-eligible goods at each border
- Identifying gaps in trader organisation and opportunities for strengthening collective structures
- Assessing the capacity and functionality of existing trader associations and cooperatives
- Identifying gender-specific, youth-specific, and disability-related constraints affecting participation in formal trade
- Mapping and engaging relevant financial institutions including MFIs, SACCOs, and commercial banks
- Reviewing border agency roles, Trade Information Desks, and STR coordination mechanisms at each border

### **Intervention Area 2 — Trader Sensitisation and Awareness**

The partner will design and implement structured sensitisation programmes across all the Busia, Malaba, Lwakhakha, and Saum. Delivery channels will include group training sessions, on-site outreach

at border points, and collaboration with trader associations and local stakeholders to ensure broad coverage. Activities will include:

- Developing and delivering awareness sessions on trade procedures, documentation requirements, and applicable border processes
- Providing targeted sensitisation on trader rights and obligations, including prevention of and response to gender-based violence at borders
- Promoting awareness and understanding of the Simplified Trade Regime, including eligibility, procedures, and benefits
- Tailoring sensitisation approaches to different trader groups — with particular focus on women and youth — and ensuring materials are adapted for low-literacy and multilingual contexts, available in English and the relevant local languages at each border
- Facilitation of linkages between individual traders and border cooperatives, enabling access to collective bargaining, shared resources, and cooperative membership

### **Intervention Area 3 — Trader Mapping and Organisation into Cooperatives**

The partner will work with at least 20 border cooperatives and associations across the Busia and Malaba borders to strengthen collective structures and build long-term institutional capacity. The partner will ensure that supported cooperatives are functional, inclusive, and well-positioned to help members access training, finance, and market opportunities. Activities will include:

- Supporting the formation of new cooperatives where gaps are identified, including facilitation of registration processes
- Strengthening existing cooperatives and trader groups to improve coordination, participation, and access to services
- Training on cooperative governance, leadership, accountability, financial management, and member advocacy — tailored to gaps identified during the needs assessment
- Strengthening management systems and providing practical tools and guidance to improve day-to-day cooperative operations
- Development of a sustainability plan for each supported cooperative, enabling continued integration of informal traders into formal trade systems after the programme period
- Building cooperatives' capacity to negotiate better market terms for members, improving trader incomes and incentivising formalisation
- Support to reconstitute or establish Gender Sub-Committees within cooperative governance structures where these do not yet exist

### **Intervention Area 4 — Capacity Building for Traders**

Building on Intervention Area 2 and informed by the needs assessment, the partner will deliver deeper, targeted capacity-building programmes those identified as ready for more intensive support. The approach must be practical, context-specific, and responsive to the needs of the target groups at each border. Activities will include:

- Business management, record keeping, and financial literacy training tailored to the scale and operational context of small-scale traders and cooperatives
- Training on production practices and compliance with quality and standards requirements, including sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures and applicable product standards
- Business formalisation support, including registration, licensing, and practical guidance on transitioning from informal to structured enterprise
- Provision of practical tools and guidance to support application of skills in day-to-day trading activities

- Mentoring and coaching support following training to reinforce knowledge and support practical application

#### **Intervention Area 5 — Border-Based Resource Centres and Trade Information Desks**

The partner will support the design and operationalisation of border-based resource centres at Busia and Malaba, serving as one-stop hubs for trader information, training, digital access, and trade facilitation linkages. The partner will work within the existing border management structure to strengthen Trade Information Desk functions. Activities will include:

- Operationalising resource centres at Busia and Malaba to coordinate training delivery, provide compliance resources, and serve as safe reporting points for harassment incidents
- Supporting recognition, access to, and utilisation of Trade Information Desks and other support services available within the border management structures at all the borders
- Building the capacity of designated Trade Information Desk officers on trader rights, STR provisions, grievance handling, and case management
- Facilitating at least six public-private dialogues over the assignment period, convening traders, EAC representatives, national government institutions, and border agencies to identify and address systemic issues
- Collecting real-time trade and trader data through iSOKO and other tools to inform TMA's policy advocacy work under SITA

#### **Intervention Area 6 — Facilitation of Financial and Market Linkages**

The partner will facilitate access to financial services and structured market opportunities for traders and cooperatives, removing the practical barriers that prevent women and youth from accessing formal financial and commercial systems. Activities will include:

- Facilitating linkages between traders and cooperatives and financial institutions, including support for onboarding processes where necessary
- Supporting traders and cooperatives to meet the basic eligibility requirements for accessing finance and structured markets
- Identifying and engaging potential buyers and market actors relevant to the priority value chains identified at each border
- Facilitating market linkages to support increased trade volumes and diversification of trading opportunities, with a focus on agribusiness and textiles
- Supporting traders to access and use available tools and support services in their day-to-day trading activities

#### **Intervention Area 7 — Digital Platforms and Simplified Trade Systems**

The partner will support traders to adopt and confidently utilise available digital platforms and simplified trade systems. The focus of this intervention area is on improving awareness, confidence, and practical usage of these systems by traders. iSOKO is a TMA-supported digital platform that enables traders to access real-time market prices, connect with buyers, and manage trade compliance documents. TMA will provide the implementing partner with platform access, onboarding materials, technical documentation, and ongoing support. The partner is not required to build, fund, or technically maintain the platform. Activities will include:

- Training at least 6,000 traders on digital literacy and the practical use of iSOKO and other relevant digital tools

- Onboarding at least 6,000 traders — drawn from those trained — as verified active iSOKO users, with practical guidance on using iSOKO for market information, buyer connections, and compliance documentation
- Delivering targeted platform promotion campaigns at the borders to drive awareness and sustained uptake
- Deepening STR adoption through targeted training for experienced traders on eligibility criteria, duty provisions, documentation requirements, and correct use of the Common List
- Capacity building for trader associations on the accurate and consistent issuance of Simplified Certificates of Origin, and training for customs officials on standardised review and verification — to close the issuance-verification gap identified under the SWIFT programme
- Supporting content updates to ensure iSOKO reflects current STR guidance, commodity prices, and market trends relevant to Uganda traders
- Piloting at least one platform sustainability model and documenting findings for TMA

### **Intervention Area 8 — Gender-Responsive Inclusion (Cross-Cutting)**

At least 60% of all traders reached across all intervention areas must be women. In addition, this intervention area contains four specific activities:

- a. Gender Desks, Safe Spaces, and Grievance Redress Working with border agencies and local governments, the partner will:
  - Institutionalise Gender Desks at Busia and Malaba OSBPs, staffed by trained officers with clear mandates to handle complaints, make referrals, and support women traders
  - Establish safe spaces at Busia and Malaba where women traders can report harassment, access information, and receive referrals without fear
  - Design and operationalise a grievance redress mechanism accessible to women, youth, and persons with disabilities, in collaboration with border management authorities
  - Train border officials on trader rights, gender-responsive service delivery, and referral pathways

- b. Segmented and Inclusive Training

- c. Inclusion in Trade Policy Dialogue

The partner will ensure women's and youth associations participate actively in trade governance — not as passive beneficiaries but as informed voices in policy processes. Activities include:

- Supporting women's and youth associations to participate meaningfully in national and regional trade dialogue platforms including EAC-level forums
- Mentoring association representatives to prepare positions, engage effectively in policy processes, and ensure contributions are formally documented

- d. Advocacy on Regulatory Reform

The partner will co-develop targeted advocacy strategies with women-led cooperatives and microenterprises at Busia and Malaba, identifying specific regulatory, procedural, and institutional barriers to market access. Findings will be compiled into concise, evidence-based advocacy briefs and channelled through TMA into national and regional policy

TMA will share the WITEI tool that will guide the consultant in measuring the four domains to enhance women's Economic Empowerment

## **6.0 Monitoring, Reporting, and Stakeholder Engagement**

The partner will be responsible for tracking implementation progress, ensuring effective coordination with relevant stakeholders, and establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with clear indicators to track progress, measure performance, and assess impact — particularly in empowering women, youth, and persons with disabilities to participate in cross-border trade.

The partner will specifically:

- Develop and maintain records of all traders reached, trained, and supported under each intervention area, disaggregated by sex, age, disability status, and border
- Collect and report data on key activities and results in line with agreed reporting formats and the M&E framework submitted at inception
- Participate in regular coordination meetings with TradeMark Africa and other relevant stakeholders
- Engage proactively with border agencies, local authorities, and trader associations to support implementation and resolve emerging issues
- Document lessons learned through a learning Brief, challenges, and good practices to inform ongoing implementation and future programming

Baselines, targets, and output milestones will be defined following inception studies, including border diagnostics. The M&E framework, including data collection tools and responsibilities, will be submitted as part of the Inception Report within 30 days of contract signing.

## **7.0 Performance Indicators**

### *7.1 Awareness and Sensitisation*

- Number of traders reached through sensitisation campaigns — target: at least 25,000, minimum 60% women
- Number of traders demonstrating improved knowledge of STR and trading procedures against baseline — target: measurable increase confirmed at inception

### *7.2 Cooperatives and Associations*

- Number of cooperatives and associations trained on governance, financial management, and advocacy — target: at least 20
- Number of cooperatives with sustainability plans developed — target: at least 20
- Number of cooperatives with new financial linkages to MFIs or SACCOs — target: TBC at inception

### *7.3 Capacity Building*

- Number of Tier 2 traders trained on business management, financial literacy, and SPS compliance — target: TBC at inception

- Number of traders supported to transition into SMEs at Busia and Malaba — target: at least 5,000

#### 7.4 *Resource Centres and Dialogue*

- Number of border-based resource centres operational — target: at least 2 (Busia and Malaba)
- Number of public-private dialogues facilitated — target: at least 6 over the assignment period

#### 7.5 *Financial and Market Linkages*

- Number of traders and cooperatives with new or strengthened financial linkages — target: TBC at inception
- Number of traders with new market linkages to regional buyers — target: TBC at inception

#### 7.6 *Digital Platforms and STR*

- Number of traders trained on digital literacy and iSOKO — target: at least 7,000
- Number of traders onboarded as active iSOKO users — target: at least 6,000 (reported separately from trained figure)
- Number of traders and officials trained on STR procedures and Simplified Certificates of Origin — target: TBC at inception

#### 7.7 *Gender and Inclusion*

- Number of Gender Desks institutionalised at OSBPs — target: 2 (Busia and Malaba)
- Number of safe spaces established and operational — target: 2 (Busia and Malaba)
- Number of women's and youth associations participating in national or regional trade policy dialogue — target: TBC at inception
- Number of advocacy briefs produced and submitted to policymakers — target: TBC at inception
- Proportion of women among all traders reached across all intervention areas — target: minimum 60%

### **8.0 Reporting and Supervision**

The partner will report to Country Director, TradeMark Africa Uganda Country Programme. They will work closely with relevant technical teams within TradeMark Africa and will be expected to coordinate with key stakeholders at the border level, including government agencies, trader associations, financial institutions, and other relevant actors.

Regular coordination meetings will be held between TradeMark Africa and the partner to review progress, address implementation challenges, and ensure alignment with programme objectives.

All deliverables produced under this assignment shall be submitted to TradeMark Africa for review and approval. The partner will be required to provide periodic progress updates in line with agreed reporting requirements. They will also be expected to participate in stakeholder engagements, coordination forums, and other relevant meetings as may be required to support effective implementation of the assignment.

### **Duration and Terms**

The assignment is expected to be completed within a 18 -Months periods from the date of contract signing.

### **Key Firm Requirements and Team Qualifications**

#### **Firm Eligibility**

Applications are open to organisations, associations, and NGOs with operational capacity in Uganda. The following minimum requirements apply:

- The organisation must have been in formal existence for at least 7 years with a proven track record of good working relations with state agencies involved in trade, NGOs, the private sector, or donor-funded programmes
- The firm must have completed at least two comparable assignments in the last seven years demonstrating experience in designing and delivering SME capacity building for cross-border traders inclusive of women and youth, women's economic empowerment, or cross-border trade development. Each referenced assignment must include: a reference letter from the client confirming satisfactory completion; the contract value and duration; and a concise description of scope and results achieved
- Demonstrated experience implementing inclusive trade interventions — specifically around trader mobilisation, cooperative development, advocacy, STR implementation, market access, digital and financial literacy, and business sustainability — backed by evidence of measurable results from the last seven years (for example: improved financial access, digital adoption, or enhanced trade compliance)
- Demonstrated experience facilitating access to finance and market linkages, including working with financial institutions such as MFIs and SACCOs, and engaging private sector buyers
- Demonstrated experience in stakeholder engagement and coordination with government agencies, local authorities, and private sector actors at border or community level
- Strong operational presence and capacity in Uganda, including the ability to mobilise and manage field-based teams at the target border points
- Sound organisational capacity, including financial management systems, governance structures, and experience managing donor-funded programmes
- Ability to collect, manage, and report programme data, including experience in monitoring and reporting on results
- Prior implementation experience in Uganda at Northern Corridor cross-border locations is a significant advantage and will be scored in the evaluation criteria

#### **Team Composition and Qualifications**

The partner shall propose a competent, multidisciplinary team with relevant expertise to effectively deliver the assignment. The team must demonstrate a balance of technical knowledge, field implementation experience, and stakeholder engagement capacity. At a minimum, the proposed team must include the following key roles:

#### **Team Lead**

- Degree in economics, business administration, development studies, or a related field — a master's degree is an advantage
- At least 10 years of relevant experience implementing programmes related to trade, private sector development, livelihoods, or economic empowerment
- Demonstrated experience managing multi-component, field-based programmes and coordinating geographically dispersed teams
- Experience working with cross-border trade programmes or similar interventions at Uganda border points is an advantage
- Strong leadership, stakeholder engagement, and coordination skills; proficiency in local languages spoken at the target borders is an advantage

#### **Inclusive Trade and Gender Specialist**

- Degree in development studies, gender studies, social sciences, or a related field
- At least 7 years of experience implementing programmes targeting women, youth, and vulnerable groups in trade or economic empowerment contexts
- Experience in trader mobilisation, cooperative development, and capacity building
- Demonstrated understanding of gender and inclusion considerations in cross-border trade programmes, including experience designing gender-responsive M&E frameworks
- Experience working with women's associations, youth groups, and persons with disabilities is an advantage

#### **Business and Financial Linkages Specialist**

- Degree in business, finance, economics, or a related field
- At least 7 years of experience in financial inclusion, enterprise development, or market systems development
- Experience working with MFIs, SACCOs, and other financial service providers to facilitate access to finance for small-scale traders or SMEs
- Experience facilitating market linkages and engaging private sector buyers across agribusiness, textiles, or comparable value chains

#### **Training and Capacity Building Specialist**

- Degree in education, business, development studies, or a related field
- At least 5 years of experience designing and delivering training programmes for small-scale traders or SMEs
- Experience developing training materials adapted for low-literacy and multilingual contexts
- Strong facilitation and communication skills; experience working with women and youth trader groups is an advantage

The partner will propose additional team members as necessary to strengthen delivery across the assignment's eight intervention areas. In addition to working with the respective government agencies/ organisations to support The team as a whole must demonstrate sufficient capacity to cover field mobilisation, training delivery, cooperative strengthening, financial and market linkages, digital platform onboarding, and follow-up support across all target borders.

#### **Submission requirements**

For bidders interested in this project, the following mandatory submission requirements would generally apply:

- Proof of official registration of the bidder (statutes + registration certificate)

- Technical proposal (maximum 15 pages): A detailed approach and methodology for the program design and implementation, including how the bidder intends to build the capacity of border stakeholders in Uganda. Bidders must also detail any partnerships or consortium arrangements, outlining the roles and contributions of each partner to enhance program delivery and effectiveness.
- Work plan under each expected result including explanation of key activities (maximum 3 pages)
- Evidence of experience (one page): Evidence of previous experience and expertise in similar projects, particularly in working with border officials and cross border traders in the region and countries specified.
- Team qualifications (2 pages maximum): Profiles of the team members, including their roles, qualifications, and relevant experience.
- Financial proposal (please provide a model): A clear and detailed budget that outlines all costs associated with the program.
- References: Examples of past work in similar contexts, including contact information for references.